

SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation



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Local-Expat Partnership in Frontier Church Planting

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Local-Expat Partnership in Frontier Church Planting

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Editorial



Editorial: A Bird's-Eye View of the Issue

By S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), lead editor of Seedbed, is a church planter with Pioneers in the Middle East, where he and his wife have served since 2015. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of [Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm](#) (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.



To what extent—and how—should we partner with near-culture believers in frontier church planting? In previous eras, frontier mission largely revolved around the activity of the cross-cultural church planter, while contemporary approaches emphasize the strategic value of equipping and mobilizing local leaders and disciples to fulfill the Great Commission. What is the ideal role for cross-cultural workers today, and how should they engage in partnership with local and near-culture believers in the task?

In our first issue of 2022, *Seedbed* offers the following articles from frontier practitioners who have wrestled with and engaged in the topic and practice of local-expat partnership.

- A practitioner in South Asia who has seen multiple generations of disciples draws from an in-depth biblical study and his own experience to [offer](#) a biblical framework and practical tips for mobilizing existing believers for the apostolic “work,” rooted in the pattern of the post-Pentecost church and Paul’s apostolic team.

- Another practitioner in South Asia [shares](#) about his paradigm shift regarding the use of finances in partnering with local MBBs, offering several case studies as well as a reassessment of the key concepts of “three-self” and patron-client relationships.
- Two female practitioners—a leader and a local field worker with combined experience in Central Asia and Africa—[co-narrate and reflect on](#) a case study of local-expat partnership in Kenya which yielded authentic community, freedom from addiction, and deep relational transformation, all within the framework of grace- and obedience-oriented discipleship in reproducing church movements.
- A practitioner who networks with local churches in South Asia [shares](#) lessons from his CP team’s failure-and-success story of moving from strained relationships with the local body to reconciliation, spiritual growth, and deepening bonds of mutual love.
- A pastor-practitioner [reflects on](#) his diverse experiences of pursuing a vision of multiplication in partnership with Arab churches in the Middle East, addressing common concerns, challenges, and questions about when partnership is not feasible; and commending the benefits of partnership to multiply churches in challenging places.
- In a three-part series, two experienced scholar-practitioners draw from their original research to [dialogue](#) about their different perspectives—DMM/catalytic versus traditional, pioneer church planting—on the role of expatriate disciplers in frontier kingdom work.

Our goal is to encourage and stimulate constructive conversations among practitioners from a variety of perspectives, and thus we are pleased to feature a final piece which continues a conversation from our previous issue. In this patchwork article, four members of the [Motus Dei Network](#) interact with and share diverse reflections inspired by Jon T.’s [“Proclamational” DBS: Biblical Preaching and Teaching in Discovery Bible Studies](#)” from *Seedbed’s Fall 2021 issue*.

One of our [book reviews](#) (on *Supernatural* by Heiser) continues a theme (spiritual warfare) from [recent Seedbed issues](#), while the

remaining reviews offer a frontier practitioner's angle on four books which impinge upon local-expat partnership in various ways.

- *Leading Cross-Culturally* by Lingenfelter gets into the messy details of multi-cultural teams and leadership dynamics.
- *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions* by Dent dives into the biblical meaning and role of "apostle" and how it relates to pioneer church planting.
- *Paul's Missionary Methods* by Plummer and Terry is a compendium of essays on the legacy and principles of Roland Allen which revolutionized how expat workers engage with local believers and leaders.
- *Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity* by Ott offers an historical perspective of how key events and eras in mission have successively shaped and transformed the understanding and praxis of cross-cultural workers.

We always appreciate feedback and interaction from our readers. You are most welcome to reach us on [the Seedbed website](https://seedbedjournal.com) or by email (editor@seedbedjournal.com) with your thoughts, push-back, and creative ideas.

Please share this resource broadly and invite your colleagues, teammates, and networks to join the conversation. We hope and pray that *Seedbed* will stimulate some lively, insight-producing discussions (and healthy debates!) with your co-laborers in your context which result in more biblically robust and fruit-yielding service for the glory of our King.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

S.T. Antonio

Lead Editor, *Seedbed*

Articles



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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To Fund or Not to Fund? Challenges and Opportunities in Partnering with Local Believers in South Asia

by William Jackson

William Jackson (pseudonym) has been engaged in church planting among Muslims in South Asia since 2012. He and his family live in a restrictive-access country. William taught English to college-age students and now works in a missional business. William is passionate about evangelism, church formation, vision, strategy, and the development of people around him.

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“I will never use finances with locals in ministry.” I said those words with conviction prior to moving to South Asia in 2012. I wrote papers on the subject, recruited team members with this idea in mind, and preached this model for years. Among missionaries in our host country, our team was in the minority opinion as we chose to work within this model. I desired this approach because negative use of finances was at the heart of numerous issues and unreliable reports of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) in my host country. Determined to never create dependency, I swung the pendulum and became ultraconservative as I cited my favored missiologists and sociological principles to prove my points. However, I eventually realized that my position, though well meaning, was an overcorrection which limited legitimate ways I might partner with local believers in our frontier church-planting situation.

In 2017, after five years of field ministry, God taught me the challenges I would likely continue to face without a local partner and coworker in the gospel. In our host country there are several thousand scattered Muslim-Background Believers (MBBs) and a much lower number who

are qualified for ministry. House churches exist in small pockets with many MBBs scattered in villages throughout the country. These house churches are often uninterested and unable to send their own people to plant churches within the country. This predicament raised important questions to answer: How do you partner well with MBBs when finances are an inevitable issue to address? Do you ignore this challenge or work within it?

In this article, I share my journey of entering into partnership with a qualified, local MBB in order to plant a church and the challenges I encountered when I refused to include finances. I offer several examples of partnership, both good and bad, and the lessons gleaned from those. I also discuss some important missiological principles and possible misunderstandings which limit fruitful partnerships in church planting. Finally, I highlight the biblical and leadership principles God used to convince me to use finances in partnership with local MBBs and how that relationship has worked thus far. My goal is to encourage other missionaries working within the patron-client framework to be unafraid to engage in healthy partnerships with local MBBs so that God-honoring churches are planted.

A Bad Example of Partnership

Todd, a new missionary to our host country, wanted to follow his agency's methodology of paying local believers to do ministry.¹ This agency previously divided up the country among their five to seven missionary families, with a commendable goal to see churches planted in each region. However, strategy and methodology is where danger loomed. Todd was responsible for fulfilling his agency's goal in a region of more than 40 million people. He opened a map, found out how many districts and subdistricts were in the region, and employed seven local MBBs to preach the gospel, disciple new believers, and provide leadership in the area.

1 All names of people and organizations are changed to protect their identity.

Our team was initially excited that one of these local MBBs, Masum, would move to our city and perhaps partner with our church-planting team. Unfortunately, Masum did not work well with one of the existing local believers, and conflict soon ensued. Several months later, while our family was on home assignment, Todd wanted Masum to see the work going on in our city. Through Masum, Todd paid local village believers to travel to his house for a Bible study and a meal. When they gathered, pictures were taken, causing local believers to feel cheap and used. The local believers confided in us that they thought Todd and Masum were buying conversions.

Within a few months Masum moved to his hometown while keeping a small apartment in our city. He would visit our city a few days a month, but it was primarily to give the impression that he was engaged in church planting there.

When I found out Masum was deceiving Todd, I confronted Masum and encouraged him to fulfill his job (and ministry) and be honest with Todd. Masum listed several excuses for his deception and did not address his dishonesty with Todd. Eventually, I explained the situation to Todd; he said he would look into the matter, although he never contacted me afterward. Because Todd did not live in our city, he was not able to provide accountability in his partnerships, and their ministry suffered.

We can glean important lessons from this bad example of partnership.

- **Transactionary relationships are not partnerships.** Todd paid evangelists to do a job, and they felt obligated to produce. Partnership does not mean “employing” a local for ministry. Money will not automatically lead to churches planted. God gives us money to steward and use for his kingdom. We must be careful so that we do not send the message that godliness is a means to financial gain (1 Tim. 6:3–9).
- **Lack of accountability can lead to abuse.** This principle applies to most areas of life, but especially ministry. When we are not in

accountable, healthy relationships, abuse or sin can easily occur. When Masum moved out of our city, Todd did not know this, even though Masum filled in monthly ministry reports. Todd failed to have a genuine accountability relationship with Masum, and Masum didn't respect Todd's leadership in his life. To Masum, church planting was merely a job and income source, and this led to him abusing his ministry position.

- **Foreigners need local language and culture skills when working in partnerships.** Expats should not rush into partnership with a local believer merely because their missions agency or denomination wants them to. It is naive to believe that one can work well with someone they cannot communicate with or whose ministry context they cannot understand (1 Cor. 14:9-10). Foreigners ought to spend several years in their host country before engaging in such partnerships themselves (or apart from an experienced team).
- **Making numbers a primary thing does not lead to quality disciples.** Missionaries using finances to merely hire people to build God's church can be focused on productivity and numerical growth. They want a return on investment. I'm not opposed to keeping track of where believers are and how many churches have been planted, but we must always be faithful to preserve quality disciples.

A Good Example of Partnership

In 2017, our team was in our fifth year of ministry. During a team meeting we discussed frustrations about a lack of spiritual fruit and how we had labored in this city for years without seeing a church planted. We decided we would continue praying and reach out to more seasoned missionaries in country for advice. I emailed four families with more than 200 years of combined ministry experience. Each family responded with stories of how they worked closely in a financial partnership with a local MBB and saw fruitfulness, and each encouraged us to prayerfully

consider how we could do the same. I will share one such story from their experience.

In the western part of our host country, gospel ministry has occurred for more than three decades. In the 1980s, the Smiths were approached by an MBB (and gifted evangelist named Uncle Star) who had previous experience working with a Christian missions agency in country. After that employment, Uncle Star worked with his brother as a business owner and sought to share the gospel with his contacts and friends. Unfortunately, Uncle Star's brother ran off with a woman and took all the business's money, leaving Uncle Star with little hope for employment. (Our country has significant struggles with unemployment and corruption, often crippling the labor market and making it unfair for those without large amounts of financial resources willing to pay bribes for jobs.)

Thankfully, Uncle Star had a wife with a stable job, but he would need extra assistance if he were to regularly follow up with seekers and new believers. The Smiths and another family decided they would partner with Uncle Star to plant churches. Their partnership included financial resources given to pay for gospel literature and travel costs. Accountability and follow-up were also built into the relationship. The Smiths would travel with Uncle Star occasionally and see how ministry was going. Through three decades of ministry, Uncle Star and the Smiths have seen several hundred people either profess faith in Christ or remain seekers. Several house churches have formed in one city and several believers' groups meet in surrounding villages. The Smiths and their foreign church planting team have worked alongside Uncle Star and the believers (particularly the youth) throughout this time.

The Smiths believe their model of partnerships can work well across South Asia when we apply the following principles:

- **Proven faithfulness.** Work with local believers who have already proven themselves fruitful and faithful. Trusted local believers should

affirm the godly character of the local MBB though shared ministry, just like we see with Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:2).

- **Close working relationship.** Maintain a close personal and working relationship between the local MBB and the foreigner. The work should be done together and a simple form of record keeping should occur to ensure accountability. Preferably, both parties would live in the same town and share life and ministry together (1 Thess. 2:7–8).
- **Utilization of one another's strengths.** A mutually dependent relationship where both the local and foreigner have gifts to contribute to the relationship and ministry is ideal. Smith says this about his partnership. "Often that was Bible knowledge and strong moral values on the foreigner's part and cultural values and relational skills on the local's part" (Smith 2021).

Misunderstood Missiological Concept: The Three-Self Principles

Throughout my journey in understanding how successful cross-cultural ministry partnerships with local MBBs work, the missiological concept of three-self principles caused an unnecessary misunderstanding and barrier. John Nevius, a missionary to China in the 1800s, desired to establish self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting churches (Boston University). These three-self principles have guided many missionaries over the years and are certainly noble characteristics that healthy churches have.

An unanswered question for me is this: at what point should these characteristics (or principles) begin? Should the three-self principles begin pre-church, or when churches are officially formed, or sometime in the future? I would propose that these principles might not begin on day one of the church-planting effort, but rather are characteristics that missionaries should work toward. Based on my experience in South Asia, I think they are not achievable from day one of church planting.

For example, an outside church planter in a foreign field must propagate the gospel among a people because there are no believers. Does this mean he or she doesn't affirm that a future church should self-propagate the gospel in the future? No. Equally, an outside church planter must provide inherent spiritual leadership among them as people come to Christ and are discipled and the leadership is formed. This doesn't mean the missionary is to remain forever, but in the initial stages he or she is "governing" (and should do this according to biblical practices).

If we are willing to accept that missionaries must at first propagate the gospel and provide leadership ("govern"), then we might also assume it is acceptable to provide financial support (within healthy boundaries). Of course, abuse can happen in any of the three-self principles, and a foreign church planter must be Spirit-driven and work with many counselors in a frontier context (Prov. 15:22).

Sociological Framework: Patron-Client Relationship

The patron-client relationship has existed in South Asia (and other parts of the world) for at least 2,000 years. Most Westerners think of this relationship as a boss-employee relationship where true friendship is removed. This understanding could lead to possible abuses and situations where, like Todd and Masum, missionaries hire local MBBs to "do" ministry (like a job). That is neither a God-honoring nor healthy understanding of the patron-client relationship. I have known many Western missionaries that wished the patron-client relationship did not exist. Some missionaries, however, are beginning to recognize the biblical roots and positive possibilities of patron-client relations (Tino 2008).

Several biblical scholars assert that the patron-client relationship is evident in God's relationship with Jesus and his followers in the Gospel of Matthew (Howell and Montgomery 2019, 130). In this relationship God

is the ultimate patron who blesses those who have a relationship with him through his Son. His children receive grace (a free gift) and, in return, honor God as his clients by giving their lives as a spiritual sacrifice to Him (Rom. 12:1). Throughout Matthew, we see Jesus teaching the crowds to live as clients of their heavenly Father, who as their patron will provide for their needs as they seek his kingdom above all else (Matt. 6:33). Those that are poor are actually honored and blessed (Matt. 5:3), those that yoke themselves to Christ will find peace (Matt. 11:28–29), and those that are faithful in this life will enter into their “master’s happiness” (Matt. 25:23). Matthew demonstrates that God, as the heavenly patron, bestows grace and blessing upon his children. As his clients, they get all the benefits of the patronage (God’s kingdom) as they accept and honor God with their lives.

In our host country, wealthy and well-connected relatives are often seen as patrons to their less wealthy relatives. Thus extended families help one another so that younger members are developed in a variety of ways. As a result, citizens of our host country typically view Western missionaries as potential patrons. Western missionaries are assumed to be rich, and therefore many locals who are impoverished seek to become their clients.

