

Local Partnership and the Great Commission: Biblical Principles and Practical Guidelines

By Robert Harris

Robert Harris (pseudonym) has sought to be a reproducing disciple of Jesus for the past nine years. Half of that time he has been intentionally focused on the region of South Asia, where his family co-labors alongside movement leaders to equip the saints for works of service and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20, CSB)



This task, given by Christ to His Bride prior to his ascension, continues to grip the hearts and ring in the minds of sent-ones. With such an undeniably clear Biblical mandate, conversation usually turns toward its practical implications and implementation. As modern frameworks continue to highlight the patterns of the early church¹, discussions have shifted to more nuanced topics like the relationship between indigenous churches and cross-cultural sent-ones. Specifically, the question arises: should cross-cultural workers prioritize or even approach strategic partnerships with existing believers and churches?

1 The Four Fields of Kingdom Growth (Shank 2015) is an example of a prominent and helpful framework.

When I look at the current indigenous and near-culture church in contexts across the globe, I personally cannot help but aspire to work alongside existing believers. Let us use my ministry context of South Asia as an example. The current population of South Asian countries is 1.8 billion and roughly 1.8% are known believers, which amounts to 98.2% lost, and 1.8% saved.² Though a low percentage overall, there are still approximately 32 million believers in South Asia. Just imagine the impact if 32 million brothers and sisters in Christ were mobilized to share their story and Jesus' story. Any practitioner will be quick to tell you that though they are commanded to, not every believer will share the gospel. However, if only 10% of the believers (3.2 million) shared the gospel even once per month, the rate of seeds being sown would surpass the monthly population growth rate of South Asia (roughly 1.7 million people added per month).³ Think about the potential harvest that could result from intentionally sending out more laborers to scatter seed amongst the fields.

However, choosing to devote time towards equipping local believers requires firmer ground than mere statistics and a vision of what could be. Therefore, we must look back to the example of the early church. Before addressing some practical considerations of partnering with existing believers, it is important to establish the biblical witness of the "work" of a sent-one as a reference point to what we are inviting believers and churches to imitate. After defining the "work," we can investigate Paul's co-laborers and where they originated. Finally, I will give some practical lessons learned from my personal experience mobilizing indigenous believers.

2 Joshua Project n.d.

3 World Population Review 2022

Defining “The Work”

There is no better starting point for evaluating the role of a cross-cultural church planter than Paul’s missionary journeys. However, our approach to those early missionary tales greatly influences our application to our practice in the field. When we read Acts, is our focus on discerning nuanced strategic trends or concrete kingdom progressions and activities? Though many helpful inferences into strategic trends can certainly be made while looking for Paul’s overarching strategy, an overemphasis on subjective inferences can keep church planters from prioritizing clear actionable patterns. For example, in Acts 17:22–34, Paul clearly contextualized his gospel message to the audience in Athens. However, it is quite possible to get so caught up in perfecting contextual methods that one loses sight of Paul’s vitally important and consistent pattern of bold declaration of the gospel.

In contrast, with objective observation of what the apostles and early church *repeatedly did*, we can discover sturdy foundations for missional practice.⁴ Snodgrass, in his doctoral dissertation, helpfully distinguishes between Paul’s apostolic “work” and his apostolic strategy;⁵ here we will also focus on “the work” as a reference to the early church’s pattern of establishing new fellowships as observed in Acts. With that approach in mind, I will trace Paul and Barnabas’s early activity and compare their “work” to the preceding efforts of the Jerusalem church to highlight the points of continuity between the two.

Prior to their commissioning by the church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas had both displayed faithful labor in places familiar to them. Saul, as he is referred to until immediately following the Spirit’s commission (Acts 13:9), was proclaiming the gospel and evidently

4 Luke records what Paul actually did; the narrative record and Paul’s declamations provide exegetical foundation for the apostolic “work” (Snodgrass 2017, 43).

5 The Greek *ἔργον*, “the work” is used in Acts 13:2, 14:26, 15:38 (Snodgrass 2017, 44).

making disciples in Syria, Arabia, and Palestine.⁶ Barnabas had reputable influence in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36–37, 9:27), was sent to strengthen the disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:22), recruited Saul to join him in teaching (Acts 11:23–26), and later carried aid from Antioch to the churches in Judea (Acts 11:27–30, 12:25).

