

Legitimate Business as Mission Ventures and Effective Witness

Summer Rogers

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David G. Duby, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Brian Satterlee, D.B.A.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

This thesis discusses the practice of missionaries creating cover businesses solely for visa purposes, which brings a dishonest presence and harms the ministry. In contrast, Business as Mission (BAM) is a strategic business model to bring the gospel overseas through social, economic, and spiritual impact. Through a literature review, best practices for legitimate BAM ventures are explored based on studies done by BAM professionals and experts. Research shows that Christian businesspeople can establish an authentic image and credible witness through BAM businesses that are integrated into the local community, generate a profit, and incorporate biblical principles into business operations. BAM practitioners should have a proper theology of work to model an integrated life of work and ministry for unbelievers.

Legitimate Business as Mission Ventures and Effective Witness

Followers of Jesus are commanded to share the gospel and make disciples of all nations. Matthew 28:19-20 says, “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001). This command does not stop with the church in the West—it is God’s mission to have His glory proclaimed worldwide, to the ends of the earth. The thread of God’s heart for all nations is seen throughout the Bible, and His Church has the opportunity to join Him in what He is doing around the world. Since Pentecost in Acts 2, believers have obeyed this command and taken part in bringing the gospel to all nations, people groups, and languages. As the centuries have gone on, however, followers of Jesus have had to adapt to the changing world environment to get the gospel to the least-reached places. Whether this was crossing continents, learning languages, gaining new trades, or changing professions, it is encouraging to see how the pioneers of the modern missions movement have paved the way for present-day believers to move overseas in the pursuit of seeing lost people become adopted into the family of God.

Currently, however, one region of the world remains largely unreached, with very little to no Christian presence. Between 10 degrees north latitude to 40 degrees north latitude from West Africa to East Asia lies what is called the *10/40 Window*. The 10/40 Window contains approximately 96% of the world’s unreached people, while an estimated 77% of missionaries are serving in reached locations (Joshua Project, 2021). A significant barrier to Christian presence in this region is the fact that these countries are closed to the gospel and missionaries, and they do not offer missionary visas, unlike many reached countries.

A growing phenomenon in missions has arisen in response to this barrier: The creation of cover businesses to get a visa into a country, with little or no effort put into actually growing the business (Rundle, 2011). Missionaries running fake or shell companies often have to “lie to hide their missionary identity” since they do not practically function as businesspeople (Lai, 2006, p. 37). Although missionaries in closed countries might not desire to create a cover business, it is often viewed as necessary for ministry to take place in the area (Cragin, 2003). Yet, according to Steve Rundle (2003), “Professionalism cannot be faked... amateurism and deception, no matter how sanctified, is not a good model of Christian discipleship” (p. 225). Calling oneself a businessperson while running a weak or non-existent company for the purpose of getting into a restricted country is, to put it frankly, deceptive (Rundle, 2011). The problem to be addressed in this thesis is that some missionaries are being sent under the façade of having a business, resulting in a poor witness and image in the community.

Though the goal of entering a country in this way may be well-intentioned, it ends up causing more harm than good. Often, the missionaries' credibility is damaged as the local community is not oblivious to the lack of a business (Russell, 2010). The workers themselves can also “find themselves struggling with their own identity and integrity, ultimately jeopardizing the credibility of the very Gospel they are trying to present” (Rundle, 2000, p. 95). Even more so, the government can become suspicious of the missionaries, resulting in difficult legal battles or deportation (Russell, 2010). No matter what, such an entry strategy tarnishes the name of Christ and leads to ineffective ministry.

If using business as a cover is deceptive and hurts the witness of the missionary, what can be done instead? The staggering statistics regarding the unreached in the 10/40 Window must still be addressed. Moreover, it cannot be denied that God has given many believers a passion for

business—a tool that can be effectively used for God’s glory overseas if done in the right way.

Therefore, this thesis will attempt to answer the following research question: How can missionaries establish an honest image and effective witness in the community through business?

Literature Review

Currently, a good deal of literature exists on what is known as *Business as Mission* (BAM). There are many books on the topic and related concepts, the majority of which include studies and data on BAM in practice. Additionally, articles in both business and missions journals research and discuss specific case studies, individual aspects of BAM, historical movements, the biblical basis and theology behind BAM, the role of mission agencies, and more. Some sources recommend practices and advice on starting or running a BAM venture from the specific studies done on real examples around the world.

Definitions and Term Usage

One broad definition of Business as Mission is a “for-profit business in a cross-cultural setting with a goal to participate in God’s mission in the world” (Ward, 2021, p. 1). At the root of this term is the foundational concept of using one’s trade or profession as an avenue for gospel witness. Many sources discuss historical examples of Christians who used business or trade overseas to transform communities and reach the lost with the love of Christ; there are examples throughout the last several centuries and even all the way to biblical times (Russell, 2010). However, the term *Business as Mission* was not coined until the 21st century, when the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization published a paper on BAM from its 2004 Forum for World Evangelization (Tunehag, 2005). At the end of the forum, the Lausanne Working Group for BAM “concluded that it was virtually impossible to achieve a universally satisfactory definition of BAM” due to its innumerable nuances and subsets (Johnson, 2009, p. 28).

