

Movement Servants Needed!

By Dave Coles & Stan Parks

What is the most strategic role you can imagine for a Jesus follower in the Western world who wants to see all peoples reached with the gospel as soon as possible?

Three hundred years ago, at the beginning of the modern Protestant missions movement,¹ most missionaries were sent from Europe and the USA. Western cultural norms were also exported, resulting in a common image of missions portrayed as a white man standing before a group of seated “natives,” holding a Bible and preaching a sermon to explain the good news of salvation in Christ. The fruitful response envisioned was an altar call in which large numbers of people raised their hands or otherwise indicated they wanted to follow Jesus. This paradigm can still occasionally be found in fund-raising appeals. And whether consciously or subconsciously, this picture still informs the interest of some missionaries and missionary funders: “How many people have you personally led to the Lord this year?” But we need to recognize that the Great Commission does not require us acting as the “hero.”

Over the centuries, examples of a different pattern were seen in the co-laboring of Adoniram Judson and the Karen leader Ko Tha Byu, Hudson Taylor and Chinese evangelists such as Xi Shengmo, and the missionary efforts of non-Westerners such as Sadhu Sundar Singh.

Sadly, in past centuries some opposed the empowerment and leadership of local missionaries and leaders. However, in recent decades, more and more missionaries have come to accept this pattern. They have understood that the most fruitful ministry among the unreached is usually done, *not* by a distant-culture (Western) worker trying to directly reach the unreached, but through partnership between near-culture Christians and distant-culture (Western) workers.

In E-Scale terminology, “E1 is reaching one’s own culture across the barrier of ‘church culture.’ E2 is cross-cultural evangelism into a similar, but different culture. E3 evangelism is taking the gospel to cultures very different from that of the messenger.”² The most effective evangelism generally happens through messengers culturally closer to the culture of those hearing the message. Thus distant-culture workers maximize their effectiveness by partnership with believers culturally closer to those they hope to reach with the gospel.

In most cases, the greatest number of people come to faith through the ministry of same-culture or near-culture workers. When E3 messengers in such partnerships report

¹ The Moravian church renewal in 1727 and resulting 100+ year prayer campaign and sending out of missionaries starting in 1732 laid the groundwork for William Carey, the Wesley family, and others who continued the modern missionary momentum.

² Ralph Winter & Bruce Koch, “Finishing the Task: the Unreached Peoples Challenge,” in [*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*](#), fourth edition, p. 532

accurately on ministry fruit, they portray clearly that they play a role in the ministry, but it is their local partners who actually lead the most people to saving faith.

Especially in our day, colonial history has made a Western passport and identity often a liability rather than an asset in direct evangelism to the unreached. The vast majority of the world's UPGs (Unreached People Groups) have some negative history with Western imperialism and the connection of colonial oppression with Christian missions. Thus, whenever the gospel arrives as a "white man's religion," with a face reflecting the colonial face of Christendom, it meets immediate barriers of perception and cultural preservation. This dynamic strongly reinforces the importance of strategic approaches in which the face seen bringing good news to most UPGs matches the majority face of Jesus' followers in our day. Most of Jesus' followers in our time (since about 1980³ and increasingly so) are non-Western: majority Christians from the Majority World.

In recent decades, a new kingdom dynamic has burst on the scene of missiological awareness. Often described as "Church Planting Movements," Disciple Making Movements," or "Kingdom Movements," these rapidly reproducing movements feature disciples making disciples and churches planting churches in multiple streams to four or more generations. While confirming the high value of E2-E3 partnership, these movements have also opened highly valuable potential E3 roles that most missionaries and mission agencies have not yet realized.

As researchers have studied the amazing work of God in 1,371 movements (as of this writing), bringing over 79 million people into God's kingdom in this generation,⁴ they have discovered something surprising. Not only are movements the way God's kingdom is growing fastest in our day, they are also the source from which most *new* movements are springing up.

Only 10 to 20 percent of existing movements were started by an outside catalyst(s) finding an inside catalyst(s) and planting the first churches. The vast majority of current movements – between *80 and 90 percent* of them⁵ – were started by believers from other (near-culture) movements. The metaphor of "hot coals" has often been used to envision taking embers from an existing fire to start a fire in a new location (rather than trying to start a fire from nothing). For example, the Bhojpuri movement in Northern India⁶ has started movements in at least eight other large language groups. Another family of movements in Southeast Asia has started work in over 50 UPGs and 17 countries.

