

EXCERPT



Subversive Mission Serving as Outsiders in a World of Need

November 1, 2022 | \$18, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0438-8

Some see missions as the story of heroes and martyrs; others see only colonialism and missionary disasters. How do we respond to God's call to mission in this new era? Craig Greenfield offers a radically different way of doing missions, calling outsiders called to crosscultural contexts to be humble alongsiders in the work God is already doing.

Enhancing the Ministry Gifts Outlined in Ephesians 4

Have you ever noticed how the things that Satan tempted Jesus with during his forty days in the desert were not inherently evil (Lk 4:1-15)? Satan tried to goad Jesus into making bread from stones, but there's nothing particularly bad about bread, is there? Starving people need food, and the world is full of pressing needs. Only a heartless jerk would deny a starving beggar a yummy bread roll.

What if the temptation we face as people with power and privilege in a world of need is not so much the temptation to pursue evil—rape, murder, or pillaging? Instead, what if our temptation is to pursue good in the wrong way? This is a temptation I face every day because, as a Western missionary for more than twenty years, I walk the streets with forms of power that many of my Cambodian neighbors don't have. I receive invitations and open doors that others don't receive. With that access comes the temptation to be their "savior," to use my power to create "miracles," when I'm really called to be something else—something more humble, vulnerable, and much, much better.

This challenge is for all those who serve as outsiders. It's for anyone who goes into the world seeking to change it while carrying more power than those whom you are trying to reach—whether through a passport or privilege, money or mastery. The simple fact that you have the ability to buy and read a book written in English means you have forms of privilege and power that most people in the world don't have. And that means this book is for you.

I've lived in slums and inner cities among the poor and marginalized for twenty years. I've led humanitarian organizations, a global missions agency, and now a grassroots youth movement that is truly making the world a more beautiful place. I have held the dying and walked alongside the desperate. My whole life is geared toward seeking change that will make the world a better place for everyone.

And, frankly, I'm impatient! I want a better world for my poor neighbors—and I want it sooner rather than later. I want to see more vulnerable children being reached and uplifted. I want bread for the hungry, I want safety for the endangered, and I long for people to know the boundless love of Jesus.

Yet, I've come to understand that there are lots of ways to seek what is good for the world. Over time, I've learned that many of the short-term ways I've tried to pursue change—such as handing out money or food—have actually resulted in more deeply entrenched systems and structures, which continue to perpetuate poverty and injustice. At times, some of my "great ideas" have actually made things much, much worse because I've been trying to play god in the lives of the poor.

So, if we're no longer standing center stage as outsiders, giving keynotes to twenty thousand young leaders, how is God calling us to serve in this new era? Didn't Jesus call us to go out into all the world to make disciples and build his upside-down kingdom? Didn't God call us to bring good news to the poor, freedom for those in captivity, and comfort to those who mourn?

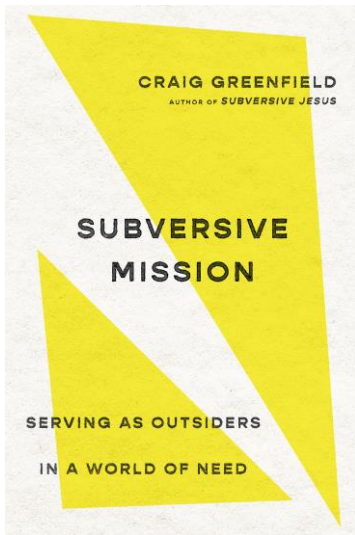


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"Books on the Ephesians 4 typology of ministry (APEST) are rare enough. Rarer still are those that seek to translate these critical biblical forms into the language of crosscultural mission. Craig's is a practical and wise book that does precisely that."

—Alan Hirsch, founder of the 5Q Collective and author of *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ*

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul describes five different types of giftedness for serving God in the world and the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors), and teachers. I believe that these five types continue to provide a promising framework for how we can serve the world even in our post-colonial era, but we need to examine them through different eyes. We can't simply transplant them into crosscultural situations that have deeply embedded power dynamics, or we run the risk of disempowering local people.