Triple Bottom Line

In most instances, BAM is used as an umbrella term encapsulating many other related terms, concepts, and strategies that “describe the integration of ministry goals and business goals in making an impact for God’s kingdom” (Lai, 2015, p. 26). Some of these “include ‘transformational business,’ ‘missional business’... ‘great commission companies,’... ‘kingdom business,’” and more (Tunehag, 2018, p. 96). Each term may carry specific meanings and nuances according to different sources. However, aspects of BAM that are widely acknowledged make up what is known as the triple bottom line.

Rather than a single bottom line of profit, for example, Business as Mission has three bottom lines: “economic, social, and spiritual” impact (Bosch, 2017, p. 35). Although some companies may aim for additional areas of impact, like environmental impact, these three are predominant among true BAM businesses. Moreover, the three bottom lines are not separate compartments of the organization—business and ministry are not two independent full-time jobs. The ministry of such a business is to those “who are directly in the business’s spheres of influence, such as their workforce and their families, suppliers and vendors, investors and creditors, customers and clients, even competitors,” in addition to participating in the local community and striving for “holistic, people-impacting community-development initiatives” (Johnson, 2009, p. 28). Rather than a side job, cover, or avenue for funding ministry projects, BAM involves business itself “as a vehicle of the mission of God in the world” (Russell, 2010, p. 23). Overall, Business as Mission is a holistic concept based on the belief that “God has the power to transform people and communities, spiritually, economically, socially, and environmentally—in and through business,” as part of taking the gospel to the least-reached places on earth (Tunehag, 2018, p. 96).

Social Entrepreneurship

Business as Mission is related to social entrepreneurship in that it is, in a sense, “a subset” of it (Bosch, 2017, p. 34). The end goal of such a social venture is to start “an organization with the desire of influencing positive social change” through the business (Bosch, 2017, p. 34). Social entrepreneurship is similar to Business as Mission in that both try to alleviate a social ill, which is more than a typical for-profit company’s primary bottom line of maximizing profit. However, a BAM business “is so much more than a potentially powerful business-development and community economic-transformation strategy, because it brings eternal hope and healing along with temporal prosperity” (Johnson, 2009, p. 38). Although understanding social entrepreneurship can help shed light on BAM, the incorporation of a Kingdom mindset and Kingdom goals into the BAM company differentiates it.

Tentmaking

“Tentmaking” was a term used widely before Business as Mission was coined. A tentmaker refers to “a believer who intentionally takes a job with a company in another culture, is fully supported by that job, and strives to witness cross-culturally” (Lai, 2015, p. 26). It is important to note that BAM and tentmaking are not the same. Although they are related and both involve using a secular profession to be a witness for Christ in a cross-cultural setting, tentmakers take a job overseas that is already established. In contrast to taking a job, “BAM business is about job creation, value enhancement, wealth generation and product/service distribution at both the business and spiritual levels” (Johnson, 2009, p. 33). BAM directly aims for the holistic transformation of communities through the business itself and the profit earned, which is not directly part of tentmaking.

Business as Mission in Practice

Many authors who have written books on Business as Mission do so with proven data from missionaries and businesspeople worldwide. Frequently, sources appeal to responses from surveys and interviews of real people doing Business as Mission in restricted areas. For example, Mark Russell (2008) conducted a study interviewing over 128 people practicing BAM in Southeast Asia. Patrick Lai (2008) interviewed over 450 workers from around the globe in his research and writing. David Bosch (2017) performed a field study in which representatives from 11 BAM companies were surveyed in Central Asia. These studies, among many others, evaluate the effectiveness of business and ministry strategies, discuss the role of business in missions work, and explore best practices for BAM. Additionally, researchers affirm the presence of cover businesses and provide information regarding the harm done in such circumstances. In some sources, there are real testimonies included from missionaries who failed due to deceptive business strategies. The collected survey data, interview responses, and real-life stories help reveal how business and missions interact overseas.

Present within the literature is also opposition to the newer practice of Business as Mission, in favor of a traditional missions model. However, the purpose of this thesis is not to diminish the place of traditional missions; rather, it aims to shed light on how Christian businesspeople can effectively use their business skills to further the gospel in closed countries. Business as Mission, along with similar models like tentmaking, are not replacements of what is currently predominant in missionary circles—they are to augment the work already being done overseas (Lai, 2006).