When looking back at the preceding activity of the Jerusalem church, we see a continuity with these early ministry activities of Paul and Barnabas. While there are fewer details regarding the early efforts following Pentecost, the basic activities of sharing the gospel and making disciples are observed in the Jerusalem church as it multiplied (Acts 2:37–47, 4:4, 5:42, 6:7, 8:4, 9:31, 11:19–21). The essential continuity between the early work of the Jerusalem church and the early activities of Paul and Barnabas highlights that all missional activity is empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Therefore, whenever the church is growing it is always characterized by evangelism and discipleship. All of this shows that the subsequent “missionary journeys” of Paul and Barnabas should not be understood as a new pattern but rather as the ongoing activity of church planters empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the pattern set forth in the Great Commission.

This descriptive evidence of a sent-one’s task is further established within the first journey. In the context of the gathering of the church in Antioch, the Holy Spirit directed the church to set apart the apostles to an explicit “work” (Acts 13:2), which subsequently became a fulfilled “work” in under three years (Acts 14:26).⁷ Within those two chapters of Acts (13:2–14:26) resides the clear example of the apostolic pattern of disciple-making and church planting previously observed.

6 Paul was active in Damascus (Acts 9:19–25; Gal. 1:17), Arabia/Nabatea (Gal. 1:17; 2 Cor. 11:32), Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–29; Rom. 1:16), Syria/Cilicia/Tarsus (Acts 9:30; 11:25–26; Gal. 1:21), and Syria/Antioch (Acts 11:26–30; 13:1). See Schnabel 2012.

7 The missionary journey took place from AD 45–47 (Schnabel 2012, 807).

Therefore, based on the account of what Paul and his team did, the “work” of church planting should be understood as the following:

1. Engaging lost people (Acts 13-14).
2. Sharing the gospel (Acts 13-14).
3. Discipling those that believe (Acts 13-14).
4. Forming them into new communities/churches (Acts 13-14).
5. Appointing local leadership (Acts 14:26-27).
6. Continuing to repeat the process (Paul’s Second and Third Missionary Journeys, Acts 15-21).⁸

This is the “work” flow of the early church and missionary teams. In subsequent journeys, we observe Paul replicating this pattern, with the addition of two additional activities:

7. Sending envoys to check on the churches previously planted (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:16-17; Phil. 2:19-26; 1 Thess. 3:1-5).
8. Delivering personal instructions to aid in the maturation process (i.e. the Pauline epistles). Within those instructional letters, Paul exhorted churches to imitate his example five distinct times (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Paul’s exhortation is to imitate the full scope of his ministry, including his doctrinal commitments, exemplary character, and pattern of “work.”

To summarize, there is a clear apostolic pattern of disciple-making and church planting that emerged in Jerusalem. It is further demonstrated by

8 When the patterns of the workers in Acts align with statements made by the Apostles in the epistles, this demonstrates the significance of those tasks and provides rationale for the continuing of their patterns and practices. Consider these examples of how the “work” in Acts coheres with statements made throughout the epistles: 1. Engaging lost people (e.g. Rom. 10:14-15), 2. Sharing the gospel (e.g. Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; 1 Pet. 2:9-10), 3. Discipling those that believe (e.g. Col. 1:28), 4. Forming them into new communities (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12-14; Eph. 4:11-17), 5. Appointing local leadership (e.g. Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 3:1-13), 6. Repeating the process (e.g. Philip, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Apollos, Epaphras, disciples). See Snodgrass 2021.

Paul and Barnabas prior to their commissioning and encapsulated in the three missionary journeys and corresponding letters exhorting churches to imitate this example. Based on these descriptive observations, this “work” is what sent-ones should be modeling and inviting others to participate in. This brings us to the topic at hand: is there biblical precedent for partnering with existing believers and churches as cross-cultural sent-ones engage in this “work”?

