

Addictions: An unreached mission field

Have you ever considered addictions a mission field? Many people do not think of addictions in this way. They often assume that it's the job of someone else to minister to addicts, or that it is not even possible to do so. Sadly, they miss out on an opportunity to reach a currently unreached mission field. Why should we see addictions as an unreached mission field? How should we respond to this ministry opportunity? This will be the subject of our discussion.

Viewing addictions as a mission field requires the correct understanding of the Great Commission. The Great Commission in Matthew 28, while typically being a familiar command for churches and Christians, is usually not connected with addictions. Here, Jesus commands his disciples and followers to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he commanded. Historically, the church has taken this command to mean reaching particular nations with the gospel message. In more recent years though, missionaries have focused specifically on reaching different people groups with the gospel instead of simply a nation. The reason for this is because nations are made up of numerous people groups. Simply because a nation is reached with the gospel in no way means that the different people groups in that nation have been reached. The shift of focus from nations to people groups has helped the church realize how many more people need reached with the gospel.

Even in America where the churches are located on almost every corner, the need for the gospel to be brought to different people groups and mission fields still exists. Today, perhaps no greater need exists for the gospel message than in the area of addictions. This mission field rests right in our backyard. Despite the fact that addicts are image bearers who should hear the gospel like all others, many people cringe at the notion that addictions are a mission field worth pouring resources, effort, and time into.

Why are there challenges in bringing the gospel message into the mission field of addictions? One reason is otherness. Otherness is treating people differently who are "other than us." They may be other than us for different reasons: such as the way they look, smell, act, or think. Addicts are often viewed as "other than us." We do not see similarities or familiar heart struggles, and treat them as a different class. A second reason is due to personal responsibility. It is far easier to give to support orphan care, foster care, or crisis pregnancy than it is to addiction efforts. We assign a greater level of personal responsibility to those in addiction than we do to many others. Personal responsibility in addictions cannot be ignored or minimized, yet it should not be a reason why fail to reach out with the gospel. Third, others do not think the gospel has any relevance to addictions. Addictions, as viewed by many, require a solution apart from the gospel, as in chemical or biological sanctification.

What role can you play in reaching the mission field of addictions with the gospel? A willing and ready heart is the first key, believing that God cares about those in addictions. A second key is proper training and equipping, so you can learn how to best minister the gospel in these situations. For us to successfully reach the mission field of addictions with the gospel, we need all hands on deck, with all of our churches partnering together. Here at Empower, we are committed to the task of uniting the local church for the sake of the gospel.