The literature concludes that BAM is not an entirely new concept as there has been a growing “paradigm shift that recognizes the holistic nature of [the Mission of God] and affirms

all vocations” (Tunehag, 2005, p. 23). BAM has arisen amidst this paradigm shift as “both missions and business circles” are discovering how to “strategically [use] business to accomplish missional purposes” (Russell, 2010, p. 20). Rather than a cover strategy to get a visa and “a clandestine cover for unlawful evangelization,” real and honest business can actually play a significant role in bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth because “Christians are welcomed into even hostile or closed communities/countries when they bring the prospect of business and economic advantage” (Tunehag, 2005, p. 22). Thomas Sudyk (2003) sums up this role:

I recently read a mission agency’s recruitment brochure describing mission work in the United Arab Emirates—a highly restricted country. A major problem, as the agency saw it, was the group of Western employees in the country who were chasing profit and living lifestyles that were a poor reflection on Christianity. The agency was seeking missionaries to reflect a true Christian lifestyle, although I am not sure how they expected to get in. They seemed to miss the point that businesspeople were already there, accepted, and protected. Think how far they could “push the envelope” if they were part of the business community and not trying to sneak in. I believe the answer is to send people who are bivocational—missionaries and businesspeople. The answer is *both/and*, not *either/or*. (p. 165)

The literature informs various aspects of what typically goes into BAM, provides examples of BAM companies, affirms the uniqueness of BAM, and explains the goal of BAM. These sources will fuel the research of this thesis in an attempt to discover how those seeking to take the gospel to the unreached can best use business to establish an honest image and effective witness around the world.

Theology of Work

A foundation of Business as Mission that is important to discuss before addressing the research question is a proper, biblical theology of work. In society today, work is often viewed as evil and necessary to make a living and survive, and there is an increasing divide between the secular and the sacred (Keller, 2016). Now, it is typical for a Christian's professional life to be seen as a completely separate part of life, isolated from spirituality, ministry, and the Church. The various areas of life have become compartmentalized. However, this presents a flawed view of the gospel and what God intended for a holistic life of work and spirituality. God Himself did work in creating the universe, as seen in Genesis 1-2. God also implemented work for man before sin came into the world. Genesis 2:15 says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001). Before the fall of Adam and Eve, work existed—"work was part of paradise" (Keller, 2016, p. 36). Man, in God's original design, was created to work. Yet, after the disobedience of Adam and Eve that brought sin into the human race, work became something that involved toil, sweat, and pain. In Genesis 3:19, God says to Adam, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The societal grumble at the idea of work is linked back to this consequence of the fall, and the entry of sin has contributed to a warped perspective on every part of life, including work (Keller, 2016). A common view, though it may be subconscious for some, is that secular work is inferior and unrelated to ministry, discipleship, and life as a follower of Jesus.

In addition, the results of the gospel are often limited to a believer's eternal state and sin record. However, the gospel is not just an entry ticket into heaven—it is a holistic entry into the Kingdom of God. It bleeds into everything the Christian does. The entire trajectory of his life

purpose changes—not just what his Sunday morning plans are. 1 Corinthians 10:31 affirms, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001). Moreover, Luke 9:23-25 says, “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’” (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This does not mean that a Christian professional only works in a Christian setting or produces Christian products; rather, the truths of the gospel transform every area of a believer’s life and the lens through which all of life is viewed—including the workplace (Keller, 2016). Work is a sacred thing and was created by God to bring glory to Himself, regardless of the level of spirituality of the work environment surrounding the believer. A doctor, teacher, or businessperson is not further from ministry and a holistic spiritual life than a pastor. The ‘secular’ professional can choose to compartmentalize his day job, life at home, and church activities, or he can choose to honor his work as worship and a means for God to work in people, society, and the world (Nelson, 2011). Colossians 3:23 instructs, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” affirming that all areas of the believer’s life are to be done for the glory of God, not just church-related activities.

Understanding this biblical perspective on work is vital before striving to do Business as Mission. If the missionary does not view non-spiritual activities—like running a business and working a job—as worthwhile and sacred, then it follows suit that a business would be viewed as a distraction. However, a change in perspective can revolutionize the impact of ministry through business overseas. In one study of BAM practitioners, there was a collective agreement that there should be no difference between believers’ conduct “in their private lives and in their business

lives” (Nur, 2009, p. 47). Work and ministry should be integrated, with a seamless transition between one and the other (Lai, 2006). A BAM business should be a part of the believer’s life and avoid compartmentalization because the business and ministry are not two separate full-time jobs but are, rather, one integrated whole as part of the community. Although hundreds of pages could be written on a biblical theology of work, a brief understanding serves as a foundation for why a Business as Mission venture should be an integrated part of the local community, generate a profit, and incorporate biblical values into business operations.

Integration into the Local Community

Missionaries can establish an honest image and effective witness in the community by having a business that is a part of the community. This involves a business that becomes part of the everyday life of locals, which can come through starting a business that has consistent access to locals and addresses a need in the community. Doing such a thing will provide a legitimate image and role in society consistent with the business visa that is gained to get into the country (Russell, 2008).

Consistent Access to Locals

In many circumstances, missionaries start businesses to get into a country, even though the company does not help them gain access to the local people they are trying to reach. This makes their efforts counterproductive and may, indeed, distract them from their ministry. One team, desiring to reach a people group in a Muslim nation, set up an IT company; however, the clients and employees were predominantly Western, and the company could not truly build relationships with the local Muslims (Lai, 2015). In such a situation, true BAM would not be a proper strategy for this population because not having consistent, quality access to the local unbelievers does not help the missionaries effectively witness to that people group (Lai, 2015).