While this tendency can lead to disastrous situations, if we believe that this form of relationship has roots which can be used in God’s kingdom, we will not be as likely to reactively throw it away. Instead we will seek to use it to honor and bless those who have come to Christ. Westerners can use this form of relationship with their resources (e.g., biblical knowledge, experience, finances, etc.) to bless those who have local resources (e.g., insider knowledge, language, cultural experience, etc.) to form a God-honoring patron-client relationship with local MBBs.

The Reality of the Apostle Phase

Many of us would love a godly person to work alongside that is independently fully funded—or healthy local churches that have built

up members from within their church body to send to plant churches. This is a noble desire, but is it appropriate and realistic in frontier church-planting contexts where corruption and high unemployment exist? Are we asking something that was rarely demonstrated in the book of Acts and Paul's apostolic ministry?

Don Dent describes the Apostle Phase of ministry as one where God sends an apostolic person (or team) to lay a foundation upon Christ in an unchurched area (2019, chap. 3, "The Apostle Phrase Described"). He believes apostles are needed until Christ returns because they play a vital leadership role and are a gift to God's church (Chapter Summaries, para. 5, Eph. 4:11). When our team began prayerfully searching for a local MBB to partner with in church planting, we asked numerous people who had connections with twenty to thirty house churches, but no church was willing to send or recommend anyone. In frontier contexts, there is no mature local church among the focused people group, and thus outside church planters are needed to plant churches. This effort might include partnerships with trusted locals. What I have learned is that such partnering may also include a financial dimension.

Paul and His Coworkers

When Paul planted churches, he worked with a variety of people—men and women, Jews and Gentiles (Romans 16). One type of relationship we see Paul develop in his discipleship of others is the sponsor- or mentor-apprentice relationship. In this relationship, the sponsor has resources the mentee or apprentice needs in order to develop and fulfill the purpose of the church or organization (Clinton and Stanley 1992, chap. 8, "A Timely Sponsor"). Sponsors or mentors see a ministry apprentice that could be developed into a leader within the church and use their resources to build the apprentice up and release him or her in the future.

The clearest example in scripture of the sponsor/mentor model is seen with Paul and Timothy (Acts 16). Paul (sponsor/mentor) assumes leadership over Timothy (apprentice) because of Timothy's godly

reputation. Timothy does not have the resources yet to be a church leader but will gain them by seeing and hearing Paul conduct ministry (2 Tim. 2:2). Since Timothy is most likely in his teens when he meets Paul (Acts 16:1 and 1 Tim. 4:12), Paul probably provides for Timothy's financial needs while they minister together.

I conclude that Paul was both a client to Phoebe (Rom. 16:1–2) as well as a patron to Timothy in the spread of the gospel. If the New Testament uses this relationship for church-planting purposes, I believe we can too. Perhaps God is calling church-planting teams to be a sponsor/mentor to qualified men and women so that they will take on future church leadership. Accomplishing this vision takes determination, hard work, and an apostolic mindset.

Our Example and a Proposed Model

I have sought to demonstrate that there are good examples of partnership that affirm solid missiological principles and use the patron-client relationship for godly purposes. When I solidified these lessons for myself, I was convinced that God gave me the green light to use finances in a partnership with a local MBB. After hearing from the Smiths, we began a relationship with a former imam (Ahmed) who came to Christ in 2015. This couple had observed Ahmed for one or two years and felt he had character qualities and ministry skills that could be used well within church planting in our host country.

Ahmed had endured persecution after fleeing his former job in a mosque and faced anger from his father. He proved his commitment to Christ through much opposition. Ahmed had no church experience because there was no local church in his area. However, he had completed a two-year Bible certificate program in country and the leaders there spoke highly of him. When our team prayed about working with him, we decided we wanted him to be a full-fledged team member, not a mere addition to the team working on the side.

We invited him to work with us in 2019, and he joined us in December of that year. Currently Ahmed participates in team meetings and earns a salary by working part-time in our NGO project and part-time in ministry. This identity is exactly the same as each foreign team member has. The salary he earns is raised through Western churches and individuals, just like our support is. His salary is managed through the NGO, so he has no direct contact with donors. In Ahmed's culture, money is not an easy topic to talk about. However, he has said he is happy with this arrangement and glad for this means of financial provision which allows him to work with us.

It is worth noting that his salary is lower than he previously earned as an imam, just like our salaries are lower as church planters than if we worked in another job in our home countries. We believe this is another indicator of Ahmed's willingness to sacrifice for the gospel. In our two years of partnership, Ahmed has led several people to the Lord and is discipling them (in spite of the COVID pandemic). He provides our team with a rich insider perspective we Western missionaries do not have. Thus far this partnership is bearing fruit that our team had not seen previously.

Conclusion

For me, it took field experience to learn that bad examples of partnerships using finances does not mean one should not engage in such relationships at all. Rather, we have seen God use finances for the building up of his kingdom, even finances that might flow across the expat-local divide. By developing a more biblical missiology, we have seen that the patron-client relationship can be redeemed for God's glory.

A word of caution is in order. Each missionary or church-planting team should prayerfully consider the points above and be sure to work in a unified manner based upon their context. Each situation is different, and each person's comfort with using finances in ministry will vary, and

that is OK. I believe God works in a multitude of ways to see his church established globally.

Questions for Discussion

- Do you agree with William's overall argument and rationale for the use of finances in partnership with local believers? Explain your perspective.
- What good and bad examples of financial partnership are you personally aware of? What lessons can be learned from these examples?

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Partnering in Obedience, Partnering in Grace

By Pam Arlund and Ruth Njagi

Pam Arlund, PhD, is a member of the International Leadership Team of All Nations. Pam has been a field missionary in Central Asia, helping unreached peoples to hear and fall in love with the true story of Jesus Christ. She now travels widely, training, equipping, and encouraging anyone (big or small!) who wants to learn to share the love of Jesus. She lives in Kansas City, MO, with her mom, a really great housemate, and two cats.

Ruth Njagi is passionate about helping facilitate healing for people lost in addiction. Through discipleship and counseling, she has seen many individuals in Kenya and elsewhere in the world walk and find freedom in Christ. She is an All Nations' field worker based in Nairobi, Kenya under the Kampala hub.

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A key aspect of most church planting movements is obedience-focused discipleship. This discipleship model stresses that following Jesus is primarily about living in loving obedience to Jesus and His commands rather than simply gaining head knowledge of Jesus. In this model, new believers might not have very much knowledge about Jesus yet, but they are invited to live in practical obedience to what they do know.

Partnering in obedience-focused discipleship can have many advantages in cross-cultural relationships. It creates the ultimate level playing field for all believers, stressing that all believers fail. Missionaries fail. Baby believers fail. All believers fail. However, when they do, they all receive grace, acceptance, restoration, and ministry. Over time, all believers also share victories through these struggles.

Thus, obedience-focused discipleship, coupled with grace, has the potential to remove many of the unhealthy dynamics of the patron-client relationship in cross-cultural ministry. In a patron-client ministry relationship, one party (usually the missionary) is expected to give or provide spiritually (and not receive). On the other hand, the second party (usually the local) is expected to gratefully receive spiritually (and not to give). This means the missionary would not confess their sins to the locals because that would show the missionary is weak and would need to receive, rather than give.

However, all of humanity is bound together by our shared need for God. Although doctrinally we agree that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23), our cross-cultural partnerships rarely seem to show this. Obedience-focused discipleship is one of the vehicles that helps restore relationships by building them on a shared need to obey Jesus and our shared need to receive grace when we do not obey. These cross-cultural partnering relationships, formed through the lens of obedience-focused discipleship, are then based on a shared weakness before God rather than one party being weak while the other is strong. It is this shared weakness (all have sinned) that restores kingdom order and leads to greater opportunities to experience grace and true Christ-centered (grace-centered) community.

In this short article, we concentrate on one case study in cross-cultural partnership. We hope to show how obedience-focused discipleship made a difference in changing the nature of the partnership and how this change brought wholeness, healing, and belonging to all parties. Although we recognize the diversity of experiences and contexts among the mission community, we offer this particular story as an illuminating example of what we believe is possible in many places.

Pursuing Wholeness Together

Sexual wholeness has been a challenge for followers of Jesus. Churches sometimes struggle to talk about the topic and often do not know how to address issues of pornography and other sexual addictions in appropriate and nurturing ways.

In 2017, the Lord called Ruth Njagi, a single Kenyan woman, to “go public” with her struggle with pornography (Njagi 2017). She wrote a book and began to speak out publicly about her addiction, one that she struggled with even as a believer. She knew she needed to live out James 5:16 to get free: *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”* (NIV). The problem was she did not have a safe place to confess her sins, feeling that confessing to other believers would lead to shame rather than healing.

Enter on to the scene an American missionary couple seeking to ignite church-planting movements in Kenya. They understood their job as helping people to live in loving obedience to Jesus and His commands (John 14:15).

Ruth eventually connected with this missionary family and joined the church-planting movements training they were offering. Ruth felt called to share about her addiction with her fellow church-planting students, but she was still afraid she would find condemnation rather than restoration.

When Ruth began to hear about obedience-focused discipleship, she felt this group of believers might be a place of healing for her, and she eventually decided to confess her struggle with pornography. When she did, she found something different than in previous Christian groups she had been a part of.

This group celebrated Ruth, even when she failed completely. Then, they would pray for her to find obedience going forward. They told her

that God loved her even when she lived in partial obedience and God even loved her in complete failure. They praised her for being vulnerable and honest with the church and for being willing to try again. She found a safe place to belong. In addition, the missionaries who were the trainers shared their life struggles vulnerably with the group. This was a different kind of leadership than Ruth had seen modeled before.

During discussions about obedience in which every church member participated as a part of regular church gatherings, Ruth discovered that grace abounded in a way she had never experienced before in other churches she had attended. She found a place built around shared weakness rather than shared strength. Neither she nor the missionary were expected to follow Jesus perfectly. However, both she and the missionary shared their weaknesses and sins, and both she and the missionary also received grace. Ruth grew in Christ. Sometimes she slipped back and failed, but she always came back to Christ and to this small church.

Discipleship Defined: Deliberate and Costly

Often, church-planting movements have been criticized for shallow discipleship. However, look at how Ruth defines discipling as she experienced it in the midst of a church-planting movement: "Discipling is the act of deliberately teaching someone how to live out their Christianity, taking the time to pray, guide, celebrate success and partial obedience, offering support over a long time, and walking the journey with someone through everything. It means being available and taking time to be with someone else to ensure their spiritual growth" (Njagi 2017, 87).

Ruth's definition hardly seems like shallow discipleship. It seems labor and time intensive. It seems relationally intense. It seems messy. It highlights a constellation of related outgrowths of obedience-focused discipleship that creates a strong framework for believers to grow. We will unpack this definition below.

The first aspect of Ruth's definition is that discipleship is *deliberate*. This small church not only cared for each other, they learned how to share their faith and lives with others. This involved practicing telling "Jesus stories" from the Bible and actively praying for opportunities to share Jesus. The missionaries even provided special trainings to help people *"always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect"* (1 Pet. 3:15). All church members knew and studied Luke 10 as a life pattern, learning to offer peace to everyone they met in accordance with Jesus' instructions.

The second key aspect of Ruth's definition of discipleship is *time*. In fact, Ruth makes an effort to point out this key aspect in multiple ways in her definition: "taking the time to pray," "offering support over a long time," and "taking time to be with someone else."

In a recent conversation in the Motus Dei research network ([discussed](#) in this issue of *Seedbed*), Sandro Oliveira, a Global South practitioner in the Global North, had this observation about the issue of time in the life of churches in his home culture versus in the West:

I have observed that, for a good number of believers in the West, the Sunday service tends to be the only "church activity" of the week. Now, I understand things are done differently from community to community and denomination to denomination. However, based on my personal experience and observation from serving in England, what I have observed is true for a large part of the church membership, particularly among reformed congregations. In the Global South, however, as I have experienced it, church is more of a whole-life experience. When you come to Christ, you are brought into a new "family." In this context, relationships are very close and people spend a huge amount of time together. There are also numerous church activities throughout the week. Because of the constant interaction a believer

has with his/her community of faith, learning and transformation is not taught, but modelled, encouraged, and expected.

Churches in the West often only spend one to two hours per week together. In addition, Westerners often struggle to find time to rest, honor the Sabbath, or carry out the “one anothers” of Scripture. Although many popular Christian books in the West are about resting, slowing down, and Sabbath rest, many Western believers still find little time to rest and be with their fellow church members outside of the weekly gathering.

We personally do not know of any church in any movement where church members spend only one or two hours together on a weekly basis. Movement-based churches are typically in each other’s homes and lives together on a regular (usually daily) basis. They know each other’s families, children, and lives. There is little or no room to remain anonymous or to hide in a small community-based church.

One aspect of movement-based churches that helps facilitate this sharing of time is the convenient location of many movement churches. Movements typically consist of many small neighborhood-based churches. This means that church members are able to “pop in” to say hello, to check on one another, watch each other’s kids, or simply chat and process the issues of their lives. The size and location of the churches means church members are known by each other. Unlike large churches, no one participating in the church meeting can do so anonymously.

As one begins to reflect on practical realities such as global urbanization and the grid-locked traffic of many cities, the need for many small local churches becomes even more apparent, since churches that are far away simply become impossible for people to participate in. Transportation across the world’s mega cities is often too expensive and time consuming for church members. A church in every neighborhood

provides access to the gospel and to the local church body life that large gatherings simply cannot offer.

Discipleship That Heals

Much has been written about social-networking theory in movements. These discussions are usually in the context of allowing the gospel to spread quickly through entire networks of people. These are discussions we applaud and hope to encourage. However, too little discussion has been related to the power of social-networking theory to bring healing and restoration in a broken world. In the power of community, people are healed.

The promise of James 5 for healing resides in the phrase “*one another*.” People cannot “*one another*” if they only see each other for an hour or two each week, sit facing each other’s backs, and watch a monologue from a stage.

How much does this matter? Consider some typical global contexts in which we live and work:

- In the ghettos of Kampala, people who are still addicted to drugs are also studying the Bible. They come from backgrounds characterized by abuse, hunger, and gangs.
- In the refugee camps of Europe, Iranians who grew up in an Islamic police-state begin to discover Jesus. They come from backgrounds in which they have been spied on, lied to, and abused.
- In the shadow of Manhattan live various Asians, African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians who come from backgrounds in which they have experienced isolation, abuse, intense pressure to succeed, and fractured relationships with their neighbors.
- In the villages along the Zambezi River are different people groups. They have each been told through colonialism that they are weak and need to be served. As a result, they wait for the church to give them something, believing they are too weak to give. They come from

backgrounds in which their communities are passive, hopeless, often hungry, and often drunk.

What binds the people in these diverse contexts together? We submit that the binding agency is weakness—a shared need for Jesus Christ. However, some of our missions models do not currently reflect this reality. Perhaps one of the reasons many of us do not see the power of Christ we long for is because we do not put this verse to the test: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9).

