

Business as Mission's Redemptive Path: A Holistic Reclamation of the Kingdom

Abstract

Aside from individual salvation and redemption, the Gospel seeks to reclaim God's Kingdom on earth. This article examines how the "Three Greats"- the Great Story, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission- drive Business as Mission (BAM) to advance its mission of holistic transformation (economically, socially, environmentally, and spiritually) to all people and nations. After providing a historical overview of BAM's theological and missiological roots, the text analyzes the Fall's corruptive impact on creation, relationships, and the nature of work, alongside BAM's subsequent redemptive mission. It evaluates how the Great Story guides creation and environmental stewardship, how the Great Commandment shapes vocation and justice, and how the Great Commission advances human flourishing and reconciliation through entrepreneurial ecosystems. Last of all, the article highlights how events that appeared to be barriers to the Gospel's spread actually accelerated it, providing a blueprint for how creative access methods can be used to enter the 1040 window and other areas closed to traditional missionary organizations.

Introduction

The claim has been made that athletics is the best way to reach people for Christ. Clearly there is a transcendence that occurs on a field of competition, and a Tim Tebow or Kurt Warner can garner the attention of a crowd.... However, the power of business is significantly greater. It has the impact to evangelize and is the only mission technique that can provide jobs and transform a society that can help lift people out of poverty. BAM's impact is long term.¹

God's intent that Christians are to reach out to others for Christ and teach them to obey is unambiguous: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20). This is one of the most well-known Scriptures associated with God's plan for his followers to extend his Kingdom and share the Gospel with those who do not know him. Other Bible passages echo this plan to extend the Kingdom and specifically embrace the unreached or ignored. In Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18, God's covenant with Abraham included a promise that everyone could someday enjoy the blessings he had promised to share with Abraham's descendants. In John 4:26, the Samaritan woman at the well was the first person with whom Jesus revealed his identity as the Messiah. Acts 8:26-40 describes the conversion of the first Gentile, a eunuch.

Business as Mission (BAM) includes serving the unreached and ignored as part of its intentional "Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations; focused on holistic transformation..."² BAM enterprises strive to create and operate commerce activities that holistically transform neglected and underserved communities. This transformation is intended to glorify God and occur along four dimensions: economically, environmentally, socially, and spiritually.³ Thus, a BAM enterprise differs from a traditional firm pursuing profit while being

religious. In the BAM model, business itself is an essential part of the mission. The enterprise tries to financially sustain itself while advancing values associated with the Kingdom of God, led concurrently by the Great Commission, the Creation Mandate, and the Great Commandment.⁴

The Gospel's message extends beyond individual redemption and salvation to encompass the "reclamation of God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven."⁵ This article explores how these three core values, or the "Three Greats," lead BAM in reaching out to "all peoples" in its mission of holistic transformation.⁶ After tracing BAM's historic roots, the article examines the Creation Mandate and how the Fall fractured the relationship among God, humanity, and the environment; disrupted relationships among people; and corrupted the nature of work. It subsequently analyzes BAM's response to the Fall. Following an analysis of the impact of the Great Story in addressing challenges related to the theological themes of creation and stewardship, it explores guidance provided by the Great Commandment in alleviating tensions associated with discipleship, vocation and justice. The article evaluates the Great Commission's influence in fostering reconciliation and human flourishing through the formation of communities and networks, and how these formations are replicated in entrepreneurial ecosystems. The article concludes with an examination of supposed barriers that accelerated the Gospel's spread instead, and the lesson this provides in the use of "creative access methods" to reach people living in areas that have not traditionally been receptive to conventional missionary organizations.

BAM's Historic Roots and Redemptive Potential

The theological basis of BAM stems from the conviction that business practices and other aspects of life should reflect the kingdom and purposes of God.⁷ This view recognizes opportunities for businesses to contribute to human flourishing through the creation of goods, wealth, and jobs.⁸ Instructions "to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis

1:28) state God's intentions for humanity to work with him in creation and celebrate work as an act of worship.⁹ By providing jobs in places where they are difficult to find and for people who are unemployed, BAM enterprises invite them to enjoy fellowship with God.¹⁰

Sustainable missions are the missiological basis of BAM. BAM merges evangelism with social and economic development to realize two key goals.¹¹ First, the combination can be an effective means of addressing circumstances involving extreme poverty, restricted access, or other situations where a professional missions ministry is ineffective. The approach also deviates from the professional missions arrangement that promotes Christians financially supporting full time missionaries, a tactic that segregates business professionals and other lay people from missionary work.¹² As a result, aside from lessening a mission's reliance on outside finances, BAM allows all Christians, not just professional missionaries, to participate in God's mission.¹³