However, if a team is able to start a company that places them in direct access to the target people group, the business can be incredibly beneficial in providing consistent access to the local people and providing a context for natural relationships to develop (Lai, 1998). These relationships might be with employees, suppliers, customers, or anyone else involved with the business (Tunehag, 2018).

Not only does a strategic business place the Christians among the people group they are trying to reach, but it also allows them to become a natural part of people's lives. Business is central to societies all around the world. According to Patrick Lai (2006), "The world's heart beats with the marketplace. That is where people spend most of their waking hours and gain their satisfaction" (p. 40). Therefore, it is imperative that businesspeople take advantage of this opportunity and meet people where they naturally are—the business world and marketplace (Lai, 2015). If some missionaries desire to access people through the business world, they must meet people where they are; a company should put them in a position where relationships with people naturally arise from the interactions that are part of the marketplace (Lai, 2015). True Business as Mission companies aim to have real and natural relationships through the work they do as a way to be "salt and light" to the community (Tunehag, 2005, p. 21).

Upon the relationships established in the marketplace and within the business itself, believers can foster relationships and "build the trust necessary for these people to listen and accept the truth" (William, 2003, p. 50). The business world and community create opportunities to witness in the context of a pre-established relationship, which is something not available for traditional missionaries (Lai, 2006). Additionally, in many cultures around the world, there is a higher cultural value of relationships than in the United States (Caputo, 2019). Relationships are crucial to spreading the gospel in these cultural contexts because a person is less likely to trust a

stranger trying to talk about their faith. Instead, this could be seen as suspicious and break any chance of a relationship ever forming. However, with a legitimate business that is integrated into the fabric of the community, the believer can become a 'normal' person in someone's life, with the ability to walk with people in everyday interactions. Having a business that provides natural, consistent access to the local people group will bring natural relationships and help create opportunities for missionaries to have an effective witness.

Being a real part of the community is vitally important because it is the community that defines who the foreigner is (Lai, 2006). Soon after meeting a newcomer in the community, a person will often ask what the newcomer does for a living; as soon as this question is answered, the community member's opinions begin to form about that new person. Having a secular identity breaks down barriers to those sharing their lives with the believer because the believer is considered to be "one of them" (Lai, 2006, p. 41). In contrast, a false business image that does not line up with reality can harm the Christian's ability to build natural relationships with the local people and be a witness for Christ (Russell, 2008). This is because the locals' perspective of the foreigner is based on what they see in action, not necessarily the words with which the foreigner describes himself (Lai, 2015).

While trying to reach a specific local population on one distinct side of a city, one Christian businessman made the mistake of living and working on the opposite side of the city (Lai, 2006). The target people grew suspicious of the businessman since he seemed out of place to them. However, once he moved his family and office to the same side of the city where the specific people group lived, they became an integrated part of the community. Accordingly, the suspicion from the local people disappeared. If the Christian identifies himself as a businessman and truly has a business that provides access to the locals, the business is integrated into the local

community and is a witness to the legitimacy of the Christian's identity and place in the community. This provides a natural and honest way to share the gospel in the context of relationships effectively.

Address a Need

A second crucial part of a business' proper integration into the community is addressing a need in the community. This idea has been seen in past missions history, with famous missionaries like Hudson Taylor setting the example of meeting a physical need in the community to win the hearts of the locals and justify a presence in the country (Kane, 1984). Meeting a physical need is not uncommon in missions circles. Yet, when it comes to using business itself to address a need, there are fewer good examples around the world. Unfortunately, "far too many business mission efforts try to create demand when they should be trying to satisfy demand," resulting in the failure of business and ministry (Cragin, 2003, p. 172). However, a legitimate Business as Mission venture that addresses a need, market, or desire in the community can bring many benefits, help a business be truly integrated into the community, and give the missionaries an honest image. Attracting locals to the business through the service or product provided is key to ensuring one's "longevity in the country" because addressing a need adds value to the community (Lai, 1998, p. 43). Value can come through "education, creating jobs, bringing in capital, or enhancing people's lives," but regardless of the type, the society is benefited in tangible ways (Lai, 2003, p. 58).

In order to best address a need in the community, businesspeople can maximize their chances of success by anticipating a need that the community will have three to five years in the future (Lai, 1998). It may be a desired product, a neglected service, or anything in between, but the missionary must be willing to invest time in learning about the environment and available

resources in the region (Russell, 2010). Teams must know what societal needs have already been fulfilled, then be able to “accurately forecast... economic, educational, spiritual, and other needs of the country and people” being targeted (Lai, 1998, p. 43). This requires work, time, research, and experience in the culture (Tunehag, 2004). However, the results of such efforts can make or break the business strategy, success, and effective ministry.