Ruth highlights how such deep brokenness and pain is approached in a movement context in a third aspect of her definition of discipleship: “walking the journey with someone through everything.” The term “everything” is necessary in this definition. Church-planting movements cannot simply focus on those who are basically already emotionally healthy, well-educated, and already-contributing members of society. This is because the church of Jesus does not have this option available. Jesus was very clear about caring for the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner in our midst (see Isa. 58:6–10; Luke 14:12–14).

For some, this definition of discipleship might seem to be counter-intuitive to the idea that the gospel will run swiftly through a people group in a church-planting movement. It is true that not all members of a church-planting movement are “super spreaders” of the gospel. However, obedience-focused discipleship creates the opportunity for grace to abound while also holding up the goal: being joy-filled believers who share Jesus with others.

This dual focus of being both outward looking (sharing the gospel with new people) and inward looking (shepherding the flock in the midst of their needs) has practical implications for how all believers live out their life in Christ. Such an approach encourages our church members with more inward-facing pastoral gifts to also reach out in evangelism (as a response of obedience to Jesus). Conversely, it encourages those with primarily outward-facing gifts of evangelism to care for the brokenhearted (also as a response of obedience to Jesus).

Although it is true that apostolic teams will likely not deeply meet heart needs themselves (for they have a different gifting), apostolically gifted people cannot ignore these needs in the churches they plant. It is worth noting that attending to these needs could help ignite a hunger for Christ for the first time in some people. When heart healings occur, the power of the Kingdom of God is demonstrated as it transforms individuals. As this transformation is noticed by the community, there is a possibility of increased interest in following Jesus and potentially more churches being planted. This potential increase in new disciples happens because brokenness brought into the kingdom leads to healing—sometimes instantly and sometimes over time—which leads to joy and new proclamations of the gospel.

Grace Abounds

In short, obedience-focused discipleship creates an opportunity to “*prefer one another*” (Rom. 12:10) and to “*bear with one another*” (Eph. 4:2), while at the same time to “*stir up one another to love and good works*” (Heb. 10:24). Only in this environment of a relentless call to obedience to Jesus was Ruth also able to receive relentless grace. Only in this environment was she able to finally gain some victory over her addiction.

In Ruth and the missionary’s relationship, the grace did not flow one direction only. The missionary also received grace and care from a loving community. Ruth credits the missionary’s daughter—who was four at the time—as being one of her major teachers. This also speaks to weakness. A missionary who is operating as a ministry patron probably would not simply invite people to come and be with them in their home while they lived life. However, this missionary needed grace to handle her life circumstances as a mother of children. Thus, Ruth watched and was included in the sometimes “hectic” family life of the missionary, seeing both the good days and the bad days. The foreign missionary needed the local church to make accommodation for her as she included the children in everything and to give her lovingkindness in this area.

Children can be very good at showing and teaching aspects of God's character. However, they have often been seen as a nuisance during times of ministry. And, truthfully, they can be a challenge. Children have often been seen as a hindrance to ministry, a reason to keep women at home and not able to do ministry in public.

This missionary mom simply brought her daughter along and invited others into her home life of raising children. This showed the challenge and chaos of family and parenting. We have seen the power of a woman, with children in tow, to minister to whole families (including men) in a way that no man (without his kids) or single person can do. Whole families ministering to whole families creates a "real world" relatableness that in and of itself is healing to tired parents. It also addresses the need of a world that is overwhelmingly under the age of eighteen to also have an opportunity to come to Christ and join a church community.

Weakness is something that all humans share. Victory in Christ, belonging in Christ, and community in Christ are also available to all human beings. However, only sharing victory without sharing weakness may potentially lead to unhealthy Christian relationships, colonialist dynamics, and unhealthy patron-client relationships in mission.

Through obedience-focused discipleship, such relationships can be restored for the mutual benefit of all involved and for the advancement of the kingdom of God. This potentially gives believers of all backgrounds, all socio-economic classes, and with all kinds of addictions the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God on the same footing: as weak people in need of a Savior and a community of grace. This firm foundation can lead to healing, wholeness, and healthy cross-cultural partnerships.

Questions for Discussion

- In what ways does Ruth's experience in community connect with your own experience? What are the most important lessons and applicable insights for your own life and work in your context?

- What do you think of the Pam and Ruth's understanding of obedience-focused discipleship? In your view, how do obedience, grace, and discipleship relate to one another?

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“You are Not Good Partners”: Lessons from the Failures and Growth of a Church-Planting Team

By Brian C.

Brian C., an American of European descent, is a coach, trainer, painter, and songwriter who has lived and ministered in Southeast Asia since 2006 with his wife and three children. His primary experiences in church planting are in mobilizing, training, coaching, and networking with local and indigenous brothers and sisters.

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As we walked into the room, we immediately knew from the chair arrangement that this was going to be a very different sort of meeting. We had partnered with this denomination for four years to train Bible-college students and coach their local church-planting team, and we were accustomed to abruptly called meetings with the president and other leaders of the denomination. We had thought the partnership was going well overall, despite occasional misunderstandings. But as we faced the four main leaders directly across from us, the president of the denomination said, “You are not good partners. You don’t attend church activities. We have tried to tell you multiple times, but you are not capable of understanding. So we can’t sponsor your visa anymore.”

In our hearts we rationalized and defended ourselves. “What do they mean, ‘We’ve been trying to tell you’?” we protested in outrage. “We’ve done everything they asked us to do!” We commiserated together in frustration and anger because they did not understand our intentions. Their words hit us like a battering ram, and we felt like helpless victims.

Over the following months, we were able to reconcile our relationship. For the past seven years, our team has had the joy and struggle of discovering both what caused our inability to be good partners and what can be done to nurture partnerships that are healthy for both expat and local brothers and sisters in Christ. Relationships, however, are not linear. So allow me to introduce two dear friends and share the most significant stories and lessons we learned through them. It is my wish that though your context may differ from ours, you may be able to see some similar patterns in your context and possibly in your heart as well.

Mike: A Local Church Planter

The first day we met Mike, we sat around a circular table in a dark room with a noisy air conditioner that couldn't possibly keep such a large room cool. Like many local (non-indigenous) Christians in the area, Mike was born on another island, where his ethnic group was majority Christian.¹ He moved to our city to attend the Bible school affiliated with the denomination which had recently started sponsoring our visa. But unlike most non-indigenous, local Christians, Mike felt called to church planting among the indigenous Muslim people groups. The leaders of the denomination knew that we wanted to work with local church planters, so they introduced us. It never seemed quite clear to us what the leaders were hoping, but at the very least we began a relationship together.

It didn't take long to realize that Mike was difficult to pin down. He spoke circularly – meaning that his point was not made at the last sentence of his story but throughout the anecdote that he shared. As

1 When I use the term "local" in this article, I am referring to a national citizen of the country in which we work. When I use the term "indigenous," I am referring to people whose ethnic heritage is uniquely attached to the area—one whose ancestors are originally from that area. An indigenous person has a very different view of their area than one who is simply of the same nationality, or born in the same city, and yet of a very different ethnicity. As such, an expat's relationship/partnership with a brother or sister who is indigenous may look very different from a partnership with those who are "local" but not indigenous. For that reason, I make this distinction in the retelling of my experiences.

Americans of European descent, we waited with baited breath through his long-drawn-out stories for his conclusion. We always left the time confused. It was even more challenging to us when he spoke in this manner as an answer to what we thought was a pretty simple question.

It took a number of years before his communication started to make sense to us. The aspect of his communication that first became clear was that his stories did in fact contain his answer. Usually there was a person in the story whose behavior in a specific scenario (whether positive or negative) was the principle that he felt we needed to understand. In an honor-shame culture, Mike was uncomfortable speaking ill of us or of anyone else that he saw as an authority figure. We began to understand that when he started speaking in this way, it was because he was uncomfortable with what we were asking. So we stopped asking him direct questions about particular people but about possible scenarios instead.

There was another communication approach of his which we learned to interpret and later to emulate. When a number of people gathered together, after the customary chitchat about ethnicity, family, and work, he would begin the “business” of the meeting by telling a very detailed historical timeline of how each party (individuals or organizations) came into relationship with one another. For example, in the case of a business we started together, he would state in detail who founded it and in what year, who became the next employee, or when another person was incorporated into the group. In the case of a ministry program, he would detail when we first came up with the idea, what we learned from it, what village or church we went to, and how other people joined in. He would then conclude with the last person, who may have even just joined us that particular day for that meeting.

At first, these ways of speaking felt cumbersome and unnecessary to us. I regret to admit that sometimes I even fought anger and frustration. I was ready for us to “get on with it.” Even though my intention was to serve and work together, these responses showed a sense of paternalism

deep in my heart. Whenever communication was cumbersome, I felt they were doing it the wrong way. "If only they gave us the opportunity to lead, if only they let us do it our way, then we would get some momentum," I thought.

Yet today I can't help but smile at the genius and gentleness of Mike's deliberate use of history. As I sat and listened, one day it dawned on me he was creating one narrative incorporating us all. Not only was he telling everyone where they stood in the timeline hierarchy (a common cultural way in our context to communicate who has the authority in the group), but he was also graciously bringing the newest people into the timeline. Our individual stories became one integrated story. It was easy to see from the smiles and laughter that this was a very simple way to start the business off with a very powerful Christian message—unity.

It was also powerful because, as I was to learn, how one begins a meeting signals to the listener what is most important. One day on the way home from a training, a dear indigenous friend and I were debriefing some conversations that we had over the course of the weekend. I remember him feeling uncomfortable about a particular person that we had met and how he spoke too much about money. His response to a clarifying question was a lightbulb moment. He said, "Well, whatever someone leads with tells you what they are most interested in." As I meditated on his response, I became horrified at how often I had fallen into this trap.

I too had been leading with what I cared most about, hadn't I? I had often led with strategy, planning, agendas, and the like. What had that communicated to my brothers and sisters? They always started with family, home, culture, experiences, and stories. I had been exposed. I cared more about ministry than being their friend, and thus I had shown them that I would not be a good partner. Though I had come from a so-called "advanced" nation, Mike and other brothers and sisters were the ones teaching me.

Mike also taught me that no matter how close we became, he would always need to distance himself from me at certain points. At times we'd spend weeks working closely together on a training or some other project for weeks, and then I would not hear from him for two or three months. Many years later, I learned that a number of people from within the denomination still believed that our team (comprised of Americans of European descent) had bought him a motorbike, paid for his house, and given him a salary. We were quite surprised by this because for upwards of ten years, he had been a paid staff member of the denomination.

Finances are, of course, a multifaceted issue. But in this particular case, it was clear that Mike wanted the church to be his patron. Whenever the line became blurry as to who his patron was, he would maintain a distance and invest more fully in his local church. We had to come to terms with the fact that within the honor-shame and patron-client culture of Southeast Asia, we would always be seen as potential patrons. And as such, we needed to give freedom to our brothers and sisters to navigate their relationship with us in a different way than they would with their local or indigenous friends.

Once we had developed a long-term relationship with Mike, which took five years, we understood what our ministry partnership could look like. We often got together on a monthly basis and talked specifically about how to tweak Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). We were struggling to persuade local Christians to see these groups as a legitimate way to disciple Muslims. We began working with Mike to do these groups among the churching in order to see what aspects didn't make sense to them. It became clear that if they wouldn't use them to disciple their own congregations, they certainly wouldn't use them anywhere else either.

We each conducted our own groups and trainings in our own networks and then would meet up together and learn from one another. The DBS format included seven to ten simple questions that functioned as the structure or liturgy of the group meeting. Though the questions

were very simple, we constantly had to edit them to get to the intent of the question. Mike helped us in so many ways to find the right phrases.

I will never forget one time while we were doing training sessions together, Mike came up to me during a break and said, “This is really good. Your training is much better than years ago. But that first question . . . it still doesn’t work.” I was flabbergasted! *How has God blessed you in the last week?* How could that question be too hard? He told me that in the church context the word *blessing* often refers to a financial blessing. Suddenly I understood why 90 percent of the time people would answer the question with stories about insurance payments and surprise discounts, or about someone buying them food.

We learned from him to use a different question all together: “How have you seen God’s goodness in your family this week?” It made all the difference. Within two years, we had adapted our DBS-type groups in significant ways. As a result we began to see churches grasp the process much faster than before. Observing, listening, and learning from Mike was the key. As we got better at understanding Mike’s context and perspective, it helped us to understand the pastors we began partnering with as well.

Harry: A Local Pastor

We first met Harry on an evangelism trip. Our team, along with those on the local church-planting team, made it a habit early on to have a weekly meeting as well as a weekly evangelism push to some new place in the city. Mike, as was his habit, invited other pastors from the denomination who had a heart for evangelism. I realize now that he was not only networking but doing his part to help define the identity of the team.

Our Western team’s involvement in the local church-planting team often caused problems for the individuals on the local team. At the time we were not going to any local church or attending church events

or gatherings. We had been told by our Western leaders to avoid area churches because local Christians “didn’t understand security issues” and “didn’t care about unreached people groups.” Our previous leaders modeled a pattern of doing “house church” with other Westerners for weekly worship. What we did not know was that these actions placed us squarely in the “not safe” box, according to the local church community.

The fateful meeting described earlier and the events that followed taught us that we understood identity very differently, which was a detriment to our relationships. In our Southeast Asian context, community defines your identity. No one simply walks into a new area or town or relationship and has the authority to define themselves. When our team came in and said, “We want to do Muslim church planting,” and “We don’t go to your church but do our own house church instead,” there was no box for that. The local church community decided that we were suspect. In hindsight I would say they were right.

Mike needed to invite others from outside the group. They needed to see that though the Americans were not doing the right thing culturally, the leaders should not be too worried about them and should not ostracize the members of the team. Though it was never communicated that way, I am now positive that this was one of the reasons Harry was there. He could then report back to the head pastor and president of the denomination and put in a good word for the Bible-college students we were training.

But Harry was also there to be a nurturing, mature example for the younger men. He was really impressive. He had a loud preacher-type voice. He was confident and courageous in conversations. He was joyful and encouraging. Mike taught him some of the basics of the evangelism method we were all using, and he actively participated. We hoped that maybe we could do some trainings with him.

Around this same time, we sat down for the meeting in which the leaders said they could no longer support us. Though we acted a bit

defensively, the point of the meeting most likely was not to have a conversation. It was a show of authority among three other witnesses to get our attention. We came home from that meeting frazzled. But as we gathered as a team to pray, I very distinctly heard the Spirit say, “Be humble and listen. You want to be a good partner? This is your chance.”

We reasoned that the only specific thing they said was “attend worship.” So that is what we did. Our whole team began attending every week. It felt a bit awkward, but many things began to change. Within three months I could see a change on people’s faces when they warmly greeted us with a big smile. A few months later, we joined the Christmas services (upwards of five additional worship services on top of the regular Sunday services) and visited the homes of many of the prominent leaders and members of the church during the week of Christmas. We were amazed at how quickly our relationships were no longer strained and what big smiles we received. No one knew us any better as individuals, and no one really knew what our ministry was about, but we had declared by our attendance that we were a part of this community.

