24:14 Goal

Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (46 months)

Catalyzing Movements in Urban Areas

A 24:14 panel discussion with Victor John, David Broodryk, and Curtis Sergeant

Dr. Curtis Sergeant served with the International Mission Board (IMB) among an Unreached People Group (UPG) in China. After a movement started there, he began training for the house-church networks in China and others around the world in how to do the same. Later he served as a VP for Global Strategy with the IMB. Then he went to Saddleback Church over church-planting and helped catalyze some extremely large-scale church planting projects, especially in India, and engaged nearly a hundred UUPGs. He then served at e3 Partners as the International VP. Now he runs a disciple-making and missions training center called MetaCamp in Dadeville, Alabama (metacamp.org). He is also a co-facilitator of the 24:14 coalition (2414now.net) and founded the Zúme project (zumeproject.com).

Victor John, an Indian national, served as a pastor for 15 years before shifting to a holistic strategy aiming for a movement among Bhojpuri people. Since the early 1990s he has labored in planting seed among the Bhojpuri and continues to play a catalytic role in the large and growing Bhojpuri movement. He is the primary author of *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement that Keeps Multiplying*.

David Broodryk David has been pursuing God Movements and mentoring leaders around the globe for over 30 years. As a strategist and coach, he is passionate about mobilizing the gospel through self-replicating movements and inspires others to do the same.

He currently serves as Regional Director of Southern Africa, Global Urban Ministry and Innovation for New Generations and Executive Director of Twofoureight in South Africa.

David is married to Michelle and they reside in Durban, South Africa. They have two adult children.

Moderator: Urban areas have been perceived as harder to penetrate than rural areas. I'll start by asking Victor: "What are you seeing in South Asia, related to movements in urban areas?"

Victor: The Bhojpuri work was basically semi-rural and semi-urban work. Then we moved to the urban areas. One problem was that in our urban areas, most Christian organizations have tended to focus on slums. Of course, compassion played a big role, but those are marginalized groups; not decision-makers. So, we chose to do something different in the urban areas. But urban people are not a homogeneous group, so it's very difficult. They are so separate and generally not open to the gospel. There are a lot of challenges, but we have seen a breakthrough.

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We began in Delhi, which has a population of over 19 million people, in 11 districts. Now, eight years later, there are multiplying churches in eight of the districts. We are moving closer to impacting all 11 districts. We have definitely reached out to a lot of people. Many new churches have been started in cafes or McDonald's or other places where young people meet. We have used a lot of text messaging. We require of everybody: if you're learning one thing, you must share it with the network of your friends and families. If you learn two things, share those with others. They do that, much faster than I can speak. They are very good at texting.

Recently, during COVID, we have seen a movement where we multiplied as "Corona Warriors." During the lockdown last year, many young people were pushed into a lot of problems. Suicides increased, depression increased, a lot of unhealthy sexual habits developed and a lot of people got hooked on being online. People also have lost jobs. So, we started inviting people to be Corona Warriors, who would motivate others to be vaccinated, and engage in distributing relief work that we were doing. More than 700 young people showed up, all from non-Christian backgrounds. Within two months of our volunteer work, we saw a *tremendous* change in their attitude and their behavior. Their parents were also very happy and began inviting us to their homes, saying, "Why don't you come and talk to us?"

> We've seen that urban youth are looking for acceptance (by any group).

And these young people said, "Can we do something more? How else can we engage?" We are using this opportunity to disciple them. Many people have now committed their life to the Lord. We've seen that urban youth are looking for acceptance (by any group). They are looking for identity (and a group that will help define their identity). They are also looking for a place where their talents can make a contribution and their life can make a difference. We need to find opportunities to engage them, so they feel they are contributing to something valuable.

Moderator: That's great. I'm going to move on to David. David, you've become a kind of specialist in urban movements—in different parts of Africa and around the world. Tell us a bit about what you see happening around the world in urban movements.