An important aspect of addressing a need is the appeasing of the government. Nations want to grow and increase their influence and presence in the world. The predominant way this is accomplished is through business and the economy. As such, countries are known to “want commerce, not Christianity, bucks, not Bibles” (Lai, 2006, p. 39). If a missionary—especially in a closed country—attempts to enter the country simply to proselytize illegally, he will not be given a visa. This is why so many missionaries attempt to use a cover business to get a visa and gain entry into the country. Still, governments are not ignorant, so it is naïve to think that a government is unaware that a businessperson is a Christian and may be evangelizing and planting churches (Bailey, 2007). However, if the Christian’s business fulfills “a need or want from the government,” it can decrease suspicion from the government and help with legal relations and processes (Lai, 1998, p. 43). Even if the government is aware of the fact that the businessperson is sharing their faith, it is common for governments to “[look] the other way when something violates policy but benefits the nation,” rather than deport the Christians (Bailey, 2007, para. 7). In other words, governments can value the benefits the business brings to the economy, society, and community at large more than they value their own religious influence and laws.

Many examples demonstrate a government allowing a Christian to stay in the country instead of losing the value their organizations bring to the nation. One such instance occurred in

a Muslim nation when a believer doing real, viable work to address the nation's hunger problem was suspected of being a missionary by the government (Lai, 2006). After different governmental departments approved his deportation, the department overseeing social work argued that deporting the man would result in thousands of citizens being left hungry and a hundred unemployed. In response, the government let the believer and his organization remain in the country. Several groups of new believers formed over time in this community due to the Christian's ministry and work. If the Christian man had not been doing viable work, he would have been deported, just like countless missionaries have been deported from countries all around the world.

As seen through this example and other sources of research, it is evident that job creation is another essential part of pleasing the government, addressing needs, adding value to society, and becoming integrated into the local community. According to Patrick Lai (2015), "A job is the most fundamental nonspiritual need of a human being" since jobs bring dignity, income, and opportunity to families (p. 5). Giving a person a chance to work brings honor, thus adding value to society (Lai, 2006). Moreover, if a business can hire local people, the Christians can easily build relationships with locals, in addition to "winning favor with government officials" (Lai, 2015, p. 202).

Overall, it is crucial that believers seeking to start Business as Mission ventures gain consistent access to the local people. This is necessary to become an integrated part of the community and gain natural relationships in which to share the gospel. Then, if a business is bringing substantial value to society by addressing a clear need and providing jobs to locals, the likelihood of deportation decreases. Still, if a businessperson is genuinely integrated into his community and neighborhood, locals can vouch for the Christian's legitimacy should issues with

the government arise. Having a business that is truly integrated into the local community builds an honest image with the locals and contributes to effective ministry.

Profit

Missionaries can establish an honest image and effective witness in the community through business by generating a profit. The very definition of a business “involves a natural person or entity performing an activity or trade with the intent of making a profit” (Legal Information Institute, 2021, para. 1). Mark Russell defines a business as “an organization that creates and/or distributes goods and/or services and relies on financial profit for survival, success, and expansion capability” (Russell, 2010, p. 36). Profit is an integral part of the very definition of a business, so if a business does not strive for profit, it is not a business (Lai, 2015). Moreover, if a business cannot generate a profit, it will not be able to serve others, grow, or survive competition (Eldred, 2010). No matter the culture, profit is a crucial aspect of business, necessary “to sustain itself [and] its employees” (Ching, 2014, p. 11). Since Business as Mission involves real, viable businesses, there must be a profit motive to be legitimate, and there must be actual earned profit to make an impact. Several inputs are necessary to achieve this end of profit, but real profit assists greatly in sustainable ministry.

Business Expertise

If missionaries are moving overseas under the cover of a shell company, their motivation for going overseas does not involve a sustainable, profitable business. In these instances, it is uncommon for the believer to possess any business training or knowledge that would assist in running a company in a new culture. However, in the business world, where the majority of start-up businesses “fail in the first few years,” not having “a good understanding of the causes of failure virtually guarantees failure” (Cragin, 2003, p. 169). Basic knowledge of business

principles, strong business models, project development, business networks, investments, capital, etc., are crucial to the foundation of a company but are often lacking in missional business circles (Tunehag, 2004). Business knowledge is critical regardless of the type of business, target market, or cultural context (William, 2003).

One study of missional believers running businesses in Central Asia found a great need for more business training for those going overseas to do Business as Mission (Bosch, 2017). Some of the businesspeople interviewed had business backgrounds; still, 54% of respondents “wished their team had more business training” (Bosch, 2017, p. 42). One specific believer, who had gotten a Bible degree, affirmed that he would get a business degree if he went back in time (Bosch, 2017). The overall findings displayed a common understanding among the respondents that business training is necessary for those wishing to do Business as Mission.

Another study sought to evaluate the impact of the different bottom lines of Business as Mission among believers with varying levels of business expertise and missional drive (Rundle, 2022). The study found that the believers who had not only a high missional drive but also a strong business background and mindset performed better; they “unhesitatingly [implemented] rationalized business practices with the intention of creating a financially self-sustaining business” (Rundle, 2022, p. 427). The economic impact of those with business acumen was clearly higher than those with none. Although many missionaries may have good intentions, those with a higher propensity for pastoral ministry, church planting, evangelism, and the like should consider doing ministry in avenues that will set themselves up for the most success according to their skills and passions (Russell, 2008). However, if a believer is committed to obtaining business knowledge and skills, has a desire to meet a need in the community through business, and has a healthy perspective on work as ministry, there is a higher chance of success

(Russell, 2008). In order to sustain a legitimate Business as Mission venture and generate a profit, business training and expertise is absolutely necessary.