This surprising reality has major implications for every person eager to see more movements begun, in fact for *everyone* who desires to see the gospel reach all peoples as quickly as possible. Those wanting to catalyze movements have often aimed to focus not

³ According to World Christian Encyclopedia, 3rd edition, page 6.

⁴ See "Global Movement Statistics" at <https://2414now.net/resources>.

⁵ This question was asked of movement leaders representing over 1,000 movements. They all gave answers in the range of 80-90%.

⁶ See "Movements Multiplying Movements: How the Bhojpuri CPM has Started Other Movements": pages 185-188 in [24:14 - A Testimony to All Peoples](#).

on “What can I do?” but rather on “What needs to be done?” This motto demands a fresh application as we consider the newly discovered information about how most movements are now starting. What “needs to be done” that can be accomplished by distant-culture workers?

Actually, a great many things need to be done, but they vary from one movement to another, and sometimes from one year to another within any given movement. Distant-culture workers can play a vital role in strengthening and deepening a movement, and/or in assisting a movement to expand and catalyze fresh movements among other UPGs. The key lies in willingness to serve the actual needs being felt and expressed by the leaders of the movements. They don’t need outsiders showing up with their own plans and ideas. They want people humble enough and flexible enough to do whatever needs to be done.

In some cases, this might involve a specialized skill, but more often it involves applying a basic-level skill in an area of need.

Possibilities include:

- Communication efforts
- Job and business start-up training
- Computer and technical support
- Video recording and/or editing
- Audio recording and/or editing
- Fundraising in ways that do not create dependency
- Social media help with creation and/or distribution
- Prayer and mobilizing prayer from outside the movement
- International networking
- Hosting vision trips for potential outside partners
- Administration help
- Hosting and supervising outside interns
- Disaster response service and/or training and/or connections
- Medical service and equipping medical response within the movement
- Assisting with support, networking, or whatever else might be needed to help bring the gospel where it has never been
- Anything and everything that is needed

In many cases, the movements cannot give a specific job description, as their needs keep changing. Or they may start with a specific need and job description, but circumstances change the needs. They want people who are willing to do *whatever* is needed.

The ministry might not sound glamorous or important at first glance. And some candidates have expressed concern about the difficulty of raising funds for this type of support role. However, we need to examine our assumptions. Do we assume that a new worker from the West has the experience or ability that warrants asking for an “important” role? Do we think it somehow diminishes us to serve in a support role for

those better suited for the frontlines? Does it not make sense to learn about multiplication from people who have been a part of multiplying hundreds and often thousands of disciples and churches?

One movement leader, discussing this movement servant role, said, “Westerners we talk to do not really want to do what we need. For instance, we would ask them not to go live in Afghanistan but seek to reach Afghans in Europe and partner to raise prayer and funds and key outside connections for Afghan believers in Afghanistan. That has not been appealing to anybody we have talked to. They all want to go live in the country and be the frontline workers.”

Another movement leader said, “I have a hard time believing that Westerners would come in and submit to our leadership over the long term. In a few cases we have tried something like this, after a couple of years, they decide they know how to do it better than we do and they break away and use the appeal of excessive funding to take some of our leaders with them to work for them.”

For this reason we use the term *Movement Servant*. What movements most need is servant-hearted people. Some have encouraged us to use a “more appealing term” that would be easier to “sell to their supporters.” As if following Jesus’ example of not coming to “be served but to serve” is not appealing....

A Movement Servant will come alongside movement leaders to help expand the movement(s), assisting with a very wide range of ministry activities, depending on the ministry needs and the instructions of the movement leader(s). This will help increase the capacity of the movement to go further and faster, to become even more effective in advancing the movement(s) in which they are involved.

Consider, for example, the kingdom impact of working with a movement of 8,000 churches that has minimal computerization. They need help setting up a computer system for tracking church health and distribution, which will also help them know which peoples and places are still untouched by the gospel. This assistance brings the potential to reach *tens of thousands* more people and plant *thousands* more churches within a few years.

