

## 7 Obstacles to Engaging in Mission, Deb Hirsch

The following is my notes on Deb Hirsch's talk at the CMA Organic Movements Conference earlier this month.

The fall away rate for people who continue to be really involved in mission is very high. People get older and become church attendees, but lose their enthusiasm for mission. What's the motivation that keeps me going? "Once I was lost; once I was blind." His grace opened up our eyes. So, when we come together and are tired from ministry, we encourage each other to keep going. It's all about mission and getting out there and helping people find Jesus.

We find obstacles that stop us from being engaged in mission. Some are about external circumstances and some are internal.

7 Obstacles to Engaging in Mission:

1. Distorted view of Jesus. "If your conception of God is radically false then the more devout you are the worse it will be for you. You are opening your soul to be molded by something else. You had much better be an atheist." William Temple

A lot of Christians are trying to find who this person of Jesus is. His heart, life, love, and what He stood for. When our vision is blurred, it mucks up everything else. It's important to go to the Gospels again, and again, and again to encounter Jesus.

I fear that a lot of Christians are not seeing Him clearly. We see Him in our own image. We try to tame Him or domesticate Him. We try to keep Him behind the stain-glass walls. The Jesus of the Gospels was quite unruly. He didn't care much for social graces; often impolite or outright rude. He always seemed to be hanging out with the wrong people at the wrong time in the wrong places. He was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. We have made Him meek and mild, polite, never offensive, and always at the right place, in the right time, with the right people.

The reality is, He was born in a dirty shed and died on a dirty cross. We have cleaned these images up because they offend us. But when we follow a sanitized, cleaned up Jesus, then we become like that. A lot of Christians look like that: tame, sanitized people who never offend anyone. We become "nice" people. We equate niceness and politeness with holiness.

If we follow a Jesus that does not get his hands dirty, we are not following the real Jesus.

2. Distorted views of self

How we define our self impacts our behavior. If we see our self as a doctor, we are going to care for people in the way that doctors do.

What we think of our self and have been told by others, we act out of. Much of discipleship is to put on the new labels of the true identity that God has for us.

The foundational identity that we need to live out is that we are disciples. Churches are full of Christians, but there are not a lot of disciples. Christians believe, but disciples follow. A sacrificial motif. No sacrifice, no disciple. If we see our self with this identity, we will walk out our purpose: "to go out and be missionaries in the world."

### 3. Distorted views of others

I started in ministry with a "worm" theology. We are all bad people. We end up focusing on people's negative behavior.

We need a paradigm shift. The primary truth is that people are created in the image of God. Look at other people I encounter and recognize that this person, no matter who it is, in some way reflects my God.

### 4. Distorted views of love

We are totally saturated in romantic notions of love. Most people can grasp a romantic notion of love. But Christians are called to a sacrificial love.

C.S. Lewis says that self-giving love is the most fundamental of all loves. "*For in self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being. For the Eternal Word also gives Himself in sacrifice.*"

Romantic notions of love do not cut it in the mission field. It's "fun" to get out there and have a romantic notion of the being out there. But real love is what is needed to sustain mission. "To know love one must know pain."

### 5. Distorted views of the world

Where you stand determines what you see. We need to make intentional choices about where we stand and what we see. Too many of us keep ourselves cocooned in our safe lives and houses. How can we respond to the needs of the world if we are not out looking for them. To understand the pain of a city, you have to go to where the pain is. We have to move out beyond where we are to see the pain.

We bought a house with five people in a red-light district. Every time I walked out of my house I could see a prostitute on one corner or another. We have to place our self where we can see the needs and the pain or we become lazy.

Jesus did not take Himself away from the needs and the pain. Jesus did take breaks, but He spent most of His time with people's messes.

### 6. Distorted views about money, consumption, and status

"No one can serve two masters..."

Martin Luther said three conversions were necessary--heart, mind, and wallet. Money has the capacity to ensnare us like nothing else does. Jesus talks more about money than any other topic except the kingdom of God. He knows the power it has to wield over us.

"Money is not neutral but is and of itself... energized by power. It is an idolatry we must be converted from in order to be converted to Him. Money has many of the characteristics of deity: power, omnipresence, security, etc. We attach importance to it far beyond its worth.

For western Christians money is our greatest blindspot.

We have also been seduced by consumerism-- the alternative religion of our day. Sociologists say consumerism has become the "new religion." This is the greatest competitor to Christianity, yet we don't see it because we live amongst it. We have to repent of the idolatry.

#### 7. Distorted views of the family

We have become captive to the construct of the nuclear family (mom and dad and 2.2 kids) as the ideal family structure. We have set this up as an idol. We have ministries based upon this as the ideal.

This is not a biblical notion of family. In fact, nothing like it. This notion of family has only been known for the last 40-50 years with industrialization. Prior to that, people lived much more in a village-type family structure.

The biblical notion of family is very inclusive-- households-- many, many uncles, brothers, sisters, parents.

Family idolatry is a mis-directed form of religious worship.

The kingdom is a big inclusive family.

Note: These are only my notes and do not convey the impact of her total message. But I thought the bits and pieces of wisdom were powerful enough to pass along.