In responding to the Great Commission's call, BAM provides a redemptive path to address the consequences for work and human flourishing posed by the Fall.¹⁴ In Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day." This Scripture observes that God created work, and that he intended for it to be a good thing. In Genesis 2:15, God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden "to work it and to take care of it," an indication of God's intent for humanity to work and to be stewards of his creation. Man's relationship with creation at that point was in Shalom, enjoying "universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights" and receiving the benefit of "natural needs (being) satisfied" and "natural gifts (being) fruitfully employed."¹⁵

In Genesis 2:17, God warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When they disobeyed this commandment, God banished them (Genesis 3:8-24).

Genesis 3:17-19 describes how their sin distorted their relationship with God and with each other. It also distorted their relationship with work and with the environment as “the earth became their foe, with both land and labor becoming less productive.”¹⁶ Thus, their sin disrupted the relationship among God, humanity, and creation. It disrupted relationships among humanity. It also posed negative implications for work.

The Creation Mandate is the cornerstone of God’s purpose in the world.¹⁷ Because of the distortions imposed by the Fall, he wants not only its redemption, but complete reconciliation. Broadly interpreted, reconciliation encompasses more than salvation, it also involves creation care and justice.¹⁸ BAM’s response to the Fall’s disruptions strives to address “the immense physical and spiritual needs of the world.”¹⁹ It has identified six levels of application for this response:²⁰

- “Specifically restoring dignity through employment”
- “Promoting environmental stewardship”
- “Providing context through discipleship”
- “Facilitating going to all people”
- “Reinforcing peace and community”
- “Strengthening the Church”

These levels are considered in further detail throughout the following sections examining creation and stewardship, vocation/discipleship and justice, and reconciliation and human flourishing.

The Great Story: Creation and Stewardship

BAM entrepreneurs and business professionals, otherwise known as BAMers, face challenging operational realities related to centered around tensions involving profitability,

employment with dignity, and tradeoffs. Consider one example where a church sent a team of businesspeople to North Africa to establish a restaurant.²¹ Initially, the enterprise was profitable and its leaders were successful in serving its customers and employees. However, over time they began raising prices and lowering salaries for their workers. The impact of rising prices and falling salaries on their customers and workers left some wondering whether the enterprise was losing sight of its primary mission. Other sources of operational tension include stewardship challenges resulting from failing to implement an accountability system. In one example, a group of US churches raised funds and partnered with a church in Latin America to start a computer company in West Africa.²² Two years later the churches discovered that the business had quietly shut down without notifying them. The missionaries never sent reports and there were no other accountability measures in place.

The challenges described above relate to the “Great Story,” specifically the Creation Mandate and the Fall. They encompass concerns relevant to creation and stewardship. Consider two aspects of God’s creation of humanity. First, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Humans bear God’s image, so they have value and potentiality and should be treated as such. Second, God has assigned them dominion over the world that he created, designing them to serve as environmental stewards to cultivate and protect creation (Genesis 1:28).²³

Creation

God designed everything with forethought and purpose when he created the world. Those founding and operating an enterprise in a manner consistent with glorifying God would aspire to positively impact their customers, workers, and surrounding community. Visible outcomes of such an impact could include provision of a quality product or service, availability of products

and services at fair prices, compensation at just levels, and working conditions that are safe and comfortable for their workers. Many for-profit enterprises are successful, treat their customers, employees, and vendors well, and operate ethically. However, exclusive focus on a single goal like short-term gains can tempt managers to take short cuts that compromise quality and are contrary to God's approach to creation. Another consequence stemming from such a focus is the possible objectification of workers, environmental factors, and other inputs. Subsequently, a leader would consider only their immediate utility to the process at hand and not appreciate their value holistically.²⁴ This counters Scripture that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore have value and potentiality. It is also contrary to teachings that creation is good, should be protected, and valued.²⁵ Viewing commerce in this manner goes against treating workers with dignity, caring about creation, and protecting the enterprise's long run viability.