Around this same time Harry became the pastor of the local church we attended. Within a few months, he invited us to join the preaching team and preach every other month. I had always misunderstood the invitation to preach. Years earlier, when a pastor friend asked me to preach at his church, I told him no. I told him preaching wasn’t part of my ministry calling, and I didn’t want to bring attention to myself so as to invite questions of who I was and why I was there.

However, over the course of a few years, I began to see this as a strategic invitation. I had been asking pastors to partner with me to do church-planting trainings. But then I rejected their invitation to preach. I did not realize then that they were extending a hand for a handshake when they gave such an invitation. They were inviting me to come to their church, see their place of ministry, and engage with their congregation, and I kept saying no. They must have been so confused.

During one gathering with pastors, a friend who I had partnered with for many years was explaining the context of his church and congregation. Pointing at me he said, “Well, *he* knows about our church.” At another time a pastor from a village met with me and retold the story of a time when I came to his church to do a training and preach on Christmas. I began to see that there is something powerful about walking around in someone else’s place of ministry, seeing his context, sleeping in his home, and joining him in ministry. It is a key aspect of partnership.

So when Harry asked us to start taking turns preaching, I certainly was nervous but also excited to be entrusted with this particular ministry activity at his church. Preaching meant coming to chat with him before church started, and that led to monthly meetings in his office. One day after the first time I preached, he told me, “You didn’t bring your Bible with you to the pulpit.” I explained that I had the text printed on a sheet of paper with my notes. He said, “I understand. But the congregants will be confused. Next time bring your Bible up with you.” I was so glad that he told me when I had done something wrong.

Up until that time, I rarely got specific feedback, and I began to ask myself why Harry felt comfortable giving feedback in that instance. Throughout the years, it became clear that in a sense we had put ourselves under his authority by joining his team. The church was his church where he had the authority, and we were representing him. His honor and authority could be negatively impacted by our missteps, so he was invested in making sure we knew the rules.

When he took a leadership role with the denomination, he was given five pastors to oversee. We began working with him to train some of the pastors in this area. He now knew that we were trustworthy, and he had authority over a specific area. He could fulfill his leadership role by visiting pastors and he could be a good patron by bringing them a resource (our training). We jumped at this opportunity.

Of course, things did not always go according to plan, but this partnership became an important part of our journey. For a number of years, we joined Harry for multiple day-long trips. These trips usually involved impromptu stops to visit his friends or visits with pastors along the way (which included prayer for their sick congregants or meals with key members of their churches). We might find out we were to preach at the evening service in fifteen minutes. We inevitably never covered the amount of material we had hoped. But each trip taught us so much about how a church works and how a pastor views ministry.

The next week I would spend a few hours with Harry debriefing the trip. By this time, I knew to ask questions that didn't make it sound like I was disappointed or was blaming him for something not going according to plan. I learned so much by asking him, "Why did so-and-so say that?" or "What was she expecting when she did this?" Months later I overheard Harry with a laugh tell someone, "Whenever he wants to meet, I know he is going to ask LOTS of questions."

Each time we interacted with pastors we learned so much about what it was going to take to train local Christians to do church planting among Muslims. The first thing needed, however, was for us to change our view of local pastors. We were assuming that pastors were wishy-washy, only interested in an event and not follow-through, and distracted by "unimportant" issues.

However, as we spent time with the pastors, we realized they were incredibly invested in the work of the kingdom. Harry told us many stories of his pioneering work ten years earlier to plant a church among the tribal groups in our state. He frequently told of walking a whole day to a village to share the gospel and how on one occasion a local witch doctor poisoned his coffee. Miraculously he never got sick. Another woman doing a pioneering work in a Catholic area endured intense persecution by the Catholic leaders where she was planting a church. Many of the pastors in our trainings pastored multiple small church plants and worked hard jobs during the week. They were anything but lazy and distracted.

Thus we had to change our view of partnership. We had thought of partnership in regards to us training other people to do the work and then leaving when it was done. But that was a very short-sighted view of partnership. Rather, we each needed one another in the work of the kingdom. They did not simply need me, but I needed them. As we led trainings, we turned to small-group work and large-group discussion to create an environment where they felt comfortable sharing and asking questions (doing so directly was considered disrespectful). Our entire format for training and for strategy was influenced in significant ways by those sessions of discussion followed by trial and error. What had started out as sessions for how to start a DBS group had in fact turned into us discovering how local and indigenous Christians understood the gospel itself.

So we discovered that not only were we discipling and training others, but we ourselves were being disciplined, trained, and mentored. Maybe Harry would have never said it quite that way. But when he brought us on those long trips, he was mentoring us. He was teaching us about how the “normal” Christian saw worship, prayer, and ministry. He showed us what pastors were experiencing and hoping for. He modeled how to pray for someone, how to preach, and how to lead in that context.

Concluding Thoughts

My intent in telling these interweaving stories is to show that the ways in which the expat learns about good partnership from his or her local and/or indigenous brothers and sisters is a non-linear process of observation and listening. Cross-cultural partnership is much like walking through a room with the lights turned out. With each painful smack of our shins against an unseen piece of furniture, we are given the gift of discovering what it is and why it is there. Each painful event offers us the chance to better understand the room we are in. With many years we can move almost seamlessly through the room and value the shape and arrangement of the furniture.

The local context dictates many of the principles of partnership, making it challenging to give “universal” principles for partnership. I can only offer my perspective as an American of European descent working in Southeast Asia, and even so, most of the following principles bleed over into others. Like a tangled ball of string, when you tug on one strand, you will undoubtedly find two or three others hanging on.

First, we must recognize the ever-present danger of paternalism and superiority in our partnerships. In the stories above I have told of the many ways that I initially judged the local church. I saw their praying, teaching, preaching, leadership, and outreach as “less than.” Where did this incessant need to judge come from? As I began to study world history, I came to the understanding that most Western nations were built upon the myth of the superiority of Western, or white, civilization. I saw this evidenced in our founding documents, engagement in colonialism, and dehumanizing policies both at home and abroad toward those deemed “not white.”² As I considered this history in the context of my partnerships, I began to see how subtle and overt messages of my own importance and superiority influenced the way I entered into local and indigenous partnerships.

Much like those affected (directly or indirectly) by alcoholism or pornography must develop rhythms and rules to keep them on a path of sobriety and purity, I believe we as Westerners must put into our lives regular and intentional practices that root out and guard us from a spirit of paternalism and superiority. It is not enough to simply assume that since one is a missionary one can no longer be racist or prejudiced. We cannot just turn off these ways of thinking like a light switch. We need relationships where we continually open ourselves up to talk about such things in a spirit of curiosity, humility, and love.

2 For an introductory study primarily in the American context see Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (IVP Books, 2019); and Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019).

Second, we must also recognize how the problematic ways in which we speak about church planting affect our partnerships. Many of the trainings and materials we consume speak of church planting in a highly linear way. We are most likely all familiar with the steps, principles, strategies, and continuums. We hear words and phrases like *urgency*, *high-value activities*, and *best practices*. None of these words are in and of themselves wrong or sinful, but they can become huge roadblocks to fruitful partnership.

I mentioned earlier the concept of invitation. In many instances we decode an invitation in the wrong way simply because we are looking at the world of ministry as a linear process in which we must accept “high-value activities” and reject “low-value activities.” And this is where we see concepts tangled together. Most likely paternalism leads us to decode an invitation at best as an inefficient use of time and at worst an instance of being used or manipulated.

So it is worth questioning what makes an activity high value. What if, in the name of urgency, we have rejected a partner’s invitation? I submit that we are often missing out on the great lessons that our brothers and sisters will teach us about the church and ministry—the very lessons we desperately need both in our personal lives and in church planting.

Lastly, we need to recognize that local Christians represent a unique culture worthy of study and contextualization. I regret to admit that it took years before I realized that I had many cultures which I needed to learn—not just that of the unreached people group (UPG). When our team changed the forms and curriculum based on the church context, pastors felt served and valued, congregants had fun at our trainings, and people were empowered to take small steps when they hadn’t taken any before. There was forward momentum in every way.

Perhaps those of us in church-planting work have dived passionately into the UPG culture by learning the language and worldview and considering how the gospel can be contextualized to them. But have we

also given that same intensity to the culture of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

The strands of paternalism get tugged as well when we expect local and indigenous Christians to look a certain way, worship and pray a certain way, or be passionate about the same things as us. I have often heard colleagues say things like the following: “Why do they pray that way? I’m not fed by their preaching style. Why do they do ministry *that* way!?” We must give grace to our brothers and sisters at least as much as to our UPG culture, but maybe even more. We may need to contextualize our training, mobilizing, and teaching to our kindred in the faith. Perhaps we don’t do this because our focus is not on them. Perhaps we try to switch off cross-cultural learning when we aren’t with people from the UPG culture that we serve. Whatever the reason may be, our partnerships suffer when we don’t give the time and attention necessary to understand the Christian culture and their unique contribution to the body of Christ.

I mentioned in the earlier stories the importance of being “safe” and understanding what makes one “safe” from the perspective of the local culture. Here again all the strands get tugged. Do I care about being a safe person? What if urgency and high-value activities make me unsafe? What if my culture doesn’t value what the local church values? When we come to the point of having to choose between unity with our brothers and sisters and our principles of church-planting movements among UPGs, which will we choose? And what will we rely upon to make such a decision?

The meeting where we were called out by the leaders of the church caused us much consternation, outrage, and anxiety. As I look back upon that day, however, I see it as both a gracious gift from God and an act of generosity from those leaders. They provided for us a moment to see how our partnership was failing our brothers and sisters as well as a chance for redemption and reconciliation. I offer these stories, thoughts, and principles with the hope that our failures and growth, as well as our

deep love and appreciation for our local brothers and sisters, may inspire you to meditate on your partnerships. As expats engaging in partnership with local Christians, I pray we may consistently interrogate our beliefs and actions so we may walk in love and curiosity. May Jesus's prayer be fulfilled in us (John 17:23), that our unity in local partnerships would display the love of God.

Questions for Discussion

- How does Brian's case study relate to your own experience? What dynamics are similar to what you might experience in your context, and what might be different?
- What do you find most helpful in Brian's approach to partnership? What alternate perspectives, ideas, and questions would you add to Brian's approach?

Should We Partner? Frontier Church Planting and Existing Churches

Zachary Bland

Zachary Bland (pseudonym), an American, has served for nearly 10 years in the Arab World as a church planter, alongside his wife and children. Educated in international affairs, Arabic, and theology, Zach is focused on seeing a church planting movement among Muslim peoples.

My family and I relocated to the Middle East almost ten years ago with the goal of seeing a church-planting movement among an unreached Muslim people group. In the midst of language learning and evangelistic attempts, we discovered there was already an Arabic-speaking church in the city! Ten years, three cities, and three local church partnerships later, we have experienced varying degrees of both fruit and failure.

Not all missionaries serve in places with existing churches. Those who do face unique opportunities and challenges for disciple-making and church planting among the unreached. Informed by my experience in the Middle East, this article focuses on frontier church planting in contexts where a local, near-culture church exists, proposing a framework for partnership and a set of guiding principles for when and how to partner with local churches.

The Middle Eastern Context

Churches in the Middle East claim roots from the Day of Pentecost, when Arabic speakers in the audience heard the Apostle Peter preaching in their language (Acts 2:11). Most of these churches today are in the Eastern Orthodox or Catholic traditions, but in the last two centuries,

some congregants broke with these churches to embrace new traditions and Protestant theology. These churches often emerged from the efforts of foreign missionaries and span Protestant, evangelical, Pentecostal, and other affiliations.

For those of us in the Muslim world who identify as evangelical,¹ it can be encouraging to find small, gospel-centered churches in our target-language.² In terms of cultural identity, the local church may share much with the unreached peoples around it such as a common language, a shared foundation of cultural values and norms, and shared geography. However, there are often significant differences, including dialect and vocabulary, social circles, tribal affiliations, and frequently, a legacy of conflict with (or persecution from) other people groups. In some cases, these churches have ceased any attempts at evangelizing their neighbors. While the local church is much closer to their neighbors culturally than the foreign missionary, the differences and historic legacies of conflict can hinder outreach.

The presence of local churches compels missionaries to consider many questions: how should we relate to existing evangelical churches? Should we attend regularly? Should we join the church membership? Should we partner in ministry? Should we accept formal leadership roles in these churches? Does this local church present an opportunity or an obstacle for church planting among the unreached?

1 The first Protestant missionaries arrived in Ottoman Syria in 1840, and set up churches primarily drawn from members of the Eastern Orthodox churches.

2 For this article, I define “evangelical” as a broad, ecclesiastic identity containing roots in the Protestant Reformation. In terms of belief, evangelicals claim the authority of the Old and New Testaments and celebrate the Reformation doctrines of *sola scriptura*, *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Deo gloria*. In terms of practice, evangelicals emphasize evangelism, individual and societal/moral transformation, and a global mission.

Common Concerns about Partnership

Partnership is not always the obvious choice. Many frontier church planters choose not to partner with local churches and instead venture out on their own for evangelism, disciple-making, and church formation/reproduction. Those who choose not to partner often claim the local church is not positioned to help in church planting. The church may have no evangelistic vision or may be culturally different from the unreached people groups in the area. They may speak a different dialect or follow different social norms, which leads some missionaries to ask, “Why should we expend energy with an additional people group to reach our target people group?”

These are valid concerns. I have observed Arab Christians function in a cultural bubble, using greetings, phrases, and spiritual vocabulary different from the majority culture around them. One wonders whether these insulated believers are willing to engage in contextualized communication with unreached peoples around them.

Sometimes local churches, including evangelical churches, are hostile to outside missionaries. I am aware of unfortunate cases of existing evangelical churches persecuting outside missionaries and reporting their activities to unsympathetic government authorities. Understandably, this prevents partnership in these contexts.

The form of the existing local churches may be very different than the form, which missionaries believe is needed for a viable movement among an unreached people group. In our context, we believe a house-church model of small churches, interconnected in a mutually supportive network, and led by leaders from their own people, has the best chance of long-term reproduction. By contrast, the local evangelical church in my region usually consists of one large congregation that meets regularly in a rented or owned building. Seekers and new believers are invited to attend and grow the attendance of the single congregation, which

leads to the question: can such a traditional church partner to plant house churches?³

This is not an exhaustive list of concerns about partnership; there are certainly more reasons that have led some to work independent of local churches. Many are valid concerns, and sometimes partnership is not feasible, as I discuss below.

Notwithstanding these concerns, I propose that in contexts where there is an existing near-culture church (such as in the Arab Middle East), partnership can be a viable, and even desirable, option for those seeking fruitful church-planting movements among the unreached. While there are sometimes good reasons not to partner, partnership between foreign church planters and the local body of Christ can bring benefits and multiplying effects that are hard to achieve any other way.