Finding Co-workers

Like Jesus, Paul discovered and developed leaders to “work” alongside. Throughout the book of Acts and the epistles we see disciples and churches partnering with Paul in a wide variety of functions in the effort to get the gospel to the nations. As noted by Dunn, over fifty people are mentioned as “contributing to [Paul’s] mission team, some in regular, close support, others on particular occasions and mission.”⁹ Upon closer inspection, we notice Paul recognizes “co-workers” as those that labor alongside him in the process of establishing, multiplying, and maturing disciples and churches. There are fourteen people specifically

9 A complete list of fellow laborers includes: Barnabas (Acts 13:2-3; 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1-13; Col. 4:10.), Silas/Silvanus (Acts 15:40, 16:19-29, 17:4-15, 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 & 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12), Timothy (Acts 16:3, 17:14-15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; Phil. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:2-6; 1 & 2 Tim.; Philem.), Titus (2 Cor. 2:13, 7:6-14, 8:6-23, 12:18; Gal. 2:1-6; 2 Corinthians; 2 Tim. 4:10; Titus), Apollos (Acts 18:24, 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12, 3:5-9, 4:6, 16:12; Titus 3:13), Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:2-18; Rom.. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7, 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12), Aristarchus (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2; Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), Urbanus (Rom. 16:9), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25, 4:18), Clement (Phil. 4:3), Jesus/Justus (Col. 4:11), Mark (Acts 15:38-39; Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11), Luke (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24), Demas (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10), Philemon (book of Philemon), Phoebe (Rom.. 16:1), Epaphroditus (Rom. 16:5), Mary (Rom. 16:6), Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), Ampliatus (Rom. 16:8), Stachys (Rom. 16:9), Apelles (Rom. 16:10), Tryphaena and Tyrophosa (Rom. 16:12), Persis (Rom. 16:12), Quartus (Rom. 16:23), Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1), Chloe’s people (1 Cor. 1:11), Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14), Gaius (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 19:29, 20:4), Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15-17), Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), Epaphras (Col. 1:7, 4:12-13; Philem. 24), Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Philem. 10-11), Apphia (Philem. 2), Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2), Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:15, 4:19), Trophimus (Acts 20:4, 21:29; 2 Tim. 4:20), Sopater (Acts 20:4), Secundus (Acts 20:4), Erastus (Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20), Mnason (Acts 21:16), Lydia (Acts 16:15), Jason (Acts 17:5-7), Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). See Dunn 2009, 566-571.

listed as “co-workers” (synergoi), the most prominent being Barnabas, Silas/Silvanus, Timothy, Titus, and Apollos.¹⁰

Reading the accounts of these individuals, we notice many labored in the same pattern of church-planting “work” as Paul. In fact, none of those named co-workers or colleagues of Paul is ever referred to as a local elder; rather they are referred to as co-workers, disciples, brothers and sisters, apostles, and travel companions. Further inspection of the fourteen people specifically considered “co-workers” shows them participating in familiar activities of delivering letters and tithes, planting churches, encouraging existing churches, overseeing the appointment of elders, correcting false teachings, and developing more leaders.

We need to ask ourselves: where and how did Paul find these co-workers? Considering the origins of Paul’s missionary team gives us guidance for where we ourselves should expect to find co-workers in our disciple-making work. In sum, Paul recruited not only believers he himself brought to faith, but existing believers as well.

Barnabas, John Mark, and Silas were prominent figures from the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36–37, 12:25, 15:22). Priscilla and Aquila were existing believers exiled from Rome, potentially due to local missionary activity (Acts 18:1–3, 18).¹¹ Priscilla and Aquila then found Apollos, who already had knowledge of Scripture, in Ephesus (Acts 18:24–28).

Based on Paul referring to Timothy as his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2), many hold the view that Paul led him to faith on his first missionary

10 The fourteen are Timothy (Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Apollos (1 Cor. 3:9), Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Aristarchus (Philem. 24), Urbanus (Rom. 16:9), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Clement (Phil. 4:30), Jesus/Justus (Col. 4:11), John Mark (Philem. 24), Luke (Philem. 24), Demas (Col. 4:14), and Philemon (Philem. 1). See Dunn 2009, 566–571.