Maintaining a singular focus on one goal misses an opportunity to allow God's kingdom to flourish.²⁶ BAM's mission perceives enterprise a means to serve a disadvantaged community by addressing problems such as a lack of access to important goods or a scarcity of employment opportunities. Although profits are essential to sustain the enterprise, God's intended outcome for commerce and other activities is to glorify him and attract people to follow him. One case that sheds light on this mission aspect of BAM is a food desert in South Dallas that motivates some large grocers to financially support community charities. Locating a grocery store in South Dallas could help local households more than financially supporting these charities by providing opportunities to serve customers much needed products at fair prices and by creating job opportunities with dignity for the unemployed.²⁷

Ephesians 2:10, Isaiah 43:7, and 1 Corinthians 10:31 also describe humanity as God's handiwork that he intentionally created to "do good works" and to glorify himself. Leaders'

decisions should not only be profitable but promote human flourishing and enhance the environment. This approach requires considering not only the immediate impact of a decision on profit, but longer-term implications for the firm's financial health as well as implications for stakeholders with environmental and humanity concerns. Expanding the firm's decision-making criteria beyond short-term profits will permit the recognition of value in circumstances where traditional firms constrained to looking at the single bottom line will not.

Stewardship

A second point that reinforces the discussion above is apparent in Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." This passage reveals that God expects the human created in his image to have dominion and steward what ultimately belongs to God. Essential to such stewardship is the development and execution of effective accountability systems. A defining characteristic of such systems is transparency that discloses performance gaps or other deviations from established standards.²⁸

God created men and women with free will, and with freedom comes risk.²⁹ How people use their freedom poses important implications for accountability and stewardship. Consider the servant who was left in charge of managing his master's money in Matthew 25:14-30. Rather than investing it, he chose to hold the funds and his master condemned him for not taking cautious risks.³⁰ This parable espouses using resources responsibly and creatively to glorify God.³¹ It also advocates engaging in business not only for-profit purposes but also as stewards of creation.³²

The Great Commandment: Discipleship, Vocation, and Justice

Other sources of operational tensions for BAM leaders arise from hiring inexperienced labor and juggling competing priorities such as mentoring inexperienced workers while maintaining quality control in an enterprise. Consider one example where a BAM bakery hired vulnerable youth living in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.³³ The BAMer enjoyed mentoring her employees but was frustrated when the business became busier and she needed them to work more quickly and consistently. Another example of stress created by attempting to meet dueling mandates is evident in a case where a BAMer hoping to use his graphic design gifts to serve God founded a web design company overseas.³⁴ He successfully hired local programmers and Christian designers, but the time needed to attend to a new business made it difficult to fulfill his mentorship and community outreach intentions.

The challenges described in the examples above are related to BAM's redemptive mission in addressing distortions in relationships, and center around discipleship, vocation, and justice. "The Great Commandment" provides a helpful framework for considering challenges arising in these relationships. An essential aspect of engaging in business is building healthy and mutually respectful relationships, such as those occurring between employees and employers or consumers and producers.³⁵ Establishing and building these relationships provides discipleship opportunities for BAM participants, offering daily occasions to demonstrate the obedience, patience, and love displayed by Jesus. Another key element of BAM's mission is using business to reach, serve, and employ those who are marginalized or have been neglected, with the intention of restoring those who have been victims of injustice.

Providing Context Through Discipleship

In Scripture, Jesus incarnated to reveal humanity's urgent need for salvation and invite them to enjoy life with him now and after death. A defining characteristic of Jesus as he reached

out was that he lived among those broken and needing salvation. Serving the immediate needs of the neglected disrupted the status quo in the local religious community at times. They also criticized Jesus for mingling among the wealthy and powerful. Convincing humanity that they needed salvation required Jesus to focus not only on teaching and redemption, but on healing and liberating them from the powers that enslaved them.

Jesus' attention to healing and liberation is unmistakable when he called Peter to leadership, despite Peter having denied knowing Christ three times before the crucifixion. Matthew 26:75, Luke 22:62, and Mark 14:72 describe Peter sobbing upon remembering Jesus' earlier warning that Peter would disown him three times. Jesus' compassion is apparent during the Miraculous Catch of Fish in John 21. Jesus encountered his disciples at the Sea of Galilee weeks after Easter, who had "already lost the plot and returned to their former life."³⁶ John 21:10-19 describes how Jesus prepared "a meal for Peter ... (before he) rehabilitates and commissions him."³⁷ Jesus' call not only allowed Peter to discover his vocation, but also taught him about God's forgiveness, forbearance, and love.

