**Moving Beyond “Pray, Give, or Go”**

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**Summary**: Even if you cannot go overseas as a traditional missionary, you can still do more than pray and give. Steinhaus outlines four stages of being involved in the Great Commission. These are to (1) be a disciple who makes disciples. From wherever you are in the world, you can (2) learn about different cultures, (3) be a cross-cultural friend, and (4) be a catalyst of movements.

By **Steven P. Steinhaus**

In mission sermons and conferences, speakers commonly point out that to fulfill the Great Commission, not everyone is called to go overseas. There are other ways to be involved. These usually boil down to giving and praying. If you can’t go, no problem – pray or give. Or do both!

Perhaps at one time this tripartite division of pray-give-go was an adequate summary of ways to respond to the mission call, but I’ve always found it lacking. Doesn’t the going part of the Great Commission apply to all followers of Jesus? How do people sort out their own choice from these three options? And what about the sad reality that some have gone overseas to do mission work, but probably shouldn’t have?

Recently, while spending time with some people involved in the leadership of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course, I was reminded of their emphasis on mobilization. Many, echoing Ralph Winter in “The Practice of Sending,”[[i]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/" \l "_edn1) argue we should pray-give-go-mobilize. But this modification does not address the need for senders to also be going, nor for discipleship being necessary prior to being mobilized. I certainly resonate with the need for mobilization, but it also feels reductionistic.

My main concerns about our modern response to Jesus’ commission, however, are biblical. What does Jesus really expect of his followers, irrespective of place or position? What can we discern from Jesus’ early disciples and their use of diverse spiritual gifts?

Sadly, in 2025, our world remains approximately 40% unreached (3.4 billion out of 8 billion overall).[[ii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn2) Even more shocking is that still today only about 3% of the global mission force goes to unreached people groups (UPGs) ─ groups less than 2% evangelical and 5% Christian of any kind.[[iii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn3) These facts demand that we consider seriously our response to the Bible’s call to mission. We must ask continually: how am I obeying the Great Commission? Am I truly living on mission as Jesus requires? Can I use my life to help change the sad percentages above?

Nevertheless, a dramatic change has also occurred in the past 100 years in missions. Evangelicals have gone from approximately 80% Western to now more than 70% non-Western.[[iv]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn4) This is amazing! Yet it also adds confusion as some organizations now seem to be saying, “Just stay home and send money to our local workers.”[[v]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn5) Coupled with an increasingly unwelcoming world for white, US American Christians (still the largest demographic of foreign mission workers),[[vi]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn6) some would conclude it’s time to simply pass the baton of UPG mission on to the emerging churches of the Global South. But can we really claim to be Bible-believing people if we don’t take seriously our own obedience to the Great Commission by going ourselves?

In this article I propose a different paradigm than the pray-give-go mission response. Based on a decades-long career in missions, I recommend a four-stage model that better enables *all*believers to be meaningfully involved in global mission. While I agree that not all are called to go and live overseas, I do believe it’s clear that *all* disciples must obey everything Jesus taught, including the Great Commission. This model helps all of us to move along the path of taking the Great Commission seriously. It invites every believer to get serious about Stage 1 and leads some all the way to Stage 4.

**Stage 1: Be a disciple who makes disciples.**

The pray-give-go formula, even if we add mobilization, still lacks the concept of every disciple being a disciple-maker, which is an essential element of the Great Commission. I don’t believe it’s enough for some to say, “I’m just called to pray,” or “I’m a mobilizer.” Jesus calls us all to live our lives in a way that imitates his, doing the things he modeled. Many books have been written calling the Church back to obedient discipleship.[[vii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn7) If a disciple is someone who obeys everything Jesus commanded, that includeshis last command—the command to make more disciples. That is the core of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19).

In Disciple Making Movement (DMM) training, we consider whether we ourselves actually live as disciples, or whether we’re simply being Christians or Christian professionals.

I’ve noticed that over time, disciples often begin to feel a concern for people unlike them—those on the news, of different cultures, those in bondage to false prophets, and those living in UPGs. I believe this concern is natural for those being led by the Spirit (2 Cor 5:14). If we dare to lean into God’s burden for the nations instead of running from it, we often find he opens the door to move us onto the next stages.