In what follows, I present a brief biblical framework and outline several benefits of partnership. I examine a few scenarios when partnership can be counterproductive or simply impossible. Finally, I propose some fruitful practices for navigating partnership drawn from our experience in the Middle East.

The Biblical Paradigm for Partnership: One Body

The New Testament metaphor of a body provides a paradigm for relationships in the wider church.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one

3 Let us foreign missionaries remember the forms of churches in which we ourselves have been nurtured prior to moving abroad. Many of us seek to plant churches that take a different form from our “home” churches. If the Lord can call and equip us for this task, can he not do so for local evangelical believers already present among an unreached people group?

body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many...The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 21-27, NIV)

This is our model for working together, both on the local level and as a global church. Different parts of the body working together involves reciprocity in the relationship with mutual giving and receiving—and shared suffering and rejoicing. When we seek to plant churches among an unreached people group, we should seek to learn from our brothers and sisters already living there. The local church should also recognize that God has indeed called outsiders to enter their culture and plant churches, and that they should therefore consider assisting missionaries. A healthy partnership forms when we receive from and give to the local church.

Given this theology of church which celebrates the global body of Christ, we might expect missionaries to hold a bias in favor of local church partnerships. However, it is often the case that we often enter our mission context with an unexamined bias *against* partnership with

local churches. Those of us who are westerners can hold unexamined cultural preferences for independence, innovation, speed, and efficiency. These values propel us into the fastest ways “forward”—which often means going alone. We can bring arrogance and ethnocentricity with us by believing our values are best and that we are better than other people. Sometimes we are influenced by ecclesial arrogance in subtly believing our church tradition is best,⁴ or chronological arrogance, which is a bias against historic churches, an assumption that new ideas and younger generations are best for reaching the unreached.

I have observed all these biases in our mission context and have needed to personally repent of some. Accordingly, I would invite fellow co-laborers to begin any decision about partnership with a bit of self-examination, a process significantly enhanced by listening intently to local believers.⁵

Personally, I am convinced that foreign missionaries and evangelical churches among unreached people groups need one another. Perhaps even more importantly, such partnerships can potentially reach hard-to-reach people groups with lasting fruit and a reproducing church movement.

Potential Benefits of Partnership

A healthy partnership between expatriate church planters and the local body of Christ brings benefits and multiplying effects which are hard to achieve any other way.

4 I am referring to unexamined bias in favor of our own church tradition including its practices, styles, and even some doctrines which do not strike at the essentials of our faith and system of doctrine. Admittedly, this is a subjective area. I do not wish to discourage any theological conviction but rather to encourage self-knowledge and reflection so that we make decisions based on conviction and reason and not on unexamined biases.

5 Let us foreign missionaries also remember the forms of churches in which we ourselves have been nurtured prior to moving abroad. Many of us seek to plant churches that take a different form from our “home” churches. If the Lord can call and equip us for this task, can he not do so for local evangelical believers already present among an unreached people group?

One of these benefits is learning from the cultural insight of the church. The local church possesses a greater cultural intelligence about their context—after all they live there! They have centuries of experience in relating to their neighbors. This brings cultural baggage, both positive and negative, to the relationship. At the very least, the church's experience can be an asset to any teachable missionary who listens well.

The local church often communicates more effectively than missionaries. While there may be differences in the use of Christian jargon and vocabulary on spiritual topics, the style of communication (an oral or storying style for example) is usually shared with the surrounding people groups. Abstract language and systematic approaches to explaining the gospel and theology used by many Western missionaries arriving from abroad often fall short in communicating truths in oral preference societies. The local church is well versed in more effective communication styles, and foreign missionaries have an opportunity to learn from them.

In my present ministry, I work daily alongside local evangelical church members who are called to evangelize their Muslim neighbors. The communication effectiveness of the local church is seen in the way that several of the pastors use adapted language and mannerisms when visiting Muslim homes to better communicate with our target people group.

When Pastor Michael and I visit homes, he masterfully weaves the gospel into an affectionate and pastoral conversation with the family.⁶ He uses several Islamic greetings and titles of respect for the prophets and explains difficult concepts with concrete metaphors and examples to help the family understand gospel truths. He routinely wins their hearts and makes them feel embraced by the church and the Lord Jesus. My role has been to continue with these families by visiting them weekly for Bible study and discipleship until they place their faith in Christ. Pastor

6 A pseudonym.

Michael is energized by finding new people and bringing them into the network of the wider church. My gifts complement his as I follow up with new seekers. Together, we identify leaders among those who become believers and they, in turn, work with the new people who Pastor Michael finds.

Partnership may also provide the benefit of legal presence. A local church, if legally registered, can provide residency for missionaries and sponsor ministries that might otherwise be more difficult to sustain in an unfriendly environment.

Even so, every church planting team needs to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of official affiliation. I have observed missionaries with church-sponsored visas and others with non-religious visas participating in the same activities. In one context, the church visas gave a level of leniency from government authorities, and in another context, authorities scrutinized the religious visa-holder's every activity. Personally, I am aware of one church-planting movement that experienced distrust and persecution from government authorities until they arranged to meet in old, mostly unused church buildings in their city. This unique partnership resulted in more time and energy for shepherding and evangelizing.

A shared strategy for reaching a people group establishes the most beneficial partnerships between the local church and foreign missionary. I have seen diverse teams of expatriates and local believers perform highly effective ministry to unreached communities. Such a cross-cultural team brings challenges, but the mutual learning and support, as well as the increase in laborers in the harvest, outweighs the costs of time and relational effort. Such a partnership can function and produce fruit long after a foreign missionary leaves the country.

As an example, I serve on a team of disciple-makers made up of new believers, local church members, and myself (one of the few foreign missionaries involved). Years ago, Muslim refugees from our target people

group began visiting the local church in search of help. Several local church members were trained in basic DMM methodology including discovery Bible studies and principles of rapid reproduction. These members began discipling the new arrivals in small groups. Anyone visiting the church was assigned a small group leader to receive aid and spiritual care. After several years, the church had over one hundred new believers from this target people, and many of them were small group leaders.

A recent national crisis drove hundreds of Muslim families to our church in search of practical help. Each family was introduced to a group leader, and almost all these small group leaders are believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs) from the target unreached people group. With 900 families and over 120 BMB small group leaders, the work has turned into a movement. Some of the groups have reproduced up to four generations now. Groups are encouraged to reach their own networks and form new groups while some continue to be formed through the centralized administration of the church as new families arrive seeking assistance.

The role of foreign missionaries in this movement is dependent on their spiritual gifts and language abilities. In my case, I am gifted in shepherding and teaching, which means I guide small group leaders and their families. I invest in them as they invest in their small groups of seekers and new believers. Each week we gather as a group of eight leaders, and I also visit each in their home for family discipleship and encouragement. I am not the only one discipling and equipping this group of leaders: the local pastor visits regularly, some meet weekly with a local seminary professor for theological training, and all receive regular teaching through the larger local church gathering.

Some of these small groups have combined to form new church congregations while most have not yet become churches. Depending upon leadership and geography, the local church encourages some of the small groups to form their own congregations and others to remain under their administration. In this hybrid model, movement DNA is

interwoven with support from an institutional church. In our experience, these two sides mutually support each other. New churches enjoy a place in a network of mature churches and leaders, and the mother church maintains constant expansion and reproduction.

In collectivist societies, the witness of a community is more compelling than that of an individual. When foreign church planters are members of a larger group of Christ worshippers and disciplers, such a community may attract more unreached people. Middle Eastern culture is collectivist in that everyone wants to know what the other is doing. An individual making a major life change *on one's own* is unthinkable. However, if one visits a community of dozens of people who have started following Jesus, whether in a house-church network or large church building, it is easier to take a next step in the same direction of faith.

Finally, the local church can provide a community of support and encouragement for missionaries. Frontier church planting can be lonely and every missionary needs a network of resources to surround and support them. A local church can be an important part of that member care network.

When Not to Partner

While I generally advocate for partnership, there are times when there are good, legitimate reasons not to partner. If the local church has no desire to reach the target people group, foreign missionaries have a choice: (1) engage long-term with the local church to catalyze such a vision, (2) move on to another church, or (3) move on to work independently of the local church.

If the local church does desire to reach the target people group, the next question foreign missionaries should ask is: what can partnership look like? If there is agreement on a shared church planting strategy, then a partnership may be quite close and comprehensive. If not, partnership may not be possible, except in a limited sense, such as through mercy

ministries that bless the target people group and provide access for the missionary to make disciples. It may be that a prayer partnership is the only possibility for a season—a wonderful place to start. However, without at least some level of strategic agreement within the partnership, however limited, such a partnership cannot succeed, regardless of any close relational bonds between the missionary and the local church.

Another good reason not to partner is disagreement on *core* theological issues. It is best for the local church and mission team to agree from the beginning on core doctrinal agreements required for partnership. For mercy ministries, the theological alignment may be more flexible. For a church-planting partnership, a higher level of alignment is necessary. The mission team should decide on non-negotiables and ensure there is agreement before partnership.

Finally, it is best not to establish a partnership that causes a threat to the ministry of either the local church or the missionaries. In some contexts, the simple presence of foreign missionaries threatens the safety of the local church. Foreigners may bring unwanted attention from unfriendly government authorities or hostile nongovernment actors. If a local church has lost its reputation among the target people group, an association with the church could severely limit ministry. Teams must carefully discern and research the ministry context, such as the history of the church, various rivalries, and public perception.

Navigating Partnership for the Sake of the Unreached

Having outlined a case for partnership, benefits of partnership, and potential reasons not to partner, let us now explore the actual journey of partnership with existing churches. In essence, success is achieved when all parties experience progress toward their vision while also maintaining a trusting and reciprocal interdependency with each other. From my

own experience in partnership, I propose six fruitful practices to better ensure successful cross-cultural partnerships with local churches.

Begin as a Learner

Kenyan Bishop Oscar Muriu explains to new missionaries that starting with the question, “How can I help you?” is an arrogant place to start. Instead, he argues, we should begin with the question, “Can you teach me?” Muriu explains: “As I put myself [*sic*] in a posture of learning, then your host will invite you to teach them back in return, and the mutuality and reciprocity that is developed there is that both of you learn” (Muriu 2012).

Learning is the starting point for all missionaries seeking to partner cross-culturally with a local church. In our missionary calling, we must be learners before we are servants. We start not fully knowing how to serve, and listening becomes our first act of love and service. This does not mean the missionary must abandon the vision to which the Lord has called them. It means the missionary must slow down and listen before moving forward in the vision and be willing to have the vision enhanced by what is learned. Listening well before injecting opinions is critical.

In regards to partnership, missionaries must learn the values and goals of the local church, which are not usually posted on a website or written in a summary document, but rather tucked into a dozen long conversations over many glasses of tea! New missionaries must learn the church’s past successes and failures, discover what makes the church proud, and learn what brings shame. Most importantly, missionaries must believe the local church has something to teach them.

Share an Imagination

It is vital for foreign missionaries and local church partners to have a shared imagination—a vision of the future which both sides prayerfully labor to achieve. The question to ask is, “If our strategy succeeds, what

will we see in the future?” Follow up questions often include, “How do we define a church?” “Who should be the leaders?” “How do we raise up new leaders?” and “What is the best timetable for all of this to occur?” A shared imagination is an essential building block for partnership.

Agreement to a shared vision *before* ministry begins is an exception in our experience. The most common pathway to an aligned vision is to first befriend one another, listen to each other, and then work toward a shared goal. Ultimately, there must be vision and strategic alignment for any partnership to succeed over the long term. I encourage missionaries to be patient and learn from the church before trying to achieve alignment. Our first church partnership in the Middle East began with a slow journey of conversations and months of simply being present in meetings and worship services, during which we slowly built relationship and trust, which enabled us to align our visions for partnership.

A mission team has a highly focused vision for evangelism and disciple-making among a target unreached people group. However, a local church may believe it is called to a broader vision of multiple people groups in a wider community with various teaching and mercy ministries. The vision of the church and mission team need not be identical; there simply needs to be enough overlap in vision to work together. For example, our current church partner works extensively in global media, plants congregations among four different people groups in the city, and has an impressive teaching, writing, and theological education ministry. We primarily partner with them to reach one of the four people groups. The church is thrilled to have our help in this part of their vision, and we are honored and empowered to implement our vision with them to achieve fruit that would not have happened any other way.

Not every church is ready to align with missionaries’ strategy, such as establishing reproducing, indigenously-led house churches among an unreached people. However, I have seen a functional partnership in which a local church endorsed a missionary team to carry out their strategy among a target people group while the church coordinated

relief and development projects alongside the mission team. The relief ministry was a core component of the church's vision, the missionaries could follow up exclusively with neighbors from the target people group, and church members followed up with others.

Be Transparent

I encourage missionaries in partnership with a local church to be open with church leadership concerning agenda, values, goals, and all activities. Even if transparency is not reciprocated, trust is built and deepened when one partner experiences the other's consistent behavior over time. Not only does this help build a stronger partnership, it often gives missionaries a respected voice when collaborating with church leaders.

During the initial six months of ministry alongside our most recent church partner, we endeavored to be completely open concerning our work, including both our successes and our challenges. We established a high level of trust and respect with the church's leaders, and we learned to trust and value them.

Serve from Below

It can sometimes be a practical challenge for foreign missionaries to enter church partnerships from the posture of humble servants. The imperialist legacy of the West dominating the rest means that Western missionaries carry the baggage of that cultural dominance, often being seen as wealthy and powerful patrons. When a Western missionary speaks or proposes an idea, locals listen—even when they shouldn't. How then can missionaries pursue humility in such a partnership?

I believe one helpful way of pursuing humility is to devote time and energy to the local church's priorities. While this may appear to distract from our primary vision as missionaries, it often strengthens the partnership and encourages us missionaries to love our spiritual church

family. It is easy to get caught up in our strategic priorities and forget we are servants and siblings alongside our local partners in ministry. I'm not suggesting a change in vision or commitment to serve in areas that pull them away from one's calling. I am advocating for authentic love, which usually means considering others, and their needs, as more important than one's own. We should view partnership neither as a marriage with complete and exclusive commitment to the other nor as a business arrangement, but rather as functional interdependence as one body (Muriu 2017).

Should we consider the priorities of the local church as more important than ministry to the unreached people group? Should not a church planter's primary calling be to serve those who have never heard the gospel? Yes, but we should not forget to be disciples of Christ who are called to love their neighbors and the family in Christ. I have heard local church members share their struggles with foreign missionaries who were so focused on the unreached that they were unavailable for authentic relationship and unwilling to help with any urgent needs that occasionally arose in the church community. Balancing priorities is a challenge without simple solutions, and I encourage prayer for wisdom, as Christ calls us to serve both the unreached and our partners in the gospel.