Discipleship is predominant throughout Jesus' ministry. Passages such as Matthew 4:18–22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1–11, and John 1:35–51 describe how Jesus recruited and traveled with the disciples to help spread the Gospel. He was intentional in spending time with those he was working with and those that he was trying to serve. He modeled what it meant to live a Christian life. Jesus' authenticity in how he lived was one of the most effective ways that he convinced his disciples and other people he encountered to repent and believe. This same authenticity should be apparent in a BAM enterprise's operations. The business's intent must include a genuine provision of value and care to its customers, workers, and community in its provision of products or services. An ethical controversy that arises is whether a BAM enterprise

should disclose its mission agenda when contacting a local government known to be unfriendly to Christians. One stand is that when operating for the glory of God, “The first step in dealing with the ethical questions regarding business as mission is in understanding and embracing the idea of a Christian vocation.”³⁸

Holding a holistic vision of vocation is a possible way to advance the argument described above. One BAM operator founding an enterprise in a local municipality not receptive to Christian organizations convinced its government it was worthwhile to have the enterprise there because it would rely on the unique talent of the local workforce and would provide sustainable value to the community.³⁹ He also pointed out that the enterprise would incur financial risks that local businesses couldn’t afford by investing in silk technologies that would in turn boost worker productivity.⁴⁰ The resulting investment benefited the local workers and the community’s economy. It also served as a testament to the enterprise’s resolute commitment to the local community and its government.⁴¹

Authenticity

It is also worth noting that Jesus did not disciple from afar. BAMers trying to follow Christ’s example should not isolate themselves from their colleagues and customers. And when leaders interact with workers and customers, they need to remember that Jesus’ ability to attract disciples and followers occurred through how sincerely he lived his faith. “Informed people today ... are more likely to follow Jesus when they see it lived out in the realities of where life happens, and in normal growing economies that is in the marketplace, where people spend most of their time. It is a best practice that every Jesus follower worker in the world sees his life on the job as a way to make other Jesus followers...”⁴²

One pitfall a BAM enterprise should be wary of is the possibility of alienating incumbent firms or the community itself through behaviors caused by short-sighted motivation or that provide an unflattering witness.⁴³ If a BAM enterprise is not financially self-reliant and is partially subsidized by North American mission organizations, the (lower) prices and (higher) standards of products offered to the community may generate resentment among their competitors.⁴⁴ Likewise, subsidization may allow BAMers to live at a conspicuously higher standard of living than that of their competitors. And the spiritual facet of the mission could estrange the community if the enterprise itself is frequently and unexpectedly closed for travel, office meetings, or religious reasons.⁴⁵ These potential risks reiterate how important it is for BAM enterprises to replicate Jesus' authenticity in their culture.⁴⁶

In Luke 13:14-17 Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of a synagogue leader who complained when Jesus healed a possessed woman on the Sabbath. While in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus read the passage below from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, based on Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).⁴⁷ Although initially well received, he was forced to leave after he said "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" in Luke 4:21. Jesus was able to convince his followers that he was who he said he was by living his life genuinely and honestly, even when it meant angering those in authority and risking his own life.

Justice

Concerns related to accumulating money and wealth, particularly at the expense of the helpless, are also apparent in Jesus' ministry. For instance, of the twelve parables recorded in

Matthew, nine are related to finance.⁴⁸ Jesus' consideration for repairing financial and other harm caused to the poor, broken, and ignored echoes the restorative justice underscored throughout Scripture.⁴⁹ The Prodigal Son's return in Luke 15:11-32 highlights the father's joy when the son returns and is completely restored to the family. In Luke 19:8, after Zacchaeus the tax collector meets Jesus, he repents exploiting the local citizens and promises to pay back four times what he took from them. Psalm 112:5 promises God's goodness "to those who are generous, lend freely, and conduct their affairs with justice."

To repair the harm caused to the poor and ignored, BAM seeks potential opportunities to restore dignity through job creation, ethical relationships, and empowerment.⁵⁰ This suggests that a BAM organization would be more inclined to locate in places that would not appeal to a traditional for-profit organization. The poor, marginalized, and otherwise neglected are likely to be in areas that are less affluent or otherwise economically riskier. These could include red light districts, refugee camps, or areas recovering from conflict. A BAM enterprise would be more likely to appreciate the value of addressing needs existing in these communities than a traditional model. They would be more likely to recognize the potential for a market where traditional models would only recognize risk.⁵¹ Their multiple bottom lines would be able to perceive worth where more traditional models of valuation would reflect a loss.