11 Claudius ordered Jews expelled from Rome in an edict in AD 49. Many scholars see the edict as a response to disturbances provoked by the missionary outreach of Jewish Christians. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in AD 50, and the edict was a recent event. They were possibly “independent” missionaries laboring in Corinth before meeting Paul (Schnabel 2012, 1119).

journey (Acts 14: 8–20). However, Paul hints at Timothy’s grandmother and mother’s faith preceding his (2 Tim. 1:5), and his sending was clearly confirmed by the local church in Lystra (Acts 16:1–4; 1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Similarly, Paul refers to Titus as his “true child in a common faith” (Titus 1:4), leading some to believe that Paul led him to faith as well.¹²

Epaphroditus was clearly sent by the church in Philippi with an offering for Paul, though when he came to faith is not clear (Phil. 2:25–30, 4:18). Church tradition has Luke originating from Antioch, and based on his own account, Luke joined Paul in the second journey by Troas (Acts 16:8–10).¹³

For the other co-workers (Tychicus, Aristarchus, Urbanus, Clement, Justus, and Demas) there are no biblical indicators to determine whether Paul met them as existing believers. Still, from looking at the accounts that provide information on their background, we can conclude that some of Paul’s most prominent co-workers were discovered in existing ministry roles. Arguably, instead of co-laboring only with people he himself led to faith and discipled, Paul recruited and partnered with believers from existing churches to join in the “work” of establishing new churches, nurturing those previously planted, and mobilizing others to join in the Great Commission.

Observing Paul’s clear willingness, if not preference, to co-labor alongside existing believers and leaders, I will now outline his approach when entering a field with an established church. Does Paul seek to have

12 Titus may have been from Syrian Antioch, and probably lived there when he began to work with Paul. In Galatians 2:1, Paul describes that he went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus (συμπαράλαβὼν καὶ Τίτον, *symparalabon kai Titon*). Paul, Barnabas, and Titus likely departed from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas’s primary base (Acts 11:22; 13:1). See Lokkesmoe 2016.

13 Second century tradition asserts that Luke was a native of Syrian Antioch based on: the first “we” passage in Luke 11:28 in the context in Antioch, the presence of a large Jewish community in the capital of Syria, and the possibility in the city for Luke to get the level of education evident in his writing (Schnabel 2012, 27).

fellowship in the mission with churches he personally did not plant, or does he choose to “work” independently of them? We see that Paul sought to join the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26), and while in Antioch he was recruited by Barnabas to help teach the existing church (Acts 11:25–26). Paul also wrote the letters to Colossae and Rome without having visited either church (Col. 1:7–8, 2:1; Rom. 15:22–24).

It is also worth mentioning Paul instructed his closest apostolic comrade,¹⁴ Timothy, to work a short-term assignment among the previously established churches in Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:14; 4:13),¹⁵ which already had existing elders (Acts 20:17–38). It is probable that Paul planted the first churches in Ephesus, but it is noteworthy that although there were already elders in place, he is sending Timothy back to work among the existing churches.

Ephesians 4:11–13 helps us understand Paul and his co-workers’ conviction to equip existing churches for the sake of maturing and multiplying: *“And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.”*

The ‘apostles’ Paul is referring to here “would be closer to what many Christian groups might call church planters or church-planting missionaries,” says Clinton Arnold.¹⁶ Highlighting their necessity, he goes on to say, *“The church continues the mission of Jesus and the Twelve when the sovereign Lord commissions and empowers individuals to go and*

14 In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:7, Paul refers to himself, Silas/Silvanus, and Timothy as apostles.

15 Paul regularly commissioned Timothy on short-term tasks as a member of his team; there is no textual reason to believe his assignment was long-term (Paul 2021).

16 Though the ongoing function of these gifts is debated, there are many theologians that hold to the ongoing function of all the gifts to equip the saints for the works of service. As Arnold asserts, “Paul is speaking about [the church’s] present and ongoing structure” (Arnold 2010, 256).

proclaim the Good News, establish churches, and teach them to observe all that the Lord commands (Matt. 28:19–20).¹⁷

As leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) equip local churches to obey the commands of Christ, the Holy Spirit will make evident the gifts given to each individual for the work of ministry. Modern sent-ones would do well to follow the example of Paul in continuously circling back through existing churches for the purpose of exhorting disciples, ensuring sound doctrine, and identifying new co-workers.