David: It's always a pleasure, but intimidating, to follow Victor John. Anything you talk about in India is just *millions*, like 19 million people in Delhi. I don't even know where to start with those kinds of numbers. I find it very encouraging that some of the things he shared are not just focused on the marginalized. That's really important for me. Often people who talk about urban ministry talk about the easy places, the low-hanging fruit. Not that the marginalized are unimportant. But you won't see a movement by just focusing on the fringes. I also note that they're using technology, they're focusing on the younger generation, they're addressing brokenness and COVID. All these things are incredibly encouraging.

From our side, we are seeing movement in several regions around South Africa. I felt we needed to be doing it ourselves before we exported it anywhere else. So, in South Africa, in the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, we are seeing these kinds of movements emerge. And we're seeing these movements emerge in Africa more broadly: Nigeria, Uganda, and other places. I recently moved to Durban, South Africa, and we're busy launching a new movement here. That's in South Africa and Africa.

As a team, we're also currently working in 48 global cities: establishing teams and helping them get to movement. We've seen some really exciting first breakouts of that in some of these teams, in different regions of the world. Initially, the breakout for the last few years was among the marginalized. We've reached a lot of gang leaders, prostitutes, drug dealers, urban poor, those kinds of people. In some ways, that's easy. That's not the challenge we're actually talking about, when we discuss urban challenge.

We went to the other side of the spectrum recently, in Sydney, Australia. We focused on high net-worth individuals and asked, "Can we see movement there?"

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High net-worth individuals in a wealthy G7 country: that's a pretty high target to reach. We ran an experiment for months, with a whole new approach to reaching these people, and we've seen some significant breakthrough. Many people have begun a journey of discovering who God is; some are near conversion. That's really exciting.

One challenge of cities is the complexity, and some of that complexity is the socio-economic divide. We're also looking at addressing the economic sustainability of movements. Part of the challenge of seeing indigenous movements fund indigenous movements means you can't just target the marginalized. You've got to go at all levels. When you look at the movement Jesus started, you see Him talk to the masses, and also to some very key individuals like Nicodemus, or a religious leader, or the rich young ruler. These were more difficult people to reach, but both were important in building a movement.

One of the things I'm observing (which Victor also mentioned): the energy in cities is largely young. In rural environments, we go for the elders. But in cities, you've really got to focus on those under 35. In Africa, this is particularly true: 60 percent of Africa is under the age of 25.

We find the principles are very much the same, but the expression is very different. How to crack the urban code is a very important discussion we need to have. The world is rapidly becoming urban. This is the future and we're not looking at it and addressing it enough. So, it's a very important discussion.

Moderator: Thanks, David. I'm going to move on to Curtis. Curtis, you've used technology and you've worked around the world. Please share with us a little bit: what do you see around the world in urban work?

Curtis: I would make some of the same observations Victor and David made about young people being more responsive. I would also echo the idea of working among the poor and refugees being easier than working among higher socioeconomic classes. And I would add recovery programs and prisoners to that list. In North America (where I'm based), I think *all* of the movements that have achieved movement status are urban based. The situation here differs from some places where all the early examples are rural.

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From a tactical perspective, some things are different when working in cities. Many of these differences are because in urban centers, the relational chains tend to be shorter, shallower, and more transient. This means focusing on networks of established relationships has less powerful or enduring effects, because people keep moving. The various groups are all so transient. That means in urban situations, we need to be more open to groupings not necessarily based on someone's *oikos* (unless we

view *oikos* in a broader sense). Working among pre-existing relational networks will always be our priority in our first effort. But if that appears difficult in a given situation, we're open to moving toward grouping people who did not necessarily have a previous relationship but may have some common characteristics.

It also means we need greater willingness to win an *individual,* then have them work on reaching people with whom they have relationships. We always want our first attempt to be winning a pre-existing group and having them come to faith together. But that's often more difficult in an urban situation.

> We also use a tool I call leadership cells. Those are temporary groups, whereas a church would be a long-term group meeting together. In the leadership cells, we model looking like church, but the cells are intentionally time-limited.

There's a greater emphasis on the ends of the earth, as opposed to their *oikos*. We're always trying to equip *every* believer to have the passion and desire, the skills and the tools to reach both those worlds: their ongoing network of relationships and those outside that. We always start with their ongoing network of relationships, but relatively speaking, in an urban area we'll give more emphasis to the ends of the earth than we would in a rural area, and move to that emphasis earlier in the process. Equipping believers with an awareness of cross-cultural work and the ability to reach out cross-culturally is more important in an urban setting because of its complexity.