The Great Commission: Reconciliation and Human Flourishing

Keller offers practical guidance for those intent on providing restorative justice: *"To do justice, then, means to go to places where the fabric of shalom has broken down... and to repair it."*⁵² Shalom is a "complete reconciliation...because all relationships are right, perfect, and filled with joy"⁵³ and allows a return to the universal flourishing disrupted by the Fall. Through Jesus

humanity's relationship to God is restored, allowing them to enjoy peace with him. Believers are to share this message with others:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

The above message of restoration, peace, and human flourishing is reflected in at least three levels of application of BAM's response. "Reinforcing peace and community" can occur through actual business practices, through community investments, and through activities in public policy.⁵⁴ Such activities have the potential to reduce conflict, particularly when they require employees from different backgrounds to work together.⁵⁵ "Strengthening the Church" is more likely to occur when BAM enterprises succeed. As more local people become employed, the Church grows financially and its organizational structure becomes stronger.⁵⁶ And an important application of "going to all peoples" is "going to those places where Shalom has broken down," especially areas that are not receptive to Christianity or are isolated from capitalism.

Networks and Ecosystems

How did the Great Commission spread "to all peoples" in Scripture? Research attributes the early Church's growth and the Gospel's expansion to the formation of faith communities and networks initiated by Pentecost.⁵⁷ The catalysts for the successful growth of the Church (formation of communities) and expansion of the Gospel (networks) are also present in supplemental resources provided by BAM. Incubators and other systems that foster growth often

assist new BAM enterprises located in challenging economic communities. These systems are helpful because of the communities and the networks that they provide.

The significance of the formation of Christian communities for the Church's growth is apparent in Ephesians 4:3 as Paul encouraged the early Christians to keep "unity with Spirit through the bond of peace" and remain connected to one another. Research indicates that actual conversion occurs through "a network of interpersonal attachments," where evidence confirms that new religious movements whose underlying networks are closed tend to stagnate but those occurring through close and direct relationships flourish.⁵⁸

How is a supportive community connected to a BAM enterprise? Profit is essential to sustain a business, but BAM organizations prioritize being a part of a mission-centered team. The enterprise is more likely to experiment with something riskier if there is a community available to assist and encourage them. Resources that are helpful before and after entering a risky setting include access to investors, business practitioners, and mentors willing and able to provide guidance concerning a number of unknown factors important to starting an enterprise, including information regarding existing markets, cultural norms, and potential locations for operations. As a member of BAM, the enterprise is better equipped to take chances on locations that would not appeal to a traditional business prioritizing profit.⁵⁹

Networks not only establish a supportive community but have the potential to accelerate its growth. Consider the role of networks in facilitating the Gospel's spread. John 15:26-27 and Acts 2:1-12 describe how the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples during Pentecost, allowing people from different countries to hear the Gospel in their own language. These events made it possible to share the Gospel across language barriers.

Just as language barriers could have halted the spread of the Gospel, potential challenges that could inhibit a new business are prevalent in many environments surrounding BAM enterprises. These can include a lack of knowledge concerning business formation, unfamiliarity with local regulations and tax laws, scarce funding sources, or community resistance to generating profits or taking risks.⁶⁰ Consider one insight offered by a BAMer who initially struggled after they located their enterprise in China.⁶¹ They cited compliance of local laws and tax policies as being among the biggest hurdles they faced when they founded their manufacturing facility.⁶² They regret not having initially invested the time necessary to learn about the differences in cultural backgrounds and finding mentors to help them navigate through red tape.

What mechanism provides networks for BAM organizations? The organization exists within an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is described as “local networks of entrepreneurs, business leaders, local investors, and mentors in a single community or local area.”⁶³ Resources provided by these ecosystems include knowledge, information regarding cultural attitudes, established businesses, other entrepreneurs, co-working spaces and other locations for operations, and existing markets. Access to ecosystem networks has become increasingly important for BAM enterprises. Such networks allow new enterprises to mature, economic development to occur, and the Kingdom’s influence to increase across the world.⁶⁴

Creative Access Methods and Circumventing Barriers

How can BAM successfully facilitate “going to all peoples,” particularly those in areas that are not receptive to Christianity, closed off from capitalism, or in otherwise restricted-access areas? Consider the Gospel’s spread in the face of apparent obstacles such as Paul’s imprisonment and deadly epidemics. In Acts 28:31, Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and

taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” Stating the Gospel as being spread “without hindrance” is significant for two reasons.⁶⁵ First, it reflects Paul’s enthusiasm. In addition, Paul’s productivity during his imprisonment in Rome is evident in the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Rather than imprisonment halting Paul’s ability to share the Gospel, God worked through Paul’s letters to spread the Gospel further in time and location than would have otherwise been the case.