We can share a few examples of people serving movements. For one large family of movements, some translation experts currently supply help from the outside for movements translating Scripture. These movements are in areas that an outsider cannot enter due to political or religious realities, but the service of technical and translation experts has been invaluable to help those in that area do a church-based, computer aided, expert assisted translation process. These professional translators have had to allow God to change their paradigm from personally doing the translation to helping “amateurs” in the movement learn the skills and group processes that will produce an excellent translation.

In another movement with over 300,000 believers in a very large geographical area, some Westerners (who are not professionals) are helping with video editing. They work with movement leaders to produce short leadership training videos that can be shared from phone to phone.

A third example comes from a Kingdom Business project where outsiders help movements identify near-culture gaps needing movements. They assist with business training, prayer and fundraising (only supplementing funds raised within the movements) as movement families relocate and re-start businesses to sustain them long-term in reaching the new group. This has already resulted in reaching many new population segments.

As the apostle Peter described the glorious gospel revealed in Christ, he exclaimed: “Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Peter 1:12b). In recent decades, some gospel messengers and missiologists have felt echoes of that longing to look, when hearing reports of amazing things happening in Church Planting Movements. They’ve wished or asked to go visit a movement and see for themselves the amazing miracles and conversions being reported. But they’ve been told that for security reasons, it wouldn’t be wise for a person like them to show up in the midst of an indigenous movement among a UPG. Some indigenous movements do not want *any* Westerners visiting their movements (often related to the post-colonial reasons already mentioned). Other movements welcome a few trusted visitors, to interact with a limited portion of the ministry in certain locations.

Those welcomed in, count it a high privilege to see first-hand the Lord’s work in the movements they observe. The door to that privilege is now open for those willing to *come as a servant*, to do whatever a movement needs for its strengthening and expansion. Few people get this privilege: the opportunity to learn movement dynamics firsthand by serving *in the midst* of an actual movement. Movement dynamics are “better caught than taught.” This invitation welcomes servants *way beyond* reading a book or attending a training. A Movement Servant will gain experience in making disciples and learning from real-life multiplication.

What kind of people can fulfill the Movement Servant role? The essential qualifications, skills and experience include:

- Follower of Jesus
- Trying to be a disciple maker⁷
- Advocate of CPM principles⁸
- Good people skills

⁷ It is not required that this person have multiplication fruit, but they do need to be a faithful disciple and witness to lost people, seeking to make disciples. If they come from a traditional paradigm of building-based discipleship programs, we encourage them to get some basic training and practice in Church Planting Movements (CPM) in their home culture before they go to serve a movement.

⁸ A CPM is the result of God’s work. God has used a variety of approaches to start CPMs, including DMM, T4T, Four Fields, etc. See <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/2414-goal> for Core Principles and Common Outcomes of a CPM approach.

- Willing to submit to non-Western leadership
- Willing to learn local trade language (at an appropriate level)
- Willing to learn and be sensitive to a new local culture(s)
- Faithful to keep commitments and a person of honor and integrity
- Willing to do whatever they can to serve the expansion of God's kingdom

This role is not for people looking to emulate the ministry of the Apostle Paul. This is for those willing to serve more like Barnabas, or even Epaphras (Colossians 1:7; 4:12).

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). What if the most effective thing you could do truly *looked like* being a servant? What if your best way to maximally reach the unreached involved an assortment of jobs, chosen and assigned by someone from another culture? Would you be willing to lay down your life and some of your preferences in order to play a role in rapid kingdom multiplication among the unreached? The movements are already moving, and you're invited to play a part in increasing their growth. You might be called to go try to start a new movement(s). If so, the best way to do that could be to go learn from an existing movement. You may have thought starting from nothing was your best option in serving among the unreached. But now you can think and pray about hopping on board to increase multiplication where the action has already begun.

If you're interested, please contact us via the form at bit.ly/MServant. We already have relationships with networks of movements – in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. We cannot *guarantee* connection, because even if you are willing, we will need to find a movement that is ready and able to receive you. And there will likely be some challenging dynamics no matter how willing you are.

But we will do everything we can to help you find a group who is looking for Movement Servants. We would love to facilitate the connection and help you find the right slot for someone with your gifting. Take a moment to thank God for what he is doing through movements in our day. Thank him for the spontaneous multiplication of movements planting other movements among the unreached. Then ask him what role he might want you to play. May the Lord guide you and use you for his glory, to the ends of the earth.