**Stage 2: Be a learner of peoples and cultures, and of God’s mission.**

As we grow in Christ, we begin to care for all people – including those very different from us. That’s exactly what Jesus predicted would happen in Acts 1:8. He told a group of Jews that they were going to become global witnesses. They became exactly what Jesus had predicted, by the Spirit’s power. Before I became a disciple, I was anti-immigrant, even resentful toward foreigners moving into my country. But God changed my heart. As I grew in Christ and understanding of his word, I found I wanted to learn about other peoples. Eventually I began to find ways to spend time with these people to learn more.

Therefore, rather than just requiring mission workers to learn about their host cultures, we should be teaching all believers to follow the Spirit’s nudge to learn about the people he is bringing to cross our paths – especially those unreached areas. We need to also intentionally live out what the Bible says about God’s love and concern for all peoples. The normal life of a disciple includes caring for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40).

So, if you find yourself frequenting Pad Thai or Pho restaurants, pray for your servers and learn a little about Southeast Asia. Memorize a few phrases and greetings in their languages. If you realize a community of Somalis, Afghans, or Rohingya have moved in nearby, welcome them as neighbors and read up about their countries and cultures. If you are worried about the *mullahs* in Iran yet love Persian carpets and kabobs, watch some YouTube videos on ancient and modern Iran, and begin to pray for Iranians.

Perhaps you already live in a place where another religion or ethnic group is the majority. You may even feel threatened, as if you don’t belong in the place you live. But remember that’s exactly how Peter described the believers in his day (1 Peter 1:1–3). We aren’t called to seek our home on earth but in heaven (Hebrews 11:15–16) where our real citizenship is. Meanwhile, on earth, our purpose is to disciple every ethnic group (Matthew 28:18–20). So, let’s pay them the compliment of being interested in their land, culture and people. Join a cricket club. Play a pick-up soccer game alongside immigrants. Teach them English or find other ways to help them. If you do so, this may very well be the way the Lord leads you deeper among that people group, or a similar one.

Vision comes from knowledge and experience. It’s hard to have much vision for a UPG if we know nothing about them, have never prayed for them, and can’t find their country on a map. But if we allow ourselves to enter relationships with people from other cultures now where we are, or begin to pursue learning about a group we’re interested in, the Lord can lead us. It helps to do this while memorizing some key Bible verses relevant to missions (such as Psalm 96:1; John 20:21–23; Romans 1:16; or 2 Corinthians 5:16). Perhaps your church has a focus on a certain region or UPG cluster, or you have a friend who has moved into a UPG setting. That could also be a good place to start your exploration. See where God leads you!

For some of us, learning about other peoples from the safety of home will soon feel not enough. We want to go. We feel we have togo. The more we learn, the more the passion burns. But we shouldn’t be sent long-term if we’ve never made any disciples where we are now, and if we’ve never taken a short-term trip.

I first went to Hong Kong in 1986 and really struggled with the summer heat and various other cultural issues. So, I was amazed when my project director encouraged me to come back, saying he thought I had “the gift of apostleship.” I followed his advice, and after that summer experience, finished college, got married, and then lived overseas with my wife and kids for 22 years.

I understand that not everyone will feel led to move overseas as traditional supported mission workers like we did. Some will go as tentmakers, earning a living while intentionally residing in a needy area. Others will only live overseas for a short time. But allbelievers can honor God’s vision for all peoples by learning about them and studying his work around the world. So, let’s live as disciples making disciples who are continuously learning about God’s world and his mission. And let’s commit to keep learning and praying for the people God brings along our paths. It may lead us to discern creative next steps.

**Stage 3: Be a friend with disciples across cultures.**

When I first heard the title of the classic book, *Making Friends* by Emory Griffin, I thought, “What a low bar. Who doesn’t know how to make friends?” But I now realize that friendship is the foundation on which all ministry must be built, whether in compassionate outreach, evangelism, discipleship, or high-level strategic partnerships. This is because friendship is based on self-emptying love without which, ministry fails.