Paul’s imprisonment provided a second way for the Gospel to spread. God used it “for the greater progress of the gospel . . . and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my [Paul’s] imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Philippians 1:12–14).⁶⁶ In other words, it was Paul’s imprisonment that prodded the early believers to share God’s word even more intentionally. The spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire can also be attributed to events that appeared to be barriers to evangelism. Two epidemics (circa AD165 and AD251) were among the natural disasters that killed up to one-third of the population in the Roman Empire.⁶⁷ The Church’s assistance to the suffering during the epidemics provided testimony to that “For the faithful, disasters are but opportunities for refining character, learning obedience, and testing the faith.”⁶⁸

The examples above reveal how events that appeared to be barriers accelerated the spread of the Gospel. Events such as Paul’s imprisonment and epidemics forced believers to go beyond means that would have been traditional at that time, sharing the Gospel through alternate channels such as Paul writing the Prison Epistles and the Christians ministering to the victims of illness. These episodes reveal how God could allow the Kingdom to flourish currently in areas that resist missions or church planting. For instance, over centuries professional missions ministries focused on Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus have enjoyed limited success.⁶⁹ Today

some countries outlaw evangelism, do not grant visas to missionaries, or otherwise restrict activities of the Church.

Creative access methods provide an opportunity for BAM to share the Gospel with those in restricted access countries, particularly the unreached in the 10/40 window.⁷⁰ Consider one instance of a Christian who struggled in attempts to share the Gospel with his Muslim neighbors. Perceptions that he was “paid by Westerners to proselytize” left them inclined to openly resist his efforts.⁷¹ The community eventually accepted him after he established a cattle farm. His business allowed his neighbors to watch him address day-to-day issues and even motivated them to have him join their community’s council of elders. An IT company based in India is another example of an enterprise led by a BAMer.⁷² The nature of the business provides numerous opportunities for the community to see Christ through the company’s words and actions. The enterprise’s strategic plan is as follows: “Our purpose is to serve:”⁷³

1. “Our Customers with creative, innovative, reliable, top-quality solutions;”
2. “Our Employees with meaningful and challenging work, stability, good salaries, development and a pleasant work-environment;”
3. “Our other Stakeholders by providing attractive returns on their investments;”
4. “The Country by creating knowledge and wealth and contributing to local concerns;”
5. “Society by showing that success and high moral standards can co- exist; and”
6. “Ultimately God by being faithful and good.”

Conclusion

The Fall disrupted the relationship among God, humanity, and creation. It also distorted human relationships and corrupted the nature of work. BAM responds to the Fall’s disruptions through six levels of application: restoring dignity through employment, promoting

environmental stewardship, providing context through discipleship, facilitating going to all people, reinforcing peace and community, and strengthening the Church. Scripture related to the Creation Mandate (creation and stewardship), and justice and discipleship/vocation (the Greatest Commandment), and reconciliation and human flourishing (the Great Commission) illuminates applications of these levels in further detail.

Examining BAM in light of the biblical themes of creation and stewardship clarifies how these initiatives restore dignity through employment and promote stewardship. This framework also explains why BAM enterprises embrace financial and other risks concerning locations that would not appeal to a traditional commercial enterprise. Jesus' ministry offers lessons related to discipleship, vocation, and justice, particularly applicable to BAM's concern for the broken, marginalized, and overlooked. The Gospel's spread and Church's early growth in the New Testament provide a map for going to all people, reinforcing peace and community, and strengthening the Church. The network effects and community-building that ignited and accelerated the early Church's growth are mirrored in BAM communities and ecosystems. Finally, BAM's success in extending God's Kingdom to restricted access areas through "creative access" is comparable to the early Christians' success in overcoming opposition, like Paul's advancing the Gospel through the Prison Epistles.

About the Author



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Notes

¹Scott Adams, “Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice,” *Reviews*, Christian Scholar’s Review, October 15, 2010. <https://christianscholars.com/business-as-mission-a-comprehensive-guide-to-theory-and-practice/#:~:text=BAM%20is%20an%20approach%20that,terminology%20are%20still%20in%20flux>.

