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Finishing the Remaining 29% of World Evangelization

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Disciple-making movements as a biblical, holistic, and radical solution

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In the mid-1980s, 24% of world's population (1.8 billion people) had little or no Gospel access. Today, that figure has grown to 29% (2.1 billion people). Two interchangeable terms, while technically different, essentially define this population:

Unreached People Groups (UPGs) — less than 2% evangelical Christians (*Joshua Project*).

Least Evangelized Peoples (LEPs) — with little or no Gospel access per a multiple-factor list (*World Christian Database*).

Tragically, only about 3% of global missionaries serve this 29%. Christ-followers should be outraged by this spiritual injustice. That Jesus' command to make disciples of all *ethne* is unfulfilled is disobedience. Doing more of the same activities expecting different results is futile and irresponsible.

Mission revolution

A holy urgency has caused many to re-study Scripture as a strategy manual—and has as a result revolutionized results among some UPGs. Sound motives fuel these efforts, including a deep love for Jesus; a joyful desire for all to have the chance to love and serve him; a holy concern to bring spiritual justice; and a commitment to obey Jesus' command. The resulting radical methodological changes have resulted in amazing results reflected in the quantity and quality of disciples and churches.

Church-planting movements

Globally, 'Book of Acts'-type movements (called 'Church Planting Movements' below) have recently emerged,

often among the 'hardest' peoples to reach. The reality of these movements should not be skeptically or lightly dismissed. These exciting, transformational results—with millions of new believers and churches in hard places—should receive greater emphasis from those committed to bringing Jesus' gospel to all peoples.

At least 158 Church Planting Movements (CPMs) resulting from a process called Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs) have begun since the mid-1980s, but especially within the last 15-20 years, and largely, but not only, among UPGs.

A movement is defined as when a number of the initial churches each reproduce to fourth generation (great-grandchildren or later) churches. When this ongoing reproduction happens in multiple 'family-tree branches', critical mass and ability to reproduce is achieved. This does not seem to be the case if the reproduction stops at only second-generation (children) or third-generation (grandchildren) churches.

Biblical model

Jesus launched a movement in three years, with disciples learning to love him and obey all his commands. The numerical growth of disciples in these three years is clear: twelve, 72 others (Luke 10), 500 (1 Cor 15:6), more than 3,000 at Pentecost and then at least 5,000 (Acts 4:4). The belief that God uses people to start movements today is based on Jesus' promise that His disciples would do greater things (John 14:12-14).



Every segment. Jesus went to every town and village (Matt 9:35-38). He sent the twelve to a specific population segment (Luke 9:1-6). He sent 72 others, but now to all the places to which he was about to go (Luke 10:1-23). Thus, when Jesus expanded their scope to make disciples of all population segments globally, his disciples were already experienced in the pattern.



Jesus' pattern. His pattern was simple but deep. He modeled it regularly (eg Luke 4 and 8) and sent them to do the same (Matt 10, Luke 9 and 10). He focused on discipling whole groups (*oikos*—households), such as one of his first households of peace (Mark 1—Simon and Andrew's household) and the Samaritan village (John 4). Sent workers were to pray for local workers to be found within the harvest. The welcoming person of peace (one spiritually hungry and God-prepared) is the focus. The person of peace opens his/her social unit/group to hear the message. Focusing on discipling whole groups makes great sociological, numerical, and practical sense, which results in sustainable growth.



Holistic role. The disciples' role is holistic—both to tell the good news of the Kingdom and to heal the sick and cast out demons. They are to depend on the receiving household rather than providing all the resources or answers. They must focus on discipling the household of peace rather than going from household to household. This new group will be better able to disciple and influence their community than the outsider can.



Discipling groups. This focus on discipling groups continues in the Book of Acts, as all but three people (Saul, the Ethiopian eunuch and Sergius Paulus) came to faith in groups. Paul and his teams,

following Jesus' model, started movements among population segments, which were multi-cultural, multi-religious, and often hostile. These movements ensured that all in each area had a chance to hear of Jesus:



Jerusalem: 'numbers of disciples increased rapidly' (Acts 6:1, 7).



Cyprus: ' . . . the whole island' (Acts 13:6).

Phrygia: 'The word of the Lord spread through the whole region (Acts 13:49).



Galatia: In Iconium 'a great number of Jews and Greeks believed' (Acts 14:1); in Lystra . . . 'some disciples' (Acts 14:22); and in Derbe . . . 'won a large number of disciples' (Acts 14:21).



Macedonia: In Philippi, the families of Lydia and the jailer (Acts 16); in Thessalonica 'some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks and many prominent women' (Acts 17:4); and in Berea many Jews believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (Acts 17:12).



Achaia: In Athens 'some believed' (Acts 17:34); and in Corinth the family of Crispus and many Corinthians believed (Acts 18:8).



Ephesus: Within 'two years, . . . all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord' (Acts 19:10). Some 15 million people (Roman census) in much of the area of modern Turkey could only have had access within two years if obedient disciples were reproducing.