Each of the five ministry gifts outlined in Ephesians 4—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher—needs to be reframed for crosscultural contexts, especially in places of poverty, or where there is a significant power differential. The fivefold *ministry* types become *missional* types. Otherwise, we run the risk of playing benevolent gods—taking power away from those who need to be inspired to look to Jesus, the one true Savior. In every context, we need to ask ourselves whether we are ministering as an *insider* or an *outsider*.

In the urban hubs of Asia, the slums of Haiti, the inner cities of North America, and the rural villages of Mexico, those of us who come as outsiders with access to resources tend to hold dramatically more power and money. We often wield that power in heavy-handed ways, knocking over the carefully arranged banquet set before us by our local friends. This lack of self-awareness leads to the sins of colonialism and the "White savior" label, no matter what color you are.

Each of us will find ourselves inhabiting different missional types at different times and in different situations.

This book is the story of my own experiments—and failures—as I have tried to grapple with my place in the world and embrace the gifts God has given me. Too often I have come in as an outsider and taken over from insiders. Too often I have blundered ahead and trampled on people's toes. Too often I have failed to empower those on the inside of a local culture. I hope you can learn from my mistakes as the story unfolds.

This book is for every person who has a passionate longing to see God's love change the world but a distaste for the negative baggage of traditional colonial missions. It is for every globally minded follower of Jesus who recognizes that the world doesn't need more "White saviors"—or saviors of any color—but it also doesn't need more apathetic or disengaged Christians. It is for those who know that our guilt and tears, our "thoughts and prayers," mean nothing to the poor and marginalized in the Majority World, unless they are matched with action.

As followers of Jesus, we are all called to be ready to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth right where we are—from Vancouver to Nairobi, from inner-city Chicago to Phnom Penh. This is an invitation for each of us to wake up and start acknowledging our weaknesses and humbly composting our crap so that it can enrich the earth wherever we are. The world needs each of us, but we can't afford to isolate ourselves any longer. Before we head out to change the world, we must first be honest about the power we're carrying. As I share my journey, with all its flaws and mess-ups, I hope you will join me in seeking a better way, a more beautiful vision for how we can all bear the light we have been given into the world.

—Adapted from the introduction



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Q & A



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Craig Greenfield is the founder and director of Alongsiders International, a grassroots movement of young Christians reaching the world's poorest children. Originally from New Zealand, he has lived and worked for more than two decades in marginalized communities in Asia and North America. He is the author of *The Urban Halo* and *Subversive Jesus*.

Passionate About Serving in Ways That Can Transform the World

What are your thoughts about people sensing a calling to serve others and how did that motivate you to write this book?

Craig Greenfield: Many sense a call to serve but are paralyzed by the baggage of colonialism and missions. Others serve but remain ignorant to the ways they are complicit. I want to help both groups find a healthy and wise way forward into missions/ministry that will allow them to truly be part of the transformation of the world.

What is inherently distinctive about your approach to missions in this book?

Craig: We urgently need a fresh new approach to missions in the post-colonial, post-covid-19 era. *Subversive Mission* offers a new framework for serving in missional contexts where an outsider comes with significantly more power or resources. Taking the fivefold "ministry" types of Ephesians 4 (apostle, pastor, prophet, evangelist, and teacher), I offer five alternative "missional" types (catalyst, midwife, ally, seeker, and guide) that enable the outsider to come as an "alongsider" rather than a White savior. I also offer five blind spots that Westerners are often unaware of as they serve. These are the pitfalls we need to learn to avoid.

What perspective do you hope readers will gain from having read your book?

Craig: I hope readers learn that there is a way to engage in missions that is not based in "White saviorism" or colonialism. The ways we serve locally urgently need to be reframed for when we serve globally. There are five missional types that flow out of our giftedness when we serve in contexts of poverty. But there are five blind spots that Westerners often carry into mission. A new era in missions is dawning. We can all be part of it.



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