We also use a tool I call leadership cells. Those are temporary groups, whereas a church would be a long-term group meeting together. In the leadership cells, we *model* looking like church, but the cells are intentionally time-limited. We aim to equip all the participants to start their own groups, then break

up to start new groups. We would almost never do that in a rural setting, but in urban settings, we find it's often a really helpful tool, since the groups tend to be much more transient anyway. This provides clear intentionality in equipping those people, who then go out and start new groups.

Lastly, research is very important for urban areas, so people can know *who is there*. Although urban areas are very heterogeneous, that doesn't mean all the groups there are aware of the *other* groups there. There's still a significant trend toward insularity within one's group and maybe a small number of other groups. Very few people have an awareness of all the different segments, whether ethno-linguistic, religious, socio-economic, or whatever. There's not a lot of regular interaction between many of those groups. That means doing research, then making people aware of the various segments and which ones are least reached, helps sensitize them. Then when disciples do happen to run across people from those other groups, they can prioritize those segments for ministry going forward. Those are some of the tactical adjustments we're finding helpful in an urban environment versus a rural environment.

Moderator: You're talking about places that have reached actual movement status in North America. How many places have reached that level?

Curtis: I think we're at 11 right now.

Moderator: That's encouraging, because a lot of people have said, "It can't happen in a Western context," but we actually *are* seeing that happen here. David, I'm going to jump back to you. Curtis talked about some of the sociological difficulties: smaller *oikos*es and relational chains. Are you seeing the same thing in Africa?

David: Yes, it's the same thing everywhere in the world. Movements move the same way that good news, bad news and fake news move. It's natural social networks; that's how movements move. So, if you see a breakdown of the natural social networks (which you often see in urban environments), you'll see a shift in how movements actually move.

What we've found is that there *are* social networks and there *are* pre-existing communities in cities, especially among the younger generation, but they look very different to what we think they should look like. They're often not bloodline families. They're often not the village kind of community. They're often more linear relationships. But young people understand this. They understand social media. They have networks. They have friendships. They have large *oikos* influence groups—that are often not as deep or as meaningful—but they are there. So, learning how the gospel moves through those networks is actually very, very important.

And just to touch on one thing Curtis mentioned: the complexity and the research. We spent three years researching urban environments: talking to teams in different regions of the world, aiming to figure out what some of the challenges are. At the end, we concluded that the number one challenge is complexity. Urban environments are incredibly complex and constantly changing. Just when you think you might have researched everything and you have your head around it, you look again and it's all changed. So, we've spent a lot of time wrestling with: "How do you address complexity? How do you step into this environment that cannot actually be understood and is constantly changing?"

The Lord brought us back to something Henry Blackaby said years ago, "Our job is to figure out where God is working and join Him in His work."

So, we went back and said, "God, you understand the complexity. If you want to reach all these different groups with all this complexity of relationship, and what we call affinities (different ways people relate to each other), if you want to reach it, then we believe you're raising up people to reach those groups." So our whole concept of strategy began to change. We used to try to understand a city, then ask, "Where should we be?" Then we tried to convince people to go to those places. Our whole concept changed to say, "If God is at work, He's working in the hearts of people." So we now spend a tremendous amount of time working with people, trying to figure out what God has been doing in their life. What has He been preparing them for?