Market Research

Part of business expertise is knowing why market research is crucial to business success and how to do it. To do Business as Mission, “business missionaries should spend significant energy in the target market area generating a list and description of potential customers, competitors, and suppliers” as they come up with business ideas and strategies (Cragin, 2003, p. 173). In addition to the economic environment, competition, and industry, they should also research local accounting procedures, laws, visa processes, and regulations on business in the specific country; these legal expectations may drastically differ from what is commonplace in Western countries (William, 2003). Throughout this process, if they find little opportunity for a particular product or service to perform well and achieve a profit, they should not proceed with that business idea (Cragin, 2003). This connects to the necessity of meeting a need in the community, as thorough culture and market research can help uncover the most desired needs. Once the business entrepreneurs identify the needs of a particular community and properly evaluate the corresponding market, they can begin to form a quality strategy and business plan.

Business Plan

Without business training, it is uncommon for a missionary to understand the importance of a business plan and create one accordingly. In fact, there is a clear connection between a lack of business expertise and a lack of a business plan (Bosch, 2017). However, a business plan is a vital part of starting a new company because potential investors, advisors, and significant stakeholders will likely desire to see one (Rundle, 2011). Although there is not necessarily a guaranteed correlation between a business plan and business success, they are helpful in

developing a business strategy and researching the industry, both of which can help businesses penetrate a market more effectively and expand in the future (Russell, 2008).

A good business plan should “succinctly describe the opportunity, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the business model and the management team, and give some conservative estimates about how and when the venture will break even” (Rundle, 2011, p. 95). To break this down further, the following elements should be listed or discussed in the business plan: the people “starting and running the venture,” key partners, legal entities, suppliers, target customers, intended product or service, plan for growth, competition, economic environment, financials, market opportunity, business model, desired competitive advantage, industry regulations, host culture, and risk management (Rundle, 2011, p. 95).

During the planning process, it is wise to “set up accounting procedures and books before the company begins operating in foreign markets” (Cragin, 2003, p. 173). In addition, the business should forecast “income, cost of sales, operations costs, marketing and administrative costs, and foreign exchange rates” to project financials for a few years into the future (Cragin, 2003, p. 173). This can help the business better evaluate the longevity of the business strategy, operate competitively, and increase impact.

Creating a business plan and preparing to start a viable business takes a lot of work, market research, and preparation. Moreover, business knowledge is vital in knowing how to properly evaluate the aforementioned areas and come up with a quality strategy. However, putting in this effort can greatly increase the chances of business success and profit.

Sustainable Ministry

Generating a profit in a Business as Mission venture plays a significant role in the believers' credibility and the ministry's sustainability. Profit is evidence of a legitimate business

and gives “a natural and satisfactory reason for maintaining a residence” in the country (Lai, 2006, p. 44). A profitable business demonstrates a real business model to the local community, which affirms the testimony of the believer and contributes to an honest image in the community (Bosch, 2017). Furthermore, profit allows a business to pay employees and hire additional locals (Russell, 2010). The businessperson with money on hand can also invest it back into the community to bless the residents (Lai, 2006). Since locals can often be suspicious of expatriates who do not have a role in society that lines up with their words, a businessperson who puts work into his company, hires locals, produces a profit, and gives back to the community will not seem out of place (Tunehag, 2004). Having credibility in society will allow the business missionary to remain in the country, which contributes to continued ministry efforts.

Another role profit plays in ministry is presenting a healthy model and theology of work to locals who may convert (Johnson, 2009). Although the traditional missionary model is not inherently bad, there are innumerable examples where converts from developing countries “expect to receive money for doing nothing” after observing the Christians, who do not have a professional job yet receive funds from sources back home in the West (Lai, 2006, p. 46). Workers in many different countries around the world have reported this same phenomenon. A business’ profit, in conjunction with the missionary’s continued work in the business, provides a sustainable model of life and work for new followers of Jesus who are being discipled (Lai, 2006). Through modeling a healthy integration of work and ministry, business missionaries can “teach new believers the honor of labor and of supporting themselves” (Lai, 2006, p. 47). Then, as a result, the likelihood of a convert expecting to receive money from donors in the United States is virtually eliminated.

Christian Ethics within Business Operations

Missionaries can establish an honest image and effective witness in the community by instilling biblical ethics and behavior into business operations. As the believer sets up and runs his company, it is important to strive for excellence and incorporate Christian principles and virtues into the company's culture. This earns respect for the businesspeople and opens doors to the gospel that would not otherwise be open.