Finally, serving humbly in community means giving and receiving forgiveness. In cross-cultural partnership, there is a regular stream of miscommunications and perceived offenses. Missionaries who expect these and learn from them will cope better with the stresses of partnership. In some of our partnerships, I discovered my host culture had unspoken and indirect ways of apologizing. For example, I always knew when a local pastor was upset with me when he stopped responding to my messages. The remedy was always the same: I promptly sat down with him for face-to-face conversation in which we shared candid feedback. Sometimes verbal apologies were exchanged, but more

often, we just verbally reaffirmed each other and our commitment to our shared work.

Build Reciprocity into the Relationship

Both giving and receiving must take place for a partnership to function according to the biblical metaphor of one body. The western cultural value of independence often finds its way into our mission strategies, and yet Scripture calls us to interdependence (1 Corinthians 12). Spiritual gifts, material resources, theological reflection, and methodologies are all part of mutual sharing between missionaries and partner churches. In our current church partnership, we raise funds for mercy ministry, give time for discipling new believers, equip small group leaders, shepherd a few of the church member families, and lend our voice to conversations on strategy and methodology. Our local church provides us a residency visa, regular ministry training, pastoral care, prayer for our family, weekly worship, evangelism opportunities, and a public identity. We are able to participate in a larger mission team which includes church members who share our same vision. Our relationship is reciprocal. We need each other, and together we minister.

Unhealthy attitudes about wealth and the wealth disparity between missionaries and the local church can damage a partnership. This is a complex topic beyond the scope of this article which deserves focused reflection by missionaries, since wealth often influences relationships with local churches. For example, when a western missionary suggests an idea, the local church understands the proposal will inevitably come with funding. As a result, the local church may defer to the missionary's priorities rather than promote a truly mutual exchange of ideas and shared decision making.

One Body in the Global Task

I have made a case for partnership with the local, near-culture church in helping realize fruitful church-planting movements among

the unreached in contexts where such a church exists. It is not always possible in every situation, but when it is, partnering can be one of the most fruitful avenues for frontier church planting.

While we are called to make disciples and plant churches among the least reached peoples of the world, we are also called to be one body, both locally and globally. One part of the body cannot say to the other, "I do not need you." Each part needs the other, and no part should be left out. In describing global partnerships, Oscar Muriu remarks, "it is not marriage as we tend to gravitate to as Africans. It is not business that the western hemisphere tends to gravitate to. It is the body of Christ" (Muriu 2017). It is one body working in concert together to obey all God has commanded.

Questions for Discussion

- How do the context and experiences of Zachary relate to your own context and experience related to partnership? What are the most important contextual factors in determining when and how to partner?
- What's the best way to navigate differences in vision and strategy with existing churches? What do you think of the author's proposal for navigating this?

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A SEEDBED CONVERSATION

**“Movement Catalysts” or
“Church Planters”?
Two Views on the Role
of Expat Disciplers**

The following three articles represent a conversation between two missiologist-practitioners on the ideal roles of cross-cultural disciplers in fruitful kingdom work. The first offers a DMM perspective, the second offers a traditional church-planting perspective, and the third offers a dialogue in which the two authors take turns responding to and interacting with one another's views.

Friends of the Bridegroom: The Role of Outside Catalysts in Disciple-Making Movements

By Matthew Miller

Originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, Matthew Miller has spent the past twenty-one years living in Africa as a church planter, educator, disciple-making trainer, and social entrepreneur. He currently serves as the director of Virunga Valley Academy, a Christian international school in Musanze, Rwanda, where he and his wife are pouring into a new generation of young Rwandans and encouraging the leaders of a dynamic house-church movement that has planted more than 1500 churches in in the past ten years. He recently graduated from Bakke Graduate University with a DMin in Transformational Leadership for the Global City. He is also learning how to grow coffee.

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The need for a paradigm shift in the way outsiders relate to inside leaders on the mission fields of the world is being sounded from many corners, both from the historical missions-sending nations and those nations that have traditionally received missionaries. Part of the reason for this is because the distinctions between sending and receiving are beginning to break down as the center of Christianity shifts from the Global North to the Global South. The global mission of the church is being owned by the global church, which is a wonderful development. But the financial resources of the global church are still disproportionately in the hands of churches in the global north. Working out what partnership looks like in a world where more and more of the mission force is coming from the Global South, while the infrastructure of mission still has strong ties to the Global North, is a great challenge. Traditional patterns of ownership and decision making are becoming more difficult to maintain given these new realities.

It was in this context of dynamic change that I began my career as a full-time missionary in Africa more than twenty years ago. After eleven years in Togo, West Africa, I experienced a personal paradigm shift. I moved from an approach that was driven by the vision of an expat missionary to a catalytic role of supporting and encouraging African leaders as partners and peers. When we arrived in Rwanda, we encountered a number of mature Christian leaders who had personally experienced a literal deconstruction of traditional church and mission models. They had witnessed the churches of Rwanda become the graves of tens of thousands of people, cut down as they sheltered in their places of worship. Thus, they knew the models of the past needed to be buried.

We began praying for God to connect us with dissatisfied people who would be open to change, and he brought us into relationship with a team of exceptional leaders, both in Rwanda and throughout East Africa. In an effort to better understand my role as an outside leader in my context, I focused my doctoral research on interviewing key leaders of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs) in East Africa concerning their experiences with outsiders, and their recommendations on how they can be most effective. The results were both encouraging and challenging. I was encouraged in that my African friends all affirmed that outside leaders still have an important role to play, but challenged by the fact that many of our attitudes and behaviors have caused frustration and need to change. In the following paragraphs, I will share some biblical themes that have shaped my emerging understanding of how catalytic leaders can be effective as well as some key findings from my interviews with East African DMM leaders.

Biblical Models of Catalytic Leaders

For many years, I focused exclusively on apostolic church leaders like Paul or Barnabas in my quest to understand the role of outsiders. Though their examples are important, I experienced a breakthrough of understanding when I looked to the gospels for answers on this topic.

One of the most helpful examples for me has been John the Baptist. After John's disciples complained about Jesus gaining more disciples than him, John replied, "*The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less*" (John 3:29-30, NIV).

At a recent gathering of disciple makers in Rwanda, we discussed the meaning of this passage. I was particularly interested in finding some Rwandan words that we could use to describe the kind of catalytic leadership we are trying to champion in East Africa. The person described as "*the friend of the bridegroom*," to whom John compares himself, is known as *umuranga* in Kinyarwanda, the language of Rwanda. An *umuranga* in Rwandan culture is someone who introduces a bride and groom to each other, kind of like a matchmaker, but with a larger and longer commitment. They also help organize and oversee the wedding, and long afterward continue to help the couple throughout their marriage if they have problems or challenges. In all things, the *umuranga* is focused on developing the relationship of the bride and the bridegroom. This requires that they know their role. Obviously, they are not part of the marriage, yet at the same time they have a deep commitment to its success. One of my Rwandan friends pointed out, "The *umuranga* must know when to step out of the picture. It would not be appropriate for him to follow the couple to the marriage bed!"

What a beautiful picture of the role of a catalytic leader! We are completely focused on introducing and connecting people to Jesus, and we know that he must become the one they are focused on, not ourselves. The picture of the friend of the bridegroom sharing the wedding bed with the bride and groom is shocking and amusing at the same time, but all too often outside leaders make a similar mistake. They do not seem to know when to step out of the way and allow those whom they lead to be connected to Jesus—without them in the middle. The humility of John's beautiful statement must become the cry of the catalytic outside leader's heart, "He must become greater; I must become less." We must stop stealing the intimacy that belongs only to

Jesus by refusing to allow those we serve to become dependent upon us, instead empowering them to be connected directly to the bridegroom. This is my greatest critique of the “incarnational ministry model” because I believe that Jesus still wants to be incarnated into the lives of people himself. The moment that the Word lives in someone, I no longer need to be the Word made flesh for them, rather I should shift to facilitating and encouraging their direct experience of the Word in them.

The one John pointed towards is also the ultimate example of a catalytic leader. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus pointed to Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as the greatest command—to love God with heart, soul, and strength. When read in context, however, an important insight is revealed: *“These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me **to teach you to observe** in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that **you, your children and their children after them** may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you”* (Deut. 6:1-2, emphasis added). Bruggeman suggests all of Deuteronomy 6:1-9 should be read as one pivotal covenant command (2001, 82).¹ The structure of these verses as a unified command indicates that Jesus’ Great Command also includes the prior instruction to teach and pass on obedience generationally. I believe it is important to point out this connection in order to mitigate a strong tendency, of those whose theology has been influenced by Western thought, to unwittingly interpret Scripture individualistically.² Understanding the entire pericope as a unified command moves obedience to the command to love God from a purely individualistic exercise to a multigenerational, catalytic exercise.

The implications of this foundational passage for those who seek to catalyze disciple-making movements are many. Obeying the command to love God begins with us and is fulfilled as we pass on obedience and

1 First the introduction (vv. 1-3), then the actual imperative (vv. 4-9). Cf. Bruggeman 2001, 82.

2 For an excellent description of this phenomenon, see Baker (1999). Baker describes the way an individualized lens of theological interpretation by North American evangelical missionaries led to legalistic religion in Honduras.

equipping to others. Though the original context of Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is a physical family, I believe the principle translates to spiritual generations as well. Passing on generational obedience requires understanding the different roles a parent, or disciple maker, must play as new generations emerge. Disciple makers must learn how to make the transition from *teachers* and *mentors* who instruct the second generation, to *coaches* who empower those disciples to pass on love and obedience to God to the next generation. This is the heart of catalytic ministry. As each of these roles is modeled by the disciple maker, the next generation is equipped with all the skills needed to continue to three generations. This vision of the third generation must always be at the forefront of the catalyst's mind. Anything less falls short of obeying the Great Command.

When three generations of obedience are established, it creates a system that has the potential to continue to perpetuate itself. I would argue the moment when Jesus knew his ministry would succeed is when the seventy-two others Jesus appointed returned reporting on reaching another generation of disciples, and Jesus proclaimed: "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*" (Luke 10:17). This same pattern of three generations is reflected in Paul's instructions to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:2). In the Old Testament, language referring to "*your children*" and "*your children's children*" often indicates a perpetual, generational dynamic likely to continue, whether of righteousness or sin.³

For too long, we have settled for success in the first two generations of disciple making alone. Those who are able to obey God and lead others to believe have been lauded as successful ministers. But such ministry does not lead to movements, which happen when humble leaders understand their true legacy is not what they accomplish, but

3 This perpetual system may be why the formula of three generations is sometimes followed by the words "*and forever more*" in Scripture (see Isa. 59:21 and Ezek. 37:25). Second Kings 17:41, on the other hand, uses the "*children*" and "*children's children*" formula to emphasize the generational consequences of passing on sinful behavior. Thus, when Moses commanded the Israelites to pass obedience to their children and their children's children, it indicates that faithfulness to three generations will make it more likely that later generations will be reached as well.

what they equip others to accomplish. This shift requires disciple-making catalysts to grow in the skill of coaching—empowering others to minister without the direct presence of the disciple maker. (Even Jesus did not go with the twelve and the seventy-two on their missions.) It also requires the humility to not be in the spotlight. Only leaders who have released the need to justify themselves through their own accomplishments can become stewards of relationships that lead to generational growth. Those who want to build their own kingdoms will never be entrusted to steward the exponential growth of God’s kingdom.

My Research

This heart attitude is clearly reflected in the results of my research on the role of outside leaders in East African DMMs. I interviewed fifteen leaders from East Africa concerning their experiences with outsiders and collated the interview responses.⁴ Six common themes concerning roles of outside leaders were touched on by everyone interviewed. These themes were: 1) Prayer and Prayer Mobilization, 2) Training and Equipping, 3) Building Relationships and Encouraging, 4) Releasing Control, 5) Developing Collaborative Networks, and 6) Developing and Sustaining Movements.

I saw that the greatest positive influence was from outside leaders who were willing to come alongside inside leaders relationally to support their dreams and help them build their own networks and organizations. Conversely, the greatest frustration local leaders had was the result of those who brought outside organizational structures and control. This frustration seemed to be at its worst when money was used to control, by linking financial partnership to submission to outside structures. One of the key goals of my project was to highlight the voice of East African leaders, so I think it would be most effective for me to share some of their thoughts on each of the above categories.

4 These leaders were from countries of Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

On Prayer and Prayer Mobilization:

“Prayer with us and for us has been central to the relationship for the outside leaders who have influenced me the most.” Samuel, Ethiopia

“Outside leaders must be devoted to prayer, but not just their own cultural understanding of prayer. They must understand what prayer is like in the new culture.” Shemeles, Ethiopia

On Training and Equipping:

“One of our greatest needs is for more and more training. Outside leaders have had a very powerful role of sharing their experiences and helping us to understand the concepts of how to make disciples. They expose us to new ideas, and we as insiders can take the opportunity to put them into practice.” Justin, Rwanda

“Many movement catalysts are heavy on training, but they should spend more time on coaching and mentoring. Maturity becomes arrested unless a leader can take it to another level. Movement catalysts need to be one step ahead.” Samuel, Ethiopia

On Building Relationships and Encouraging:

“Something I appreciate about key outside leaders who have been influential in my life is that they have become great friends, like one of the family. They stay with me and I with them. They give encouragement through visits, calls, and e-mails. They don’t force things but help me process ideas and show sides that I do not see. We are friends and I feel equal.” Aila, Kenya

“Our relationships with outsiders should be two-way traffic, like a family. We should respond to each other’s needs. I am sometimes frustrated when outside leaders want to talk about work only.” John, Kenya

“Don’t formalize relationships—use life-on-life mentoring. Show concern for the entire families of leaders you work with. Be concerned for the whole person, not just the job.” Aychi, Ethiopia

On Releasing Control:

“Most outsiders want to do what they think—their ministry agenda. But first, they should ask in what way they can help. This is a temptation for organizations. If there is room for discussion, there is a lot of room to work together. It is rare to hear “You know the culture and territory; we want to help you.” Mezgebu, Ethiopia

“An outside leader’s organization wanted to put someone on the board of our organization because of their donations. They asked us to either become a branch of their organization or change our name, which was similar to theirs. But our vision is not to be a branch of anyone. We are not Toyota!” Justin, Rwanda

To be a DMM catalyst, come with less organizational intention—have open hands to help the body, not to claim. You must have a Kingdom mindset. Releasing organizational control is essential for movement.” Aychi, Ethiopia

“A paradigm shift that is needed for outside leaders is to realize that they cannot be involved in everything.” Richard, Tanzania

“Helpful organizations come as learners, then they coach and mentor. They understand us and raise our capacity. They insist on the standard they want, and this also raises capacity. They help us manage and trust us. They catalyze—they don’t have to be in the picture.” Joseph, Kenya

On Developing Collaborative Networks:

“A challenge in East Africa is that we need to build strong networks and collaborations within the countries. Catalysts must ensure that network meetings happen and add value. Movement catalysts ensure that things move in all directions without having reference directly to them. Some

of the roles of catalytic outside leaders are to bring leaders together, build networks, bring in outside resources to train and expose, and some resourcing to teams (not individuals). One of the biggest challenges for the development of movements is that we need to move away from individuals to groups. Networks built around individuals are dangerous. For movements to grow and develop, multiple local movement catalysts need to be developed in every country. People need to experience seeing things in a different way.” Aila, Kenya

On Developing and Sustaining Movements:

“To go beyond helping to start, we need to be more coaches and mentors than trainers. Training equals Start; Mentoring and Coaching equals Movement Development.” Samuel, Kenya

“Outsiders often have an unrealistic mindset. Movements are not just about spiritual issues. There are financial sustainability issues as well.” Justin, Rwanda

“We need to empower leaders to support themselves rather than depending on outsiders. This will help the sustainability of movements. Things like business, farming, poultry keeping, etc.” John, Kenya

Conclusion

My research on the role of outside leaders in catalyzing Disciple-Making Movements raised an encouraging conclusion—that there is a vital role for us expats to play. We can fruitfully contribute in concrete ways by doing the following:

- cast vision to local partners
- develop authentic relationships
- empower and encourage them in their own ministries
- contribute to their leadership and spiritual development through coaching and mentoring
- connect them to other inside leaders who share a common vision

- facilitate the development of multi-network teams
- network them with trainers and resources from around the globe
- pray with and for them as they mobilize people around the world to join in prayer to expand movements in their neighborhoods, cities, and nations.

