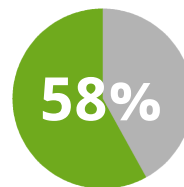


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A Question from Jesus



STAN SLADE



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“So, why are you here?”

That’s what Jesus asked me this week.

Important question. Always.



When Jesus asked it—Pastor Jesús Gómez, to be more exact—we were deep into a conversation with the Baptist pastors of Ensenada, Mexico. So, everybody already knew the obvious answer: they had invited me!

We were at First Baptist Church, attending their regular gathering for fellowship, continuing education and mutual encouragement. For over 20 years, mi *consuegro* (fellow father-in-law, Tim Long—also a fellow IM missionary) has been nurturing such gatherings of pastors in various places in Baja.

At the outset, one of the leaders reminded everyone that the agenda for the morning was informal and wide open. It was an opportunity to engage each other and their missionaries in a search for fresh perspectives on the pastoral challenges they face. So, neither Tim nor I were giving lectures or formal presentations. Instead, we were contributing to the normal give-and-take of conversation.

By the time Jesús, an experienced pastor, asked his question, Tim and I understood immediately that it was about something much deeper than the invitation to the meeting.

So, why *were* we there? How did we understand our missionary presence and role among our Mexican sisters and brothers? Spontaneously, Tim and I both responded to the question in terms of our respective calls to follow Jesus in life and in service to Christ's mission in the world. Our stories are too long to tell here, but the core was simple.

God had given us life and love in Jesus. The gift turned out also to be a call: a call to let the Spirit of God reshape us to better reflect who God is. That reshaping happens—usually gradually—as we walk with others. Sharing God's grace with one another, we encourage each other to grow as followers of Jesus and as witnesses to God's redeeming love for all creation. Together, we participate in God's all-encompassing, long-term work to redeem creation in and through Jesus Christ. Responding to the call is why we are here—wherever "here" happens to be.

Tim and I acknowledged that sometimes missionaries who are deeply dedicated and well-intentioned can give themselves to mission service without much awareness of their place in the human story. We can respond to the call eagerly, but without even minimal sensitivity to the history of colonialism and neocolonialism that has shaped our world—and even our selves!

Similarly, people with a passion to see the fullness of God's reign on earth can sometimes, despite that passion, be blind to the ethnocentrism that comes to us all so naturally.

Further, we recognized that people who have had the opportunity to get formal education and advanced training, especially if they come from a "can-do" culture (in other words, people like the two of us!), can speak and act from an entirely unconscious assumption of superiority.

That is not at all who we want to be. We ask the Lord—and the friends we serve—to open our eyes and hearts to those tendencies within us, and to help us live differently. We seek

intentionally to come to others not from “above” but from alongside or below. We have something to give, certainly, and also, just as certainly, much to learn.

Abraham was called to become a blessing to others even as he was learning who God really is and how to walk with God faithfully. And making plenty of mistakes along the way! In Christ, we have been made children of Abraham, heirs of his call. In the midst of our learning and growing (a.k.a., mistake-making), we seek to be instruments of God’s love in Christ.

Gracias, Jesús, for the question! Thank you, Jesus, for the chance to learn, grow and serve alongside Jesús, José Carlos, Carolina, Blanca, Juanita... and all of the sisters and brothers you give us!

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