Excellence

Excellence is defined as “the quality of being extremely good” (Oxford, n.d., para. 1). Other definitions may differ slightly, but the principle behind excellence in the context of business is doing everything in a job to the very best of one's ability. For the Christian businessman doing Business as Mission, excellence should emanate from his life and work as he strives to do everything to the glory of God and serve others (Johnson, 2009). One can display excellence in different ways, such as striving for success in an honorable way, going the extra mile for employees or customers, and putting real, honest work into a company. This is vitally important because people all around are always watching (Lai, 2015). As such, the work a believer does in business—its quality, success, and integrity—is part of his faith and witness (Lai, 2015). For example, going the extra mile and “giving people more than they expect, providing a quality product or service and having happy and fulfilled employees, all while making money” is seen as very respectable and honorable by outsiders, especially when that is not the cultural norm (Lai, 2015, p. 21). The world today is “full of deceit and corruption,” so living an honest life, working hard, edifying others, and doing “jobs with excellence” is “a powerful witness” for the gospel (Lai, 2015, p. 21).

Striving for excellence and putting one's all into a business is also a factor in the success of the business (Johnson, 2009). If a business is run by people with professional business training who are good at their job and work hard to make an impact in the community, success is much more likely; the government of a country, businesses, and other organizations "wish to deal with individuals who are successful" (Lai, 1998, p. 45). As such, excellence and success are key to appealing the government and affirming a business' legitimacy and honest image (Ching, 2014).

Furthermore, the more financially successful a business is, the more respect is gained in the community, especially if the business' profit was achieved through ethical means (Ching, 2014). The more a businessperson gains respect in the community, the more doors are open to share the gospel, especially those in higher tiers of society that would otherwise stay unreached. The right to be heard must be earned (Eldred, 2010). Since most "missionary work focuses on those from lower socio-economic groups," successful and excellent business is a fantastic, God-given way to earn a place in the hearing of influential but unreached people in the marketplace and economic sector of society (Lai, 2006, p. 43).

One believer overseas did not focus on being good at her job as a means to gain respect and an ear from the lost people around her (Eldred, 2010). Instead, she was somewhat aggressive with coworkers, stopping them at random moments to speak abruptly about her faith. Although she had good intentions, coworkers grew annoyed and began to avoid her. At the same time, her boss, who was not a believer, realized that she was neglecting her work duties and was not performing well. She never went the extra mile in her work responsibilities because she did not understand the value of her work as ministry. Thus, she missed out on respect from nonbelievers, relationships with coworkers, and fruitful ministry as a whole.

Rapport is gained in society from being successful and knowledgeable in an industry or part of the community. If a businessman has rapport in society, people who are not open to the gospel will listen to what he has to say. Along with the biblical ethics displayed through the way he does his job, this rapport contributes to an honest image and effective witness in the community.

Demonstrated Biblical Values

Part of effective ministry through Business as Mission is the integration of biblical principles and values into the very fabric of the company. It is crucial to have a business that is honest and godly in all business dealings, which demonstrates values that are characteristic of God's Kingdom and provides opportunities to witness. The workplace is where unbelievers can observe the way a believer interacts with corruption and other negative standards external to the company (Lai, 2006). In addition, they can watch how the Christian treats his employees with honor and dignity as he runs a business in a countercultural way.

Standards of Corruption (External)

Due to varying cultural values, worldviews, and standards, corruptive practices like bribery are viewed as normal or expected in many places around the world, especially in some African and Asian countries (Lai, 2006). In this environment, Christian businesspeople have the opportunity to stand up for godly values in the midst of a marketplace full of corruption and selfishness that they cannot control (Johnson, 2009). Although a Christian businessman may not be able to control "a customer trying to cheat [him] or an employee trying to steal," he can control the way he responds to the situation and be a picture of "God's love and grace" (Lai, 2015, p. 203). Instead of going along with what the culture says is normative for business, a believer can choose honesty and ethics in business dealings (Ching, 2014). When the believer

chooses good while the expectation is to go along with “favoritism, bribery, lying, and cheating,” the unbelievers in the Christian’s sphere of influence ask questions about it, providing the opportunity for effective gospel witness (Lai, 2006, pp. 333-334). Over time, as employees watch continued godly behavior in response to “corrupt officials and employees who lied or cheated,” they see a consistent picture of Jesus in the believer and evidence that it is truly possible to choose good in a world of bad, by the grace of God alone (Lai, 2015, p. 196).

Employee Relations (Internal)

Not only can a missional businessman demonstrate Christian values in contrast to a corrupted business environment, but he can also model biblical principles in how he structures his business operations internally (Nur, 2009). The previous section discussed the believer’s response and reactive behavior to corruption, while this section discusses ways the business can proactively promote and encourage a godly ethic with employee relations. As employees observe the believer’s life and interact with the believer at work, they see a way of running a business unlike anything they have seen in their culture before—they see “the gospel lived out before them” (Lai, 2015, p. 7).

To be effective in ministry within one’s business, it is essential to be intentional with “faith engagement on both a personal and corporate level,” an “in-depth culture of relationships within the company,” and promoting “corporate, faith-based core values” (Johnson, 2009, p. 215). Business as Mission is a strategy that fosters a company culture that rewards good employee efforts, incorporates prayer into meetings, encourages “love, forgiveness, and grace,” and displays the relationship with God that the believers have (Lai, 2015, p. 6). In most overseas contexts, this is a countercultural way of running a business. Being the fragrance of Christ is more than just verbal proclamation—it is showing employees the kindness of the Lord, turning

“to God to run the business in both good and difficult times,” praying for the needs of everyone in the company, and living an integrated life of work and ministry (Lai, 2015, p. 196).