The challenge is that our effectiveness in these roles of service depends on a paradigm shift that runs counter to many traditionally established practices of missions. Are we willing to give up positions of authority and control in favor of informal relational influence? Are we willing to give up the fruit of a movement being directly related and connected to our denomination, missions agency, or organization? Are we willing to find our fulfillment not in our own ministry outcomes but in the outcomes of those in whom we are investing relationally, equipping them to multiply generationally? If so, we may find that around the world there are leaders like those I interviewed in East Africa who will find our presence to be a blessing.

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The Role of the Cross-Cultural Discipler Within Traditional Pioneer Church Planting Approaches

by Don Little

Don, a Canadian resident in the United States, was called to minister to Muslims as a teenager and has been actively involved in this calling since the age of twenty. In his role as Pioneers Missiologist-at-Large for Muslim contexts, Don is involved in a variety of networking, mentoring, teaching, and training activities focused on equipping believers for increasingly fruitful ministry among Muslims. He is a co-founder and the Director of The Lilius Trotter Center. His life focus is to disciple people to be all that they can be in God and to mobilize, train, and mentor men and women to a life of loving Muslims. He enjoys investing deeply in people to help them be fruitful and healthy in God.



My Journey and Experience in Church Planting

Prior to moving to our city of residence in North Africa in 1988, I spent roughly three years getting started in standard Arabic, then French, and then colloquial Arabic. I arrived with limited ability to function in all three languages. In my first year in the city, I watched and listened and participated as a newcomer in a fairly large team. Arriving with a strong sense of having been *called to church planting*, I was eager to dive in and see God use me to help plant one or more local house churches.

A year after arriving, the opportunity to attempt to plant a church was presented to me when I was assigned to teach English at a new language center recently launched in a neighboring city. This was in a city of several hundred thousand people that had no known believers or house churches. For seven months I commuted to work in that city and

visited it for a whole day every Saturday as I sought to plant a church. When I left the country on home ministry assignment seven months later, there was a cell group of five men, all new believers who were meeting weekly for worship, Bible study, and prayer. I had hoped that this would eventually become the nucleus of a house church. Unfortunately, when I returned to the country about 2 years later, the group had disbanded as several members had moved to other cities for work, and no one had taken up the leadership of the church plant in my absence.

This experience illustrates the kind of role that most everyone arriving in North Africa in the 1970s through the early 2000s had in mind. We were involved, in whatever ways necessary, as members of teams which worked to plant local house churches. We all prayed and hoped these churches would mature quickly so that they would send out members to plant more such churches across the country, and even across the region. At the time my family left North Africa in 1998, every one of our agency's teams in the country were involved in key roles in planting house churches in almost every city.

About a decade later some within the organization, and within the wider missions community, began to suggest that cross-cultural workers should shift their strategy and focus their efforts on helping launch church-planting *movements*. And specifically, that we should do this rather than "merely" seeking to plant individual churches that would, we all hoped, multiply over time. I was part of the first training event on CPM run by our company in 2010. Though I whole-heartedly believe that God is able to raise up movements of churches planting churches among Muslim unreached peoples, from that very first training event, I have had serious reservations about many elements in the proposed shift in strategy away from *planting churches that multiply* to *launching church-planting movements*.

Appropriate Roles for Expat Disciplers

In my 2015 book on discipling BMBs, which drew on significant on the ground research among seventy-five church planters, I devoted one

chapter to discussing “Suitable Roles for Expatriate Workers” (chap. 15). I explored the three primary roles that the seventy-five disciplers whom I interviewed suggested were the most appropriate roles for expatriate disciplers: (1) be church planters, (2) facilitate church planting, and (3) serve under the leadership of local church leaders (hopefully Believers of Muslim Background). The reasons respondents emphasized different roles were often related to the context. In North Africa, where there were very, very few indigenous believers and churches, almost everyone agreed that it was crucial that cross-cultural workers called to church planting should be encouraged to exercise their gifting and calling, as long as they did so in close collaboration and communication with existing BMB churches and their leaders.

In contrast, in the Middle East, where there can be thousands, or tens of thousands of evangelical Christians, some felt that the best way for cross-cultural workers to contribute was by serving under local church leaders, doing whatever was asked of them. This view was expressed by many in that particular region, but it was by no means the only view. I have observed, far too often, that it is very difficult for Christians whose entire experience as believers has been as people oppressed and persecuted by Muslims, to get excited about planting churches of BMBs.

It is my belief that the kinds of roles that are most appropriate for cross-cultural workers to take on, within the broader pioneering aspect of the Great Commission, depend on two primary considerations. First, the nature of the calling and gifting that God has given to those he sends. And second, the nature of the ministry context(s) in which one finds oneself. Let me briefly illustrate.

When I was in my early twenties, while ministering and living in India, I took three days to fast and pray and seek God’s direction for his call on my life. I received a very clear word from God that he was calling me to plant churches among Muslims, and I sensed him leading me to undertake this ministry in the most unreached regions of the Arab world. I moved to North Africa ten years later in obedience to God’s clear call. Yet, the

nature of my *roles* in that endeavor were discovered in the course of ministry in North Africa. There I found that my primary ministry activities became leading regular Bible studies and spending extensive time in personal discipling of young men. And even now, though I have not lived in a Muslim country for twenty-three years, I view my current *role* as a missiologist, teacher, mentor, and trainer, as an ongoing fulfillment of the calling that God gave me forty-three years ago, to be involved in *planting churches* among Muslims.

Insights from Paul's Ministry for Cross-Cultural Church Planting

Throughout my years in North Africa and in the decades since then, the primary New Testament model and inspiration for this church-planting ministry continues to be the apostle Paul and his apostolic church-planting bands that we see so clearly in both the book of Acts and in all of his Epistles.¹ Jesus is the king of the kingdom that he inaugurated prior to his ascension, yet he leaves us no actual *model* or *example* of how to preach the gospel and plant churches. What he does give us is a great model on how to minister in the power of the Spirit, and how to train up a band of disciples in new kingdom communities. The two missions on which he sent first the twelve, and then the seventy-two, were short-lived missions of a few weeks which were essentially preparing the way for Jesus' coming visits to those towns. Those short training events were an important element in his pre-crucifixion, pre-resurrection, and pre-Pentecost announcement of the kingdom. Therefore, since the church was not birthed until Pentecost, it makes sense to look at *post*-Pentecost ministry reports as we seek New Testament models and examples for our own cross-cultural ministry.

1 A few years ago, when I was asked to give two keynote addresses for a consultation on church planting in our agency, I chose to give them on the apostle Paul as a model church planter and on lessons from Paul's church-planting ministry.

Some argue strongly that Paul did not plant churches, and that there is no command given in the New Testament to plant churches. I agree that there is no command given by Jesus, or by any other New Testament author to preach the Gospel and plant churches. However, even the most well-known version of Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28 strongly implies church planting. Where else can we obey his command to baptize believers and teach them everything that Jesus commands but in the context of a worshipping community of disciples?

Even though Paul never used the expression "church planting," it is crystal clear to me that Paul went from city to city, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and then setting up, organizing, and multiplying local house church congregations. Paul was not the pastor of any of those local churches. He worked in apostolic church-planting teams, and he appointed local leadership for the newly established churches. Paul's passionate love for the people in the churches he planted shines through everywhere.

Some would suggest that Paul is not a great model for cross-cultural church planting because he ministered in a world with which he was familiar and was already fluent in the languages that were used by the people. Yet, it seems to me that this misses the value of Paul and his example. Paul moved from city to city, from region to region and preached primarily to Gentiles, though he himself was Jewish, and he saw God raise up fellowships of local believers wherever he went. It was the task of those local churches to continue what he had begun and to preach the gospel to all the surrounding villages, towns, and cities.

Of course, when one is crossing major cultural and linguistic barriers, it often takes a much longer time in the early stages, as cross-cultural apostolic workers must immerse themselves in the language and culture of the people. But the approach is still the same, to recruit and lead a team of people who will preach the gospel and ask God to raise up local churches which will take on the ongoing task of preaching and planting churches throughout the region. The model that Paul gave us

is an inspiring and instructive model of the apostolic ministry of planting churches among unreached peoples.

Lessons from the Ministry of Paul

There is an unending source of insight, challenge, and instruction from Paul and his ministry found in the pages of the New Testament to guide everyone seeking to be cross-cultural disciplers in the twenty-first century. What practical implications might this picture of church planting seen in Paul and the pages of the New Testament have? I believe there are many profound lessons that can be applied directly to cross-cultural church-planting ministry today. Here are a few examples.

(1) The planting of churches is the fruit of the proclamation of the gospel (regardless of the form of that communication: preaching, inductive Bible studies, friendship and sharing, discovery studies, etc.). Evangelism is the cornerstone of church planting. As J.D. Payne says, in his helpful little book *Apostolic Church Planting*, “Biblical church planting is evangelism that results in new churches” (2015, 24). We often get side-tracked with debates about the biblical *form* of proclamation, with some arguing that *preaching* is what is meant when we think of proclamation.

Yet Paul helps us even here, in that the reports in Acts are that he dialogued with people, debated with others, preached to some in the synagogues, and—how can one not envision—sitting and talking with his clients hour after hour in the marketplaces as he made tents and awnings in his tent-making business. Proclamation of the gospel was even then accomplished in diverse ways.

(2) The work of church planting must always be undertaken under the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit, since he alone empowers the planting of churches as he bears fruit in the hearts of people to the truth of the gospel proclaimed, shared, or discovered. In several places we get insight into how utterly dependent Paul was on the leading and anointing

of the Holy Spirit. As Paul stressed in 1 Corinthians 3, he planted the seed, but it was God who gave the increase; it was God who confirmed the message in the response of those who heard, which led to churches being planted. All of us are utterly dependent on the sending, guidance, and anointing of the Spirit of God.

(3) The churches planted do not belong to the planter, but to Christ, and they must be locally led and shaped in locally and culturally appropriate ways from the outset. We do not plant “our own” churches. The churches are always Christ’s churches. Perhaps that is why Paul did very little of the baptizing. We are not told who did the baptizing, but it seems likely that in Paul’s ministry those who came to faith baptized others who came to faith. Is that also part of the reason why Paul would never accept money for support from the churches he planted? He wanted to make sure that the churches did not feel beholden to him! They were not his churches, but Christ’s (2 Cor. 11:5–10).

(4) We who are called to cross-cultural church planting must recognize, seek out, train, and affirm apostolically gifted individuals and local disciple makers, to take the lead in such church planting as soon as the local church is birthed, as Paul clearly did. It appears in Acts and in the letters of Paul, that once there were local churches of any size, he immediately handed on the leadership of those churches to local believers, and he recruited and trained some of those local believers to become apostolic church planters as well.

In recently published ground-breaking research into what catalyzes contemporary CPMs around the world, Emanuel Prinz (2021) makes a compelling case that it is apostolically called and gifted *people* whom God uses far more than particular CPM *methods*. Paul models for us this ministry dynamic: he identified, trained, and sent local believers into Apostolic ministry, sometimes within just a few months of their conversion.

(5) As we follow Paul's model of apostolic leadership, we will be humble; we will elevate others—particularly women—into key roles, and we will keep recruiting local believers and training them to become apostolic ministers to their own people and beyond.

Though I am aware that many still hold to a common traditional understanding that men are to lead in churches and in church-planting ministry, I find it compelling that much recent scholarship notes that Paul worked quite extensively with women. We see Priscilla, along with her husband, with whom Paul worked as a co-laborer in the gospel, discipling Apollos (Rom. 16:3-4; Acts 18:26). Then there are his co-laborers in the gospel, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3). And we have Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), to whom it seems Paul entrusted to bring his epistle to the church in Rome, and likely interpret it for them as well. And we cannot forget Junia who Paul calls an apostle, who was imprisoned along with him for their apostolic ministry (Rom. 16:7). And finally, there are the three other women, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, whom Paul singles out for praise as having worked hard "*in the Lord*" (Rom. 16:12). Just as Jesus acted counter to his culture in having a whole group of women travelling with him and ministering to his needs, Paul, too, appears to have violated cultural norms in working with women in his team. He went so far as to have planted the first church in Macedonia (where he went in response to a vision) in the home of Lydia, who was likely a single businesswoman.

Concluding Benediction

There are so many more profound lessons to be learned from the apostle Paul, as Roland Allen (1912) first made us aware of more than a century ago.² May God continue to call and gift men and women by the thousands, who have similar levels of Holy Spirit empowered anointing

2 In such books as *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, and *Missionary Principles*.

as we see in Paul and so many of his team members and co-laborers in the gospel, to engage in both cross-cultural and same or near-culture apostolic evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting.

Questions for Discussion

- What is the biblical and experiential rationale for Don's perspective on appropriate roles for expatriate church planters? Do you agree with Don's rationale?
- What practical insights do you glean for your context from Don's research and reflections?

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DMM and Traditional Perspectives in Dialogue: Two Missiologists Interact on the Role of Expat Disciplers

By Matthew Miller and Don Little

From the Editorial Team: After each writing an article on the topic, [Matt Miller](#) and [Don Little](#) take turns responding to one another's articles, further explaining and defending their perspectives on the role of cross-cultural disciplers in frontier church planting.



Matt's First Response to Don's Article

I want to begin by recognizing and appreciating the many years of service Don has given to the cause of Jesus among Muslims in North Africa, without a doubt one of the most challenging contexts for cross-cultural ministry in the world. I recognize that Don's context is very different from both of my fields of service—Togo, West Africa (primarily animistic) and Rwanda (traditionally Christian with an animistic history). There are undeniable advantages in the timeline of mobilizing already-believing people to become disciple makers and apostolic workers, though even then much deconstruction of theology, ecclesiology, and tradition is necessary.

