**[Preparing Christ’s Bride](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride)**

**SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING VS. CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS**

Dave Coles | 18 May 2023

The Lord has called us to set our hope on the grace to be given us on the day when Jesus will return for his church, ‘to live holy and godly lives as [we] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming’ (2 Pet 3:11b-12a).

Speed its coming? What could that mean? All major English Bible translations[[1](http://endnote-1/)] render *speudontas* in 2 Peter 3:12 as ‘speed’, ‘hastening’, or ‘hurrying’. The context of the verse also grapples in numerous ways with the issue of timing.[[2](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-2)] And all other New Testament uses of any form of *speudō*[[3](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-3)] clearly intend the concept of hastening. Some scholars, however, point to another possible meaning of *speudō* (‘to desire earnestly’), cited only from non-biblical sources.[[4](http://endnote-1/)]

Clearly the relationship between God’s sovereign choice and human responsibility involves elements of mystery beyond our understanding[[5](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-5)], and human effort can neither force God’s hand nor accurately predict the timing of Christ’s return.

Yet a biblically nuanced understanding of human obedience (or disobedience) in relation to God’s sovereign choice calls us to wrestle deeply with the implications of our obedience or disobedience in the realms of prayer, evangelism, and world evangelization, as well as in our everyday lives. If we were to follow the preference of all major English translations and numerous commentators[[6](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-6)]—to not only earnestly desire the Lord’s return, but also somehow to hasten that glorious day—we would be left asking of Scripture one question: How could that be possible?

A brief survey of New Testament teaching offers at least three activities the Lord has commanded, which are directly connected to the glorious promise of his return. He has called us to pray that his kingdom would come in fullness (Matt 6:10). He has called us to live holy lives of obedience (2 Pet 3:11b, Tit 2:12-14). And he has commanded us to make disciples of all nations*(ethnē)*—an assignment enduring to the end of this age (Matt 28:18-20).

Eschatology can easily distract us with arguable details. The Lord has given glimpses of the future not to inspire charts, diagrams, and speculation, but rather to inspire passionate prayer, fervent holiness, and earnest pursuit of disciple-making through gospel proclamation. Our missions practice does not depend on our eschatology, and a variety of eschatological scenarios favor efforts to proclaim the gospel among all peoples of the world.

Much prayer, strategic analysis, and effort has been devoted to the discipling of all *ethnē.*In recent decades, two significant approaches to this task have risen to the fore in missiological literature and on-the-ground efforts: saturation church planting (SCP) in the 1970s, and church-planting movements (CPM) in the 1990s (often used as an umbrella term to include disciple-making movements as one type of church-planting movement). Each strategic effort serves as an attempt to participate effectively in God’s mission in the world.

According to Murray Moerman, SCP happens when ‘an adequate number of churches’ can ‘fully disciple their cities and people groups’.[[7](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-7)] Moerman says that generally, a ratio of one church reaching out to every thousand unreached people is a good number to aim for, with the ratio varying from ‘smaller in rural areas (1:500) to higher in urban areas (1:1500)’.[[8](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-8)] When a ratio such as this has been attained, a locale (such as a nation) can be considered ‘saturated’ with churches. In other words, everyone in that location has a church easily accessible.

On the other hand, the book *24:14 – A Testimony to All Peoples* defines a CPM as ‘a multiplication of disciples spreading rapidly through a people group or population segment, meeting people’s spiritual and physical needs’.[[9](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-9)] When at least four generations of churches plant new churches, the CPM is seen as having ‘crossed a threshold to becoming a sustainable movement’.[[10](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-10)]

One type of CPM is a disciple-making movement (DMM), which focuses on disciples finding ‘persons of peace who will gather their family or circle of influence’[[11](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-11)] to begin what is called a Discovery Group. Over the course of a few months, participants inductively study the Bible, seek to obey what they learn, and begin sharing with others, sometimes starting Discovery Groups of their own. The initial study culminates in the baptism of new believers, and the group enters into a church-planting phase with the goal of forming a church, which then multiplies through reproducing the process.

**COMPARING SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING  
WITH CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS**

Both the SCP and the CPM/DMM paradigms have borne fruit through various groups and networks. The relationship between the two has been described in a variety of ways.

The main difference between the two paradigms is trying to plant a lot of churches (by whatever means) to move toward saturation of churches vs. rapidly multiplying movements that impact one people group after another, with national borders being no more significant than linguistic and cultural barriers.

SCP examples are mainly in Christianized countries (i.e. the Philippines) whereas CPMs/DMMs are mainly happening among the unreached (especially Muslims and Hindus), where disciples are still a relatively small percentage of the population, and where publishing ‘success stories’ could greatly increase persecution.

Moerman offers a comparison of the unique contributions of each. He describes the goal of saturation church planting as ‘a winsome church for every 1,000 people (or 1,500 or 500, depending on the size and effectiveness of the disciple-making community)’.[[12](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-12)] He considers disciple-making movements ‘the most effective currently known *means*of reaching the *goal’*.[[13](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-13)] The organic growth of CPM/DMM involves making disciples who in turn make disciples who make more disciples—to the third and fourth spiritual generation.