> So, we spend a lot of time helping disciple-makers disciple in a way that doesn't interrupt life.
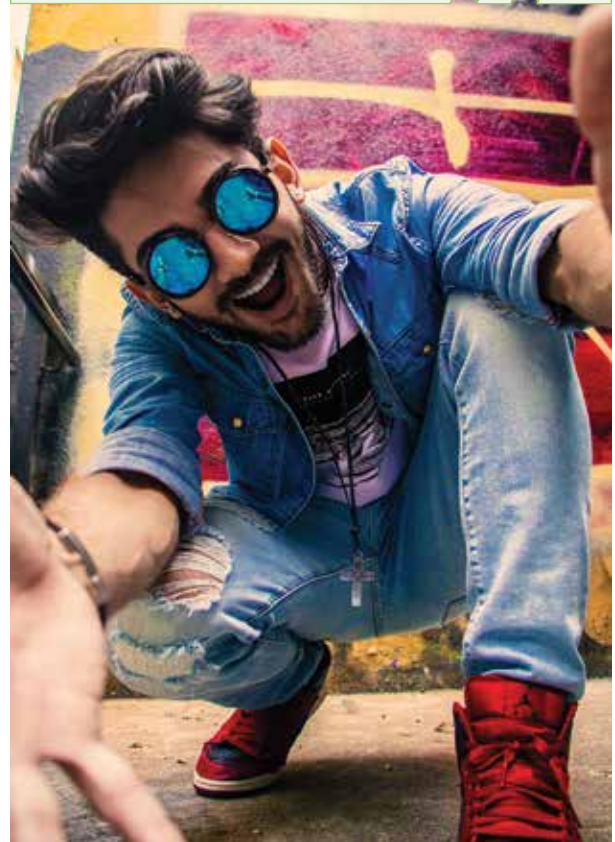
The story of the Old Testament, the New Testament and Church history is that when God was about to do something, He was raising up a person. So, if there's a group God wants to reach, He's raising up a person, and our job is to find that person. He looks a little bit different to the "Person of Peace" who is like the head of a house or an *oikos*. This is what we call a champion: somebody who really wants to see a particular affinity or group of people reached.

We found that complexity is the primary challenge in cities. And disciple-making obviously holds a lot of other challenges, like time and availability.

Very often people are unavailable; they don't have time. So, we spend a lot of time helping disciple-makers disciple in a way that doesn't interrupt life. We disciple *on* life: not stopping life to go somewhere else, to do this Christian thing then come *back* to life. Because our traditional models of church were built around that interruption of life.

Curtis mentioned transient society: the way people are moving around. One of our responses to that is to build everything on *team*. Because we found that when we trained individual leaders, before we could get them to the point of bearing fruit, they would move from the city or change jobs and go somewhere else. So now we only launch when we can launch around teams. That's very important because community births community. If you want to birth communities, and birth healthy churches, you birth them from community. Teams are very, very important because you're coming against a culture of individualism.

The way you communicate the gospel is also very important. In a rural setting, people are in touch with nature, looking for bigger answers, looking for the story of God. So, when we go and say, "This is the story of God," people connect with it. But often in our busy urban environments, people's worlds become very small: all about survival and "me." So, if the message you communicate is not initially, "How can this help me be better? How can this help me with purpose? How can this help me move forward?" it gets rejected long before you can even communicate it.

Those are just some of the things we've learned in the urban environment and some of the ways we're countering it and overcoming.

Moderator: I'm going to turn to you, Victor. You've heard these guys talk about some of the sociological dynamics. What are your thoughts on those?

Victor: These dynamics are true, no matter where you are. Often when we've reached urban people and discipled them, at first they did very little in their own community because they had no local community or relationships. But they ended up discipling their families and starting churches where they came from. It might be 400 miles away, in a rural area or some other city. So the gospel jumped over 400 or 800 miles, rather than influencing the immediate community. We said, "Let's focus where the actual community exists, like with sports or at a gym." We discipled one guy who was a gym trainer and he started to win people, so he had a church within the gym. We've been continuously evolving and learning and changing, because as everyone shared, the urban community is always shifting and changing.

Many individuals are isolated and very lonely. So, we have opened counseling centers, like a call center. That has helped a lot of young people. They might call at all hours and say, "I'm going to commit suicide." So we call the police and go together to help the person. Then we find problems within the whole family. That gives an opportunity to counsel and help them find a way through the problems and introduce Christ in some way.

Our sports ministry has also done well at bringing people together, even from different castes. We try not to address caste as an issue per se. We focus more on friendship and fellowship because most people, even high-caste Hindus, are lonely. Their friends might be 200 miles away. And the young people, through technology, have friends around the country. But locally, they hardly know anyone; they don't have any friends.

Moderator: We're hearing from all of you that it takes more creativity to reach people in urban environments. Great thoughts, everyone. Thank you for being a part of this panel today. ▧