Being a cross-cultural friend in our modern era doesn’t necessarily require relocation. With modern tools like WhatsApp, email, and Facebook Messenger, we can keep in close contact with people anywhere. In some countries, landlines were never even installed and today 60% of the world owns a smartphone.[[viii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn8) Let’s use our smartphones for the King! I use Zoom, Signal, and WhatsApp literally daily with my overseas *koinonos*(one of Paul’s words for friends in the gospel). Granted, I am a “professional” who is in full-time ministry. But my friend Matt, a Filipino American believer who is unemployed, talks constantly to his extended family back in the Philippines. My wife’s friend, Sylvite[[ix]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/" \l "_edn9) from Central Asia, works in Chicago but Facetimes her family constantly and visits them at least once a year. Free time can be used for meaningful connections instead of binge-watching Netflix; vacations can be used for fun and mission.

Moreover, if we intentionally choose to live relationally, the Lord can more easily guide us. It was probably not coincidence that Paul’s first stop on his first missionary journey was to his partner’s home island (Acts 4:36; 13:4). It can be helpful to commit to friendship in the gospel with like-minded disciples who share a God-given vision to reach a particular group.  Together, you can support each other as the Lord leads you into unexpected encounters, places, and relationships.

Living as a friend can take you into high places and into difficult ones. But whether you live far away or at home, being a friend on mission is crucial to your effectiveness. I know almost no greater honor than when a fellow disciple-maker in Asia or Africa calls me friend.

**Stage 4: Be a catalyst of movements.**

When I first heard about church planting movements (CPMs), I couldn’t believe it.[[x]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn10) I had always dreamt of seeing such a thing happen in the area where I served, but I didn’t have any idea of how to get there. Then I began to learn about how to catalyze a CPM using the strategy of disciple making movements (DMMs), and my life and ministry began to radically change.

DMM strategy attempts to follow Jesus’ sending pattern as found in Matthew 9:36–10:16; Mark 6:6–13; Luke 9:1–6; and Luke 10:1–16. Practitioners frequently focus on several steps: (1) begin with extraordinary prayer; (2) go and serve the lost through word and deed; (3) seek People of Peace (PoP); (4) form discovery groups (often called Discovery Bible Studies). In these, the PoP and his/her family can learn together about the Way of Jesus; (5) nurture discovery groups to become (house) churches; and (6) develop leaders to continue the process. If you’ve not attended a DMM training, I wholeheartedly recommend it.[[xi]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn11) Its principles can be fruitfully applied in any context.

Training in DMM brought a revolution in my own discipleship and radical changes in our ministry. Recognizing our limitations as white US Americans seeking to reach Asian Muslim UPGs, my family moved outside the UPG area and began operating as movement catalysts. Our doing so enabled local believers to lead everything while we stayed in the background, largely unseen. Now, some 12 years later, in conjunction with many others, we have seen DMMs happening in three places in that country. We have also been able to contribute to other movements emerging in other regions. It’s been thrilling, above and beyond our expectations.

Catalysts facilitate rather than being the primary ministry leader in a different culture.[[xii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn12) The process involves a huge mind-shift. But I want to emphasize that I do not believe that catalyzing movements can only be done by people in full-time ministry, like me.

The role of a movement catalyst consists of casting vision, bringing training, providing ongoing encouragement and coaching, building prayer support, and maybe helping to provide some outside resources. Everything begins with vision. Many people living in UPG areas believe that the people around them are unreachable. They’re often unaware of what God is doing in similar areas of the world, which could be a great encouragement.[[xiii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn13) We can bring them an encouraging word that God is doing a new thing. God may do it in their area too! Do you know a persecuted believer in a difficult situation? Or a supported mission worker in a UPG setting who is struggling? Perhaps you can help them catch a vision for a movement.

DMM training is a helpful step towards catalyzing a movement. If you’re not a trainer, maybe you could help bring in a trainer. That’s what Dave Hunt did for Aychi, which ultimately resulted in a still-growing family of disciple making movements among unreached groups.[[xiv]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_edn14) DMM trainers are multiplying across the globe. However, the need is greater than the supply. I encourage you, therefore, to learn DMM to the point that you can facilitate an introductory training yourself. If your audience is receptive, you can then help them get follow-up training with others who are more experienced.

