

AN EXAMPLE OF LOCAL CHURCH IMPACT

TOM STELLER

PASTOR OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT,
BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH

Editor's note: The following is a good example of the impact Dr. Winter had on local churches.

It is hard to overstate the influence that Ralph Winter has had on Bethlehem Baptist Church. During the summer of 1983 both John Piper and I were confronted with the “statistics of missions” as outlined in the Hidden Peoples Pie Chart. We were thinking of adding another full-time pastor to our staff when a young couple from Bethlehem sent us a letter challenging this decision. They wrote in the letter, “How can you justify adding another full-time Christian worker in a church that already has two in a city that has a thousand churches?” They then proceeded to lay out the statistics of missions and encouraged us to consider that when the Bible uses the word “nations” it doesn’t mean countries, but ethno-linguistic groupings of people. This pesky letter was part of what God used to wake up John Piper and me to the reality that if we love the glory of God we will not be content until His glory in the face of His Son has been proclaimed to all the nations and worshippers have been won from every tribe and tongue and people.

A “Frontier Missions Prayer and Study Group” began that summer. In October while I was listening to John Michael Talbot sing, “All the nations on earth will adore you...”, this new understanding of what nations meant sunk into my worshiping heart and I was converted to World Christianity. A few weeks later John Piper preached his now famous sermon, “Missions: The Battle Cry of Christian Hedonism” which is contained in chapter 9 of *Desiring God*. The fire for missions and reaching the unreached peoples of the world was ignited and it continues to burn with great heat more than 25 years later.



Tom Steller is pastor of leadership development at Bethlehem Baptist Church and academic dean at the Bethlehem Institute.



A crucial foundation stone in this on-going missions renewal has been the *Perspectives* course. I became missions pastor in April of 1984 without any missions experience and having successfully avoided the one missions course required by my M.Div. program at Fuller Theological Seminary. What joy to have a job description that matched my passion, but what terror to realize I had no missions training to help me carry it out. Someone told me about

an amazing introduction to missions course being offered at the USCWM in Pasadena. My wife and I and over twenty others drove our old cars across the Great Plains and over the Rocky Mountains to spend five weeks on the campus of the USCWM. The combination of the *Perspectives* course, the Frontier Fellowship meetings and personal time with Ralph Winter changed us all forever.

We brought the *Perspectives* course to Minneapolis for the first time in the fall of 1984. Over 120 signed up! The *Perspectives* course has been offered every year in the Twin Cities since then and continues to touch countless lives for the sake of God’s glory among the nations.

Dr. Winter spoke in our first *Perspectives* course and was the keynote speaker for our Missions Conference. Over the years we have had many interactions with him. We will miss him deeply. But we will be forever grateful for the impact he has had on our lives, on the people of Bethlehem Baptist Church and on lives that only the Lord can count! 🌐