Based on how Paul approached existing believers and churches, I believe the goal of cross-cultural sent-ones should be to identify both indigenous and fellow cross-cultural co-workers to labor alongside in the establishment of local churches among every people and place. If we want to see a completed Great Commission, it will be critical to find co-workers that will come alongside us, go ahead of us, and continue after us. Some co-workers will come from the harvest while others will be found in local churches. Regardless of who led them to faith, we should focus our time on anyone willing to join in the “work.” Furthermore, based on the example of Jerusalem (Acts 4:36–37, 12:25, 15:22), Antioch (Acts 13:1–4), Lystra (Acts 16:1–3), Ephesus (Acts 18:27), Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe (Acts 20:4), Philippi (Phil. 2:25, 4:18), and Colossae (Col. 4:12–13), it should be the goal and joy of local churches to see their own people mobilized into the local, regional, and global harvest.

Practical Lessons in Partnership

I believe the role of equipping local believers is God’s design for multiplying His glory, and not just a modern strategy. If God gave leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry, perhaps that is the place we begin when possible. The Great Commission is the backbone of the “work,” evident in the first three parts of the reproducible pattern

¹⁷ Arnold 2010, 256.

(engaging lost people, sharing the gospel, and discipling those that believe). We invite all believers into this “work” of making disciples because it is a commission from our Lord for His glory.

Finding co-workers to labor alongside in the “work” requires a degree of equipping and observing. This suggests two approaches to finding co-workers: 1. Equip the saints and see who joins the “work” of making disciples and planting new fellowships, or 2. Observe someone already making disciples and prayerfully recruit them to the team. In other words, put seed into the hands of the harvest force and see who begins scattering it. When it happens, you have found a potential co-worker.

If you are considering coming alongside existing believers and churches for the sake of completing the Great Commission, here are a few principles I have gathered from mentors, co-workers (indigenous and expat), and personal experience.

- **We are not the answer.** There is a tendency to think that we, as the cross-cultural workers, must be the ones to do everything—especially lead others to faith. This is not a multiplication mindset. Consider Paul’s most fruitful season when all the residents of Asia heard about the Lord (Acts 19:8-10). During that season he was spending time with the existing disciples, not personally going to every village. He was multiplying his efforts by equipping disciples to go share the gospel and establish churches, evidenced by the churches of Asia represented in Revelation. Equipping existing believers is a recognition that the Great Commission belongs to everyone, and especially to the indigenous church.
- **Relationship precedes strategy.** If equipping local fellowships is merely “strategic” for your personal objectives, you will not get far. If you do not truly love those you equip and hope to labor alongside, the church and the world will not recognize your efforts (John 13:35).
- **Look for overlapping vision.** Do not merely recruit for your own vision but be willing to serve the vision of the local churches you train. At the same time, do not lose sight of God’s vision of reaching

every tribe, tongue, and nation. Paul did not use churches to accomplish his own mission, but rather invited churches into the mission of God (Rom. 15:18–24). If churches simply want to grow their church, give them some tools. However, intentionally invest your life in those that desire to fulfill the Great Commission.

- **It is worth the security risk.** In many countries, our days are numbered the moment we enter the field. The amount of time that we can remain in a country is unpredictable, creating a distinct disadvantage to seeing movement. Local believers already are naturally connected to lost people in their community and have a burden for their friends and family to be saved. They will likely spend their whole life in the target field, making it worth any amount of risk to invest in them as co-workers.
- **Always network.** Try to meet a lot of believers and ask about their vision. If you network enough and ask the right questions, you will find believers that have a vision outside of the “four walls” of their church. While we tend to focus on bigger groups and resources that may make a bigger impact, larger organizations and denominations require a much longer time investment and have more hurdles to mobilizing their people to make disciples. I would suggest starting with smaller, under-served entities.
- **Serve local churches and commit to those that co-labor in the “work.”** Paul did not want to take John Mark on the second journey because he did not go with them in the “work” (Acts 15:37–38). However, Paul later wrote Timothy asking him to bring John Mark with him because he is “*useful to me for the ministry*” (2 Tim. 4:11). Know what you are looking for in a co-worker before you invest heavily in someone. We may have to give some people time to faithfully labor on their own, then circle back around to see if they are doing the “work.” This is not due to a lack of love for those leaders, but a greater conviction to ensure the gospel gets to those that have yet to hear. Be willing to give space for potential leaders to incubate, while you remain focused on the task of making disciples.