Just as Paul made a point of staying in touch with his disciples scattered around the Mediterranean, we must stay in touch with those we have trained. Again, Zoom and WhatsApp (or similar apps) are some of our best tools for this process. You don’t need to be an expert coach or mentor to do this; you simply need to help keep your friends on task by asking them how their application of the principles is going. And as the ministry grows, you can also help them develop a larger team of people praying for them. Sadly, many indigenous mission workers I’ve met have almost no one praying for them. Connecting some prayer champions can be a huge blessing.

I want to close by encouraging you to refocus on making disciples. As you make disciples, become a life-long learner of peoples and cultures, and of God’s global mission. Be sure to make your learning not just intellectual but also relational; learn to be a cross-cultural friend. All the while, keep seeking God to help you become a catalyst of disciple-making movements as well. He knows we need a lot more of them!

Zane is a retired marketing executive who befriended a Bible translator in Africa supported by his church. Zane had made his life-long vocation to be making disciples while working in business in Ohio, but he also yearned to be used wherever God may lead. In retirement, he took a course in DMM and began to pass things along to his friend in Africa by phone and email. Later, he and his pastor took a few trips to visit the work there. They began to train local believers in DMM strategy. When the Bible was published, they were able to couple it with DMM training. It was explosive. Today there are over 300 churches in a predominately Muslim UPG, and the movement continues to grow.

Of course, the Church must pray, give, and go. And mobilize. But we can do better. Let’s be disciple-making disciples who obey all Jesus’ commands and multiply his disciples everywhere.

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[[i]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref1) Ralph Winter, “The Practice of Sending,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,*4th ed., ed. Ralph D Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne(William Carey Library, 2009).

[[ii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref2) https://www.joshuaproject.net/.

[[iii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref3) “Mission Stats,” The Traveling Team, <https://www.thetravelingteam.org/stats>. “Definition of Unreached,” Joshua Project, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/why\_include\_adherents\_when\_defining\_unreached.

[[iv]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/" \l "_ednref4) Joel Carpenter, “Global Christianity,” in *Response* 30, no. 2 (Autumn 2007), <https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/autumn2k7/features/global-christianity.asp>.

[[v]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref5) Craig Ott addresses and argues against this phenomenon well in: Craig Ott, “Should American Churches Still Send Missionaries?” Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, YouTube, January 3, 2025, https://youtu.be/O\_XJGIJZWqI.

[[vi]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref6) Melissa Steffan, “The Surprising Countries Most Missionaries are Sent from and Go To,” *Christianity Today*, July 25, 2013, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2013/07/missionaries-countries-sent-received-csgc-gordon-conwell/.

[[vii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref7) E.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* and David L. and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making* (Thomas Nelson, 2012).

[[viii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref8) Sunil Gil, “How Many People Own Smart Phones in the World? (2024–2029),” Priori Data, January 1, 2025, <https://prioridata.com/data/smartphone-stats/>.

[[ix]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref9) A pseudonym to protect identity.

[[x]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref10) David Garrison first popularized this term and concept in his book, *Church Planting Movements*(WIGTake Resources, 2004).

[[xi]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref11) Online training can be found at [http://www.newgenerations.network](http://www.newgenerations.network/).

[[xii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref12) To learn more about this, I recommend Gene Wilson’s *Emerging Gospel Movements: The Role of Catalysts* (WIPF & Stock, 2021).  David Garrison’s first publication, *The Nonresidential Missionary* (MARC, 1990) is also helpful, but dated. Tom Steffan presents similar ideas in *The Facilitator Era* (WIPF & Stock, 2011). Read together, these three volumes outline the process of moving from traditional mission worker to catalyst.

[[xiii]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref13) E.g., Dave Coles and Stan Parks, eds., *24:14 – A Testimony to All Peoples* (pub. by authors, 2019).

[[xiv]](https://missionexus.org/moving-beyond-pray-give-or-go/#_ednref14) Aychi B.R. and Dave Coles, *Living Fire: Advancing God’s Kingdom in Challenging Places* (Beyond & Experience Life, 2025), 24.

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