One business owner in Southeast Asia neglected to invest in relationships with his employees properly (Russell, 2010). This was due to the business’ poor performance, stemming from a lack of proper preparation and knowledge of how to run a business in that context. In contrast, a business owner in the same country had a successful business and could spend time pouring into his workers. Because he had relationships with them, employee retention increased, which helped provide a longer “time frame in which the employees could observe and listen to Christian behavior and verbal proclamation” (Russell, 2010, p. 197).

In another instance, a Christian business owner in a Muslim context accidentally asked his employee to do something that was illegal in that country, not knowing that it was against the law (Lai, 2015). Once he found out what he had done, he apologized for offending his employee and asked for her forgiveness. This was the opposite of the cultural expectation of supervisors, so it made a significant impact in the employee’s life. After seeing the believer model Christ, the same employee asked him for a Bible a few days later, and she is now a follower of Jesus.

It is incredibly attractive to work for a boss that humbles himself when he does wrong and does not shame when an employee makes a mistake. Unbelievers are not interested in a Jesus that treats people poorly, but being the salt and light of Christ and spreading His aroma through the way one treats his employees can spark great interest. Running a business in this countercultural way enhances the missionary's honest image and effective witness.

Findings

Research indicates several common patterns that reveal how missionaries can establish an honest image and effective witness in a community through business. The first common pattern

seen is the integration of the business into the local community. The business needs to be related to the people one is trying to reach, or else it will truly be separate from the ministry. The BAM venture should provide continued access to the target people group, with locals as customers, suppliers, and employees. Such consistent interaction provided by the business allows natural relationships to develop in order to witness. Moreover, the business should address a clear need in society, especially one the government desires to address. Meeting a need or providing a desired service brings a visible way to add value to society. This presents legitimacy to the locals and the government, contributing to the company's longevity and honest image in the community. Since it is the community who decides who the foreigner is—not the foreigner himself—business missionaries must establish a venture that is clearly integrated into the local community.

The second common pattern highlights the necessity of profit in the BAM venture. The lack of profit will keep the business from serving people, providing for employees, and growing as an organization. In fact, part of the very definition of business is generating a profit. However, it is imperative that business missionaries actually have professional business training. This expertise is necessary to know how to properly do market research before forming a business strategy and creating a thorough business plan. Such preparation helps lay a solid foundation and increases the business's chance of success and profit. Profit is evidence that the business is legitimate, and it allows the business to continue operations. Moreover, profit contributes to sustainable ministry and models a healthy perspective on work and spirituality to new converts.

The third common pattern discovered is the incorporation of Christian values and ethics into business operations. Part of this is striving for excellence and success in the company and going the extra mile in work. Successful, excellent businesspeople earn rapport and respect from

people in the community who would otherwise not give an ear to a traditional missionary or a businessman who did not do well in his job. Additionally, the Business as Mission model allows the Christian business to incorporate biblical principles into the fabric of the company culture. The believer can demonstrate a biblical response to external corruption and interact with employees internally with forgiveness, grace, kindness, and love. Such actions are the opposite of what is expected in the culture, which causes people to watch, listen, and wonder what makes the Christian different. All of this allows the believer to speak about his faith in a natural way, which is backed up by the countercultural behavior that has already been witnessed.

Conclusion

Billions of unreached souls in the 10/40 Window will be born, live, and die without ever hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. To reach these people groups, many traditional missionaries have attempted to enter these closed countries through the cover of a business. Although well-intentioned, these missionaries enter as businesspeople simply for visa purposes, with either no real company or a poorly built business; they have no intention of putting work into the enterprise. Thus, the problem addressed in this thesis is that some missionaries are being sent under the façade of having a business, resulting in a poor witness and image in the community.

However, business is a central part of every society worldwide. This fact should not be ignored as it provides Christians the opportunity to live out their faith in the international marketplace. To do this well, it is important that business professionals have a healthy theology of work, recognizing that work is ministry and is part of bringing glory to God through a holistic life that honors the Lord. A legitimate Business as Mission venture strives for not only spiritual impact but also economic and social impact. The business itself is the means of building relationships and doing ministry—it is not a separate full-time job from the goal of sharing the

light of Christ. When done properly, Business as Mission ventures overseas can be wide open doors to the gospel. Business has a key place in reaching the unreached, and it has the power to easily penetrate the staggering numbers of unreached souls in the 10/40 Window and beyond.

Moving overseas under a cover business is not the only way to minister to the unreached in closed countries. Integrating a true Business as Mission venture into the local community, generating a profit, and incorporating Christian ethics and values into business practices allows missionaries to establish an honest image and effective witness through business. Legitimate Business as Mission has the potential to reach lost souls in countries hostile to the gospel. The Church must not let this opportunity go to waste—billions of eternal lives are at stake.

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