- **Continue in personal evangelism and disciple-making.** Neglecting your own disciple-making for the sake of teaching and training will always have a negative effect on those you are equipping. Practically, the number of seeds you are personally sowing will diminish as you begin to spend time catalyzing others to sow. But personal obedience in disciple-making should never cease altogether. Maintaining your own practices of sharing the gospel and making disciples will always have a positive impact on those you are equipping.
- **Reject cynicism.** You will meet leaders that just want to gather resources to build their own ministry. It may lead you to feel like you are viewed as just another funding source. This can easily cause some to become cynical of existing believers and churches. We must reject that negative view of God's people and remember that there is always a remnant that will obey the Great Commission and multiply. When you find those faithful co-workers, it will be worth the effort. If you embrace a cynical view of the church, you run the risk of becoming more characterized by bitterness than love.
- **Train broadly.** My wife and I trained roughly 600 believers in our first two years on the field in South Asia. We taught believers to pray for their family, community, or social network,¹⁸ share their testimony and gospel, and start a Discovery Bible Study (DBS) with any who believed or were open to learning more. Out of those we trained, we found one person that had a vision to multiply groups. Within six months, he went from one church to six. After a year, he had over fifteen house churches.¹⁹ Three years later, he has three generations of churches. It turns out that people desiring to multiply know others

18 Among Disciple Making Movements (DMM) practitioners, this is commonly referred to as their oikos, from the Greek word often translated in our English Bibles as "household."

19 The working definition of church being used is as follows: a minimum of three baptized believers meeting regularly together for the purpose of obeying Jesus and living out the essential identity and functions of a healthy church as seen in Acts 2:37-47. Though this is a minimum, the majority of house churches in our work range from 20-40 people per gathering.

desiring to multiply. Through this brother we were connected to other networks at varying levels of growth. Over the past four years, we have had the joy of watching those networks plant a few thousand house churches.

We could have easily given up after training thirty people. We could have gotten so focused on those that were not multiplying that we would have never met the one faithful co-worker that opened up opportunities for our growing network of expat and indigenous co-workers. You will have to train many to find the few to invest in deeply.

- **Use Money Wisely.** There are a lot of differing philosophies about funding indigenous co-workers, most of which come with strong convictions (and opinions). I think there are two extremes to watch out for: overusing funding and avoiding any funding. We forget that those of us laboring as expats usually cost a lot more and tend to be a lot less effective than our indigenous brothers and sisters.

If we do decide to utilize funds in some capacity, it should be a goal to be on a path toward indigenous sustainability. If the money were cut off tomorrow, is there a feasible chance that the amount could be raised indigenously? If the answer is no, then I need to carefully evaluate my use of money.

On the other hand, I need to evaluate if my avoidance of leveraging God's resources is slowing gospel progress. I can ask: Are there strategic gospel opportunities we are not pursuing because of my hesitancy to give the necessary funds? Keep in mind, "strategic" opportunity implies an alignment with the strategy and ministry philosophy of the team. For example, helping a co-worker go train a church in a target area aligns with our ministry philosophy, whereas building church buildings and other physical infrastructure to attain gospel access to a community may not.

As with most pursuits to multiply disciples and churches: fail fast, fail early, and fail forward. The best way to learn how to partner with the existing church is to start networking and training existing churches and believers that have a vision to reach their community. As you cling to God's Word, the Spirit will teach you countless lessons to help you do the "work" more effectively.

The reality is that the laborers are few, not because they do not exist already, but because in most contexts they have not been mobilized towards the plentiful harvest. Paul showed us the balance of staying devoted to the "work" while inviting others to imitate his example. As he discovered those willing to co-labor, he recruited them to the apostolic task of laying foundations and nurturing the growth.

As we make disciples in the power of the Spirit, we can be confident knowing there is clear practical reasoning and biblical precedent for pursuing partnerships with co-workers in the establishment of local churches among every people and place. The Great Commission will only be completed by unleashing the laity and it is our privilege to equip them for such service.

Questions for Discussion

- Discuss Robert's biblical framework for "the Work" and recruiting "co-workers." What are its strengths and best insights? Is there anything you would either add or push back on?
- Which of Robert's practical guidelines are most useful and relevant in your context? What additional questions or ideas does this article spark for you?

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