Russ Mitchell portrays the two paradigms as complementary:*‘*CPMs or DMMs are not replacements for saturation church planting or whole nation processes. While CPMs and DMMs are movements, they are not normally nationwide movements. [. . .] Disciple Making Movements and whole-nation processes are complementary’.[[14](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-14)]

CPMs/DMMs generally multiply most rapidly within a single people group—with a shared language, culture, and identity—then jump over to other groups, where the gospel again takes root and multiplies rapidly. Sometimes these jumps from one group to another take place based on strategic thinking: ‘What near-neighbor groups need to hear the gospel?’ Other times the jump happens organically, through connections of business, relatives, or physical proximity. Sometimes national borders play a lesser role in multiplication than similarities of language or culture.Raphael Anzenberger notes the significant ways that CPM/DMM has usefully modified perspectives on SCP: ‘The rise of CPM, and later DMM, shifted the emphasis from systemic SCP [. . .] to organic SCP thinking [. . .]. The goal has always been to provide the impetus for movement, but the path has changed’.[[15](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-15)] In our day, the Lord seems pleased to powerfully use the prayerful passion, every-member involvement, and effective outreach that characterize CPMs and DMMS to move toward saturation in church planting.

The word ‘organic’[[16](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-16)] has often been used to describe the indigenous nature of CPM/DMM, with the locus of initiative resting on local (inside-culture or near-culture) leaders. Many movements are organically initiating new movements among least-reached groups within their nation or region.

Researcher Justin Long describes an important shift in the launching of movements. He points out that in the past, foreign missionaries often played a significant role, whereas nowadays, ‘New movements are mainly being started by existing movements.’ He points out that the disciples in these movements can impact nearby peoples and places inaccessible to Westerners, often more effectively because of similarity of language or culture. ‘Not only can they go*more easily*, but they are also*going intentionally’*, since ‘their own movements began out of a vision to reach the unreached.’[[17](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-17)]

Numerous examples of this exciting dynamic can be seen, for example, in the January-February 2023 issue of *Mission Frontiers* magazine, entitled ‘Cascading Gospel: Movements Starting Movements’.[[18](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-18)]This dynamic of indigenous movements launching new movements, without dependence on foreign funding, shows great potential for impacting all *ethnē* with the good news of salvation through Christ.Moerman comments: ‘Church-planting movements (CPMs) are recognized more and more widely to be both simpler than conventional planting models and, for that reason, to multiply more easily’.[[19](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-19)] He highlights the 24:14 Network, which ‘aims at gospel saturation [. . .] with a methodology that focuses on the multiplication of house churches, CPMs, and DMMs to begin movements in unreached people groups as well as in each province or county’. He also highlights the contribution of 24:14 in mapping global progress of movements, and suggests ‘there may be opportunities for collaboration. You may wish to seek out expressions of the 24:14 network in your nation to explore and assist’.[[20](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-20)]

**THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB**

As church-planting and disciple-making movements multiply among unreached people groups and leap to impact additional groups, we can rejoice at the advance of the gospel and the multiplication of churches that move areas toward saturation.

Jesus, the sinless savior, the most loving bridegroom who ever existed, has promised to return for his bride. That will be an occasion for epochal celebration, rejoicing, and glory to God (Rev 19:7). Jesus’ bride will have ‘made herself ready’, consisting of ‘a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Rev 7:9). This radiant, multi-ethnic bride (Eph 5:27) will be clothed in fine linen, the righteous acts that have been done by the Spirit’s power (Rev 19:8), in obedience to the Lord’s commands.

The Lord appears to be using both SCP and CPM/DMM to move us forward toward gospel access for all peoples, preparing Christ’s bride for the wedding supper of the Lamb. May a spirit of mutual appreciation, encouragement, and collaboration characterize our interaction as children of our Father, eagerly awaiting and hastening the arrival of our bridegroom.

**ENDNOTES**

1. NIV, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, NLT [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-1)
2. Verse 4 cites the accusation that while time goes on, God is not fulfilling the promise of his coming. Verse 8 clarifies that God’s timetable is different than ours. Verse 9 states: ‘The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise’ (NIV). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 2:16, 19:5-6; Acts 20:16, 22:18. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-3)
4. Some older sources, such as *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*and *Strong’s Concordance,* list the LXX of Isaiah 16:5 as an example of the meaning ‘to desire earnestly’. However, the meaning ‘hastening’ is preferred there—not only by *The Septuagint Version: Greek and English*(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 851; but also by modern Bible translations, such as ESV, NIV, NRSV, NKJV, and MSG.  [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-4)
5. This is expounded well in works such as D.A. Carson’s *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension*andJ.I. Packer’s classic *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, which states: ‘The belief that God is sovereign does not affect the *urgency* of evangelism’ (98). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-5)
6. Such as those cited in ‘Can We Hasten the Lord’s Return?’ by Dave Coles (*Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2020, 38). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-6)
7. Murry Moerman. *Mobilizing Movements: Leadership Insights for Discipling Whole Nations.* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2021), Loc. 277. Used with permission. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-8)
9. Dave Coles and Stan Parks. *24:14 – A Testimony to All Peoples.*(Spring, Texas: 24:14, 2019), 315. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-11)
12. Moerman, 213. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-13)
14. Russ Mitchell. ‘Three Insights that Facilitate Nationwide Disciple Making Movements.’ *EMQ*, 55:1, (January-March 2019), 42. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-14)
15. Raphael Anzenberger. ‘Whole-Nation Saturation Church Planting: Towards a New Dawn?’ Doctoral dissertation, Columbia International University, 2020. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-15)
16. For example, ‘Multiplying Movements through Organic Growth’ by Roger Charles uses the word ‘organic’ 17 times in less than four pages (*Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2023, 29-33). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-16)
17. ‘How Long to Reach the Goal?’ (*Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2023, 34-35). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-17)
18. Available at <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/cascading-gospel-movements-starting-movements>. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-18)
19. Moerman, 24. [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, 212-213. Those interested in seeking out expressions of the 24:14 Network can visit the multilingual website [2414now.net](https://2414now.net/). [↑](https://lausanne.org/about/blog/preparing-christs-bride#endnote-ref-20)



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