Paul's missions: Only the use of several disciple-making movements with multiple branches can explain Paul's following statement: ' . . . from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum [the Balkans], I [Paul] have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ' (Rom 15: 19). Within the 15 or so years represented in this statement, Paul and his small teams would not have had the time or physical ability to 'fully proclaim' Jesus in this whole area. The only way this scriptural statement could be accurate is if they served as catalysts to raise up reproducing disciples and groups who reproduced all across this region.

Some key principles

God through his Holy Spirit is the teacher. The outsider helps new disciples to learn directly from the Father and to obey everything Jesus commanded. (Isa 54:13; Jer 31:33-34; Matt 23:8; John 6:45; 14:25).

Obedience-based group discipleship is an essential factor. Without it DMMs do not happen. The group members hear the Scripture, retell it to each other, discuss God-given insight and the obedience God is asking from the passage. People are to obey what is learned each week. Each person is to share the passage with another. At the next meeting, each shares what they obeyed (or did not) and who they told. Group accountability is built into the process. Their theology is strong. 'Accurate obedience' leads to 'accurate belief'.

Results transform. Testimonies from several movements indicate that alcoholism diminishes in their area. For example, a drunken colonel in South Asia fired his rifle point blank at his newly believing wife—and miraculously missed. He then broke her legs with the rifle. Through her continued witness, he quit drinking and became a believer and reproducing church-starter. In other movements, husbands learn from God to stop beating their wives.^[1]

Churches seek God's provision together to help the poor and widows and orphans in their communities, such as a South Asian movement where whole communities quit selling their daughters into sexual slavery. In another South Asian movement, one church branch hired a Hindu seamstress to train young women to earn a living. They only asked that this training group read each week's Bible story and ask the simple questions. Soon, the Hindu seamstress, five Hindu girls, and three Muslim girls came to faith and were baptized—along with the Hindu and Muslim families, because they saw the change in their daughters.^[2]



Movements today

Researchers are tracking over 150 church planting movements, and more are being added every year. There is at least one per continent. Disciples reproduce. Leaders reproduce. Churches reproduce and love and obey him by helping the widow and orphan, healing the sick, stop selling children into slavery, casting out demons, and sharing the good news of the Kingdom:

- A movement born four years ago in India has over 7,000 congregations including some eighteenth

generation churches.^[3]

- One of the earliest movements began about 25 years ago in another part of India among the Bhojpuri language group. It has been audited several times by researchers. The latest audit shows at least 8 million baptized believers and approximately 200,000 congregations, which serve their community through literacy efforts, health education, etc.
- Movements of several thousand congregations are growing in several continents in areas hostile to the news of Jesus.
- A movement has emerged in the US among groups often ignored by existing churches.

Exponential growth necessity

Churches must reproduce obedient churches more quickly than traditional expectations because it is the only way to exceed population growth and give all peoples access to the gospel. If it takes five years for a church to reproduce, it will require 30 years for one church to become 64 churches. On the other hand, if each church starts a church every twelve months, 32,000 churches could start (and sometimes have started) within 15 years.

Concerns addressed

Does this kind of rapid growth result in heresy? Less heresy is evident in these movements than is often seen in more traditional approaches. Most heresies historically have been fostered by a key leader/s (eg Judaizers), not groups. The group process of obeying God's Word together reduces this possibility.

Are movement proponents diminishing or insulting existing churches? This is not the case. These proven and biblical strategies to disciple many people groups should excite the church, even if these approaches cause re-examination, discomfort, and change in order to achieve greater impact.

Is not a formally trained human leader required for accurate teaching / prevention of heresy? Might this be an arrogant lack of faith that God is really the best, most able teacher?

Might movement success hurt feelings of traditional workers? The more important concern should be how the Least Evangelized Peoples feel without Christ.

Implications

Many missiological theories promote strategies that should reproduce. Church planting movements are based on strategies which have reproduced.

The existence and legitimacy of church planting movements should not be skeptically dismissed, as is the tendency among some in Christian mission circles. The comment that UPGs have been over-emphasized needs to be disputed. The call to have a 'balanced' mission emphasis should be affirmed.

It is indeed time to bring balance. At least 30% (not the current paltry 3%) of global missionaries should be assigned to serve the 30% of the world's population (UPGs) who have never enjoyed gospel witness of any kind, using proven best practices.

Jesus' simple but deep strategies (rather than our often complex but non-reproducible efforts) need to be used to change whole people groups. These proven, biblical, multiplicative, and transformative discipling methods should be used rather than theoretical, unproven, and unscalable approaches. Church planting movements which transform societies represent the only strategy which brings the scalable growth needed to exceed population growth and to finish the task.

Endnotes

1. See <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/kingdom-kernels5> , 31-32. ↑
2. See more examples of transformation at <https://vimeo.com/163162273>. ↑
3. *Editor's Note*: See also article by Prabhu Singh entitled '[Surfing the Third Wave of Missions in India](#)' in March 2017 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*. ↑

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The Lausanne Movement connects influencers and ideas for global mission, with a vision of the gospel for every person, an evangelical church for every people, Christ-like leaders for every church, and kingdom impact in every sphere of society.

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