²Jo Plummer, “What is Business as Mission?” *Business as Mission*, 14 January 2015. <https://businessasmission.com/what-is-bam/>

³João Mordomo, “Back to the Future: The Evolution of Business as Mission: A Current Overview and Analysis,” *Business as Mission* (2016): 2. <https://businessasmission.com/resources/back-to-the-future/>.

⁴See Gea Gort and Mats Tunehag, “Business as Mission and the Three Mandates,” *Business as Mission* (May 2018). <https://businessasmission.com/business-as-mission-and-the-three-mandates/>

In Matthew 22: 36, when asked which commandment is the greatest, Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

⁵Erik Cooper, “The Three Greats: Our Framework for Faith, Work, and Missions,” (The Stone Table, August 20, 2019). Note that the “Great Story” includes the Creation Mandate, as well as the Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. <https://www.thestonetable.org/the-three-greats-our-framework-for-faith-work-and-missions/>

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Mordomo, “Back to the Future.”

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²It is also worth noting that the professional missions approach departs from how the Gospel spread the first 1800 years of Christian ministry.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Harry Goodhew, “Business as Mission,” *Lausanne Occasional Paper*, The Lausanne Movement (2004), <https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/business-mission-lop-59>

¹⁵Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

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- ¹⁶Cora Barnhart and Leslie Turner, "After the Fall: Scriptural Implications for Artificial Intelligence Innovation," *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* 26, No. 1 (2023): 10. <https://cbfa-jbib.org/index.php/jbib/article/view/677/669>
- ¹⁷Business as Mission Global Think Tank, *Your Kingdom Come Your Will Be Done...in Business: Biblical Foundations for Business as Mission* (October 2013). <https://bamglobal.org/report-biblical/>
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁹Goodhew, "Business as Mission," 12.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*
- ²¹Victor H. Cuartas, *Business as Mission in Creative Access Countries: Ethical Implications and Challenges*, (Missio Nexus, July 1, 2011). <https://missionexus.org/uncategorized/business-as-mission-in-creative-access-countries-ethical-implications-and-challenges/>
- ²²*Ibid.*
- ²³Both of these points were improved upon by anonymous reviewers' observations.
- ²⁴Arthur C. Brooks, *From Strength to Strength: Finding Meaning, Success, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2022).
- ²⁵An anonymous referee offered these observations.
- ²⁶"Voices from the Workplace: Robin John on Confronting Injustice Through Good Investing" on The Faith & Work Podcast. Jul 18, 2025. <https://www.denverinstitute.org/voices-from-the-workplace-robin-john-on-confronting-injustice-through-good-investing/>
- ²⁷*Ibid.*
- ²⁸Consider accountability in light of Adam and Eve's response in the Fall when God confronted them about having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. Genesis 3:8-13 describes how they hid, became fearful, and shifted blame.
- ²⁹An important point shared by an anonymous referee.
- ³⁰Robert Brooks, "Financial Risk: An Alternative Biblical Perspective," *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* 2, No. 1 (1996): 16-24.
- ³¹Mordomo, *Back to the Future*.
- ³²*Ibid.*
- ³³BAM360, Examples of Business as Mission. <https://www.bam360.org/examples-of-business-as-mission/>
- ³⁴*Ibid.*
- ³⁵Goodhew, "Business as Mission."
- ³⁶Jared Ayers, *Blockbuster Video 2026?* (Reformed Journal, July 10, 2026). https://reformedjournal.com/2026/07/10/blockbuster-video-2026/?fsp_sid=2154&fbclid=IwY2xjawS_XK1leHRuA2FlbQlXMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeWTQkxEb-lh7Rfkl0Yn_p2KgA_EuzcLp6CnqRZXtoOTLIsnAJlc7eakbXqU4_aem_jIuvlo9r0xpTlZPg8-4Spw
- ³⁷*Ibid.*
- ³⁸Stephen Bailey, *Is Business as Mission Honest?* (Missio Nexus, July 1, 2007). <https://missionexus.org/uncategorized/is-business-as-mission-honest/>
- ³⁹*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁴¹In summary, BAM business should not be a façade but this is a tricky road to navigate. There are authentic BAM enterprises located in the Middle East and other places that forbid the Gospel. This is one of the few ways that Christians can reach out to communities that are closed to the Gospel. This point was shared by an anonymous reviewer.
- ⁴²Larry Sharp, *Five Business as Mission Trends and Best Practices* (IBEC Ventures, May 24, 2019). <https://ibecventures.com/blog/five-business-as-mission-trends-and-best-practices/#:~:text=Some%20call%20it%20a%20%E2%80%9Csoft, and%20addressed%20a%20pain%20point.>
- ⁴³Nicholas R. Morgan, *Business as Mission: A Good Fit for Your Mission?*, (CapinCrouse, January 24, 2018). <https://capincrouse.com/business-mission/>
- ⁴⁴*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶Some of these issues are similar to the problem that arises when missionary groups or charities flood a developing country or region with free or heavily subsidized goods. Struggling businesses paying for inputs in the region cannot compete with products that are being given away. In some cases, regions have been left without access to these goods after local businesses disappear and the aid ceases. Two examples are the Rwandan Egg Crisis and TOMS Shoes ("Buy-One-Give-One" Strategy). For more about this, see Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping*

Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself.” (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2012). Also see Bruce Wydick, Elizabeth Katz, and Brendan Janet, “Do in-Kind Transfers Damage Local Markets? The Case of TOMS Shoe Donations in El Salvador,” (USF Scholarship: a digital repository @Gleeson Library Geschke Center, 2014). <https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=econ>

⁴⁷These passages show the importance of a clear mission, an observation offered by an anonymous referee.

⁴⁸Hong-Jen Lin and David C. VanderLinden, “The Parables, Premium Puzzles, and the CAPM,” *Managerial Finance* 32, No. 10 (2006). <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/0307-4358.htm>

⁴⁹Tim Keller, *Justice in the Bible* (Gospel in Life, Fall 2020). <https://gospelinlife.com/article/justice-in-the-bible/>

⁵⁰Business as Mission, LOP 59.

⁵¹Whether there is a market here could be up for debate. This could be a market failure, and the absence of business enterprises is the logical outcome. This observation was shared by an anonymous reviewer, along with providing a more broad definition of market to include zero economic-profit markets for ministry and missions.

⁵²Timothy Keller. *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*. (New York, New York: Dutton, 2010): 174.

⁵³*Ibid*, 177.

⁵⁴Goodhew, “Business as Mission.”

⁵⁵*Ibid*.

⁵⁶*Ibid*.

⁵⁷For more information about network effects and the early church, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966. Also see Cora Barnhart, “The Trinity and the Cycle of Innovation,” *Christian Business Review* 12, No. 1 (2023). <https://hc.edu/center-for-christianity-in-business/2023/10/22/the-trinity-and-the-cycle-of-innovation/>

⁵⁸Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*: 115.

⁵⁹One research study compares location choices of faith driven entrepreneurs, who care about spiritual outcomes but prioritize profit, to BAM enterprises. Muslim locations are perceived in the survey as risky location choices. Their survey data indicate that a higher percentage of BAM enterprises locate in Muslim countries relative to faith driven entrepreneurs (30% vs. 17%). See Steve Rundle and Min-Dong Paul Lee, “The Motivations, Backgrounds, and Practices of Business as Mission Practitioners: Insights from an International Survey,” *Missiology: An International Review* 50, No. 4 (2022): 420-41.

⁶⁰Guest Author, *Helping Entrepreneurs Thrive: The Power of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems*. (BAM Success Factors, Incubation & Ecosystem, November 16, 2020). <https://businessasmission.com/helping-entrepreneurs-thrive-the-power-of-entrepreneurial-ecosystems/>

⁶¹Larry Sharp, *Danger Ahead: Three ways the incubation, hatching and training of mallard ducklings is like Missional Business incubation and acceleration*. IBEC Ventures (June 14, 2019). <https://ibecventures.com/blog/danger-ahead-three-ways-the-incubation-hatching-and-training-of-mallard-ducklings-is-like-missional-business-incubation-and-acceleration/>

⁶²*Ibid*.

⁶³Guest Author, “Helping Entrepreneurs Thrive.”

⁶⁴*Ibid*.

⁶⁵Ernest Liang, “Scaling the Business Enterprise: Lessons from the Early Church,” *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* 27, No. 1 (2024): 54. <https://cbfa-jbib.org/index.php/jbib/article/view/681>

⁶⁶Liang, “Scaling the Business.”

⁶⁷See Liang, “Scaling the Business.” Also see Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 73.

⁶⁸Liang, “Scaling the Business,” 54.

⁶⁹Goodhew, “Business as Mission.”

⁷⁰*Ibid*.

⁷¹*Ibid*.

⁷²*Ibid*.

⁷³*Ibid*.