With that said, many of the East African leaders upon whom my research is based work in challenging Muslim contexts such as northern Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan, and are finding DMM principles to be very effective. In the end, I believe it is a holy process of discernment for the workers in each field to determine the roles and strategies that best fit their context, while knowing that none of us will discover the perfect

method of ministry and should all be hesitant to pass judgement on anyone else's choices.

As I have reflected on [Don's article](#), one of the most obvious differences in our thinking is the place of the ministry of Jesus in informing cross-cultural ministry. Because of his focus on church planting, Don seems to suggest that only the ministries developed after Pentecost are useful for informing the role of cross-cultural missionaries. He does recognize that the development of communities of obedient disciples (churches) is implied in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, which I also affirm. I also agree that the ministry of Paul and other apostolic workers after Pentecost are essential sources of insight for cross-cultural ministry.

My concern with his approach is that it assumes a kind of discontinuity in the ministry goals and principles of Jesus and Paul that I do not see in Scripture. Though Paul was not present when the Great Commission was given, I think all would agree that his missionary journeys were in fulfillment of that great command to make disciples of all nations. It is interesting that the Great Commission does not include any strategic or tactical instruction beyond baptizing and teaching to obey everything Jesus commanded. I believe this is because the three years Jesus spent with the disciples provided them with all the training they needed to fulfill the commission. In particular, I believe the "limited" commissions of the twelve and seventy-two in Luke 9 and 10, and in Matthew 10, would have been the experiences that informed their understanding of how to fulfill the Great Commission.

The scope of the commission was expanded by Jesus in Matthew 28, but the strategic and tactical foundations laid during the disciples' years of ministry with Jesus would shape how they fulfilled that commission.

An interesting exercise to test this theory is to take the core strategic focus of the limited commission described in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 of finding a "worthy person" or "person of peace" and apply it to the ministry of Paul. In nearly every location where Paul established churches,

there was a person of peace who served as a foundational host of the gospel and through whom a community of disciples was established (i.e., Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Cornelius, Jason, Crispus). It seems clear to me that Paul continued the strategic focus established in Jesus' training of the twelve and seventy-two, and he was likely taught these principles during his interactions with the apostles after his conversion.

Concerning the use of the term "church planting," I would fall among those who would question its appropriateness. My unease with this term has grown after spending ten years ministering in Rwanda, a nation full of churches that were planted but failed to make disciples and whose gathering places became the host locations of genocide. It is possible to establish something called "church" that does not lead to communities of obedient disciples who practice what Jesus taught. I believe when the focus remains as Jesus commanded—making obedient disciples of all nations—the church will emerge.

It is also interesting that Jesus was very clear in his teaching about what should be planted, and that is the seed of the Word and obedience to it as presented in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20). I therefore prefer to talk about the role of a disciple maker being a Word-planter who looks for fertile soil that leads to exponential multiplication.

I really appreciate Don's five points on lessons from the ministry of Paul—especially point three on the Church belonging to Christ, not the disciple maker, point four on the need to train and equip others, and point five on humility. These themes featured strongly in the comments of my East African friends concerning the attitudes and practices of effective outside leaders that I shared in my article. I do feel, though, that Don's points fall short of highlighting the full impact and vision of Paul, which was not only to establish churches that multiply, but to also catalyze movements that grow generationally to reach entire regions for Jesus.

Steve Addison has done an excellent job of highlighting this aspect of Paul's ministry by focusing on the extremely fruitful three years of ministry he completed in Ephesus (2012, 150–159). It is the climax of Paul's ministry and the place where he was most fully able to implement his strategy as an apostolic outside leader. The result was a movement that Paul said led to the entire province of Asia being reached. This was accomplished through an intentional development of multiple generations of disciple makers and apostolic workers who did the work of teaching and establishing churches while Paul was based in Ephesus. Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:2 lays the blueprint for catalyzing a movement with its four generations (Paul, Timothy, reliable people, others).

I believe that the move from "churches that plant churches" to movements that reach entire nations or people groups requires that outside leaders consider the different roles they must play as each succeeding generation emerges. Nathan and Kari Shank (2014) have provided an excellent model to highlight the kinds of generational roles that lead to movements: Seed Sower, Church Planter, Church Multiplier, Multiplication Trainer, and Movement Catalyst. Each role represents a different relationship to the previous generation of disciples and a larger sphere of influence. When the outside leader reinserts himself into the process in the place of an insider by continuing to be a seed sower or church planter, the chain of generational empowerment may not be established. So, I believe even Paul, the great "church planter," eventually became a catalyst of generations of workers by taking on the characteristics of an encourager and equipper who stepped back from those pioneering roles to develop movements that reached entire regions.

Don's First Reply to Matt's Response

First, let me begin by saying that I am glad [Matt](#) stated that it is vital that workers in each field determine the roles and strategies that best fit their ministry context, since one of the main points of my article was that

the kinds of roles which cross-cultural workers fruitfully take on must be significantly shaped by their ministry context.

I agree that one could get the impression from reading my article that I think that only the ministries developed after Pentecost are useful for informing the ministries of cross-cultural church planters. I did say that Jesus leaves us “no actual *model* or *example* of how to preach the gospel and plant churches.” And I did suggest that we can learn more from Paul than from Jesus about planting churches, since the goals of Jesus’ ministry and the realities of Paul’s ministries were different. In my mind, it is clear that Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God, whereas Paul was chosen and sent to preach that recently inaugurated kingdom and disciple those who responded into new covenant churches. Their tasks and roles were different. However, I do not “assume a kind of discontinuity in the ministry goals and principles of Jesus and Paul.” I am simply highlighting the developments that occur in ministry following Pentecost.

I also agree that Paul’s ministry was an example of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It is vital that we understand that the disciples were undergoing a period of intensive training in preparation for their post-Pentecost ministries during the three years that they spent with Jesus. And a vital part of this was the short “hands-on training” in mission that we see in the sending of the twelve and of the seventy-two. Along with their proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, a key part of the ministry of the twelve and the seventy-two was to heal the sick, raise the dead (!), and cast out demons (Matt. 10:7-8). Perhaps we might see a greater response to our proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom if we more regularly included healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out demons as a normal part of our cross-cultural ministries today! However, I have difficulty with Matt’s suggestion, that the “*worthy person*” of Matthew 10:11-13 (NIV) and the “*someone who promotes peace*” of Luke 10:6 (NIV) represents a “core strategic focus” of Jesus’ training of

the twelve and the seventy-two, and in the rest of the New Testament, despite how widely this is believed and taught among the DMM advocates.

Seeing such incidental items in the gospel accounts as “core strategies” only happens once one is already convinced of the DMM model. But may I gently suggest that the “person-of-peace strategy” is not in Jesus or in Paul, or anywhere else in the NT. In the gospel accounts of Jesus sending out the twelve and the seventy-two, Jesus was not telling them to prayerfully seek out a “person of peace” who would open their family and social networks to them. Rather, he was simply telling them to be practical, use the norms of hospitality, and stay with whoever first offered them hospitality when they arrived on their brief visit to a town to preach and demonstrate the kingdom to the lost sheep of Israel.

Furthermore, the people in the book of Acts whom Matt lists as examples of this “person-of-peace” strategy do not, on closer inspection, fit the model. Lydia was a wealthy God-fearing Gentile who responded to the message and opened her home. Also, Paul and Silas introduced the jailer to Lydia before they left town, seeming to suggest that the local church met in Lydia’s home. In Acts 10, it was *God* who took the initiative with Cornelius in sending an angel to him and a vision to Peter, to open the door to the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter was not looking for a person of peace! Jason (Acts 17:5–7) was one who responded to the message in the synagogue – he was not sought out as a person of peace. And in Acts 18:8, Crispus was the leader of the synagogue who believed, but it was the Gentile Justus who welcomed Paul into his home, apparently hosting the new house church, not Crispus. We see no evidence in Acts or his epistles that Paul sought out “persons of peace” nor did Jesus teach the disciples that they ought to.¹

1 Though I do not believe that the “person-of-peace” strategy was part of NT thinking, the strategy itself has considerable sociological merit and can be used to balance our often-individualistic approaches in ministry. We do not adopt this strategy because it was Jesus’ strategy, but *because* it can be a fruitful approach. We are not disobeying Jesus if we adopt other approaches to evangelism and church planting.

Matt says that he is uncomfortable with the term “church planter” because of having seen so many churches in Rwanda that were filled with un-discipled people. He suggests that the term “Word planter” might be more helpful. In saying this, Matt echoes the deep concern for effective discipling that I also have, which led to my research into discipling believers of Muslim background. Converting people and putting them into churches that do not disciple their members is indeed a very serious and widespread problem.

But I do not think the solution is to stop planting churches, but rather it is to make discipling a core part of church-planting ministry. The post-Pentecost reality is that the way that those who respond in faith to the gospel are disciplined (so that they can bring forth thirty-fold and hundred-fold fruit) is by being welcomed into Christ-honoring communities of believers which take seriously Jesus’ call to follow him together and live and love like he loved.

This abiding concern to keep discipling at the core of our church-planting ministries is a concern Matt clearly shares. Yet it is this very concern that makes me hesitant to embrace the proposed shift from the goal of planting maturing, multiplying churches to, as Matt expresses it, “catalyzing movements that grow generationally to reach entire regions for Jesus.” I cannot help but wonder whether such a strategy will merely repeat the unfortunate reality that Matt talks about encountering in Rwanda, of a Christianity that has been famously described as a mile wide and an inch deep, and which tragically saw the slaughter of thousands of Christians by Christians, often in church buildings.

My own experience in discipling more than a dozen BMBs, the experience of the dozens of disciplers whom I interviewed throughout the Arab world, and the experience of many dozens of others whom I have met in fifteen Muslim countries, indicate that it nearly always takes time, often very significant time (even years), to see new believers grow strong enough to be able to disciple others to maturity and plant and

lead spiritually healthy house churches. Recently, a colleague described his tragic experience of discipling a new believer over a couple of years who had been instrumental in seeing multiple house churches begun in several unreached Muslim people groups, who has now fallen into sin, is unrepentant, and has completely left the church. The DMM model appears to me to stress rapid multiplication in ways that too often lead to tragic collapse. How can a newborn Christian disciple and lead dozens of other new believers, without being first solidly disciplined?

This strategy of shifting from being *church planters* to being *catalysts for movements* has far too often led, from what I have seen around the world, to movements that often shrink as rapidly as they have grown.² The movements which remain and grow strong are those built on the foundation of patient, deep work in discipling and church planting, and in raising up indigenous leaders mature enough to multiply themselves many times over. I cannot see how the work of building the foundations can be avoided such that we focus simply on building the superstructure of a movement, of catalyzing movements (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

While I acknowledge that I fell short of “highlighting the full impact and vision of Paul,” I am not convinced that the churches that Paul founded followed the twenty-first century DMM strategy of multiplying cell groups of new believers using various forms of discovery Bible studies, which some DMM advocates find in Paul and especially in the

2 I have participated in numerous discussions about movements, am part of the Motus Dei network, and have friends who are convinced proponents of DMM-type ministry strategies. I am very hopeful that many of the small and large movements that are described in the literature are as strong and healthy as the writers believe them to be. However, it has been disturbing to me, that among the movements that are described in the literature with which I have *personal* acquaintance over the past twenty-five years, none of them come close to matching the descriptions given in the published literature. Several proved to be fabricated by local “movement catalysts” and others were far smaller than reported or had shrunk and collapsed. The enthusiasm for reporting fantastic growth and massive numbers of churches is deeply concerning. Two of the healthiest and largest movements in the world, with which I am acquainted, were *not* established using DMM or CPM principles, though DMM writers sometimes claim these movements as illustrations of DMM.

church in Ephesus (Cooper 2022).³ Matt cites Steve Addison's book (which I have not read) in suggesting that it was in Ephesus that Paul modeled this role of being a movement catalyst. Matt states:

It is the climax of Paul's ministry and the place where he was most fully able to implement his strategy as an apostolic outside leader, and the result was a movement that Paul said led to the entire province of Asia being reached. This was accomplished through an intentional development of multiple generations of disciple makers and apostolic workers who did the work of teaching and establishing churches while Paul based in Ephesus.

Although it is theoretically possible that this accurately describes the nature of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, it is not what Paul himself said about his ministry there. He says that during his three years in Ephesus he laid a solid foundation by teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27-31). It does not seem that he spent those three years "catalyzing a movement." He was deeply concerned with the possibility of false teaching. We do well to imitate the Apostle Paul: "*Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears*" (Acts 20:31). If we do not build with tears, then we will probably finish with tears as we see the movement that we helped catalyze collapse. Surely Rwanda is one of the most sobering contemporary reminders of this danger of poorly disciplined leaders and churches.

Though I am concerned about aspects of the DMM strategy of seeking to *catalyze movements*, this does not mean that I do not fully embrace the clear Pauline principle found in Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, to disciple reliable people who will be able to disciple others. This is the core foundation of all church-multiplying ministry. We pray and

3 In *Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement*, Cooper devotes a whole book to finding the principles of twenty-first century DMM methodology in the New Testament. Yet, in the end, I believe that he fails to demonstrate that the New Testament is full of examples of DMM methodology. He is finding what is not, in fact, there.

work toward seeing God raise up local people, who develop into leaders, who can in turn lead and disciple others, who continue the cycle of multiplying apostolic church planters and churches.

As God blesses the ministry of cross-cultural workers, whether they be Western, Eastern, African, or Latino, and as God births movements of believers being disciplined in maturing churches in our ministry contexts, the nature of our roles will necessarily change to support the ongoing growth of such God-initiated movements. Apart from Matt's embrace of certain elements of DMM approaches, he and I are not so far apart in how we believe God desires to work in and through those who are called into cross-cultural ministry. The attitudes of humility and service which he highlighted so well are absolutely key for all ministers of the gospel, whether cross-cultural or near-cultural.

A Final Word from Matt

As I have reread through our articles and responses, it is clear to me that Don and I share many key perspectives—especially the need for deep discipleship to be at the heart of all cross-cultural ministry. We obviously have different opinions on some methods. Don has shared several concerns that he has with DMM principles that I will address below. Some of his concerns seem to be less about whether DMM principles are effective and more about the attitude with which they are sometimes shared. I agree that it is important to distinguish clear biblical commands from inferences concerning strategies and methods from passages like Luke 10, and I apologize if my enthusiasm for the way I have seen DMM principles work has blurred that line.

Making disciples who obey everything that Jesus commanded is non-negotiable. The stories of how Jesus and his disciples did this are helpful, but do not provide a step-by-step method. Rather they point to principles that must be interpreted and applied to each context. In my own ministry, opening my mind to the possibility that the methods

Jesus used to train his disciples could inform how I approach establishing churches led to significant breakthroughs in my work, both in Togo and Rwanda.

I also believe it is important to recognize that the Holy Spirit is a wind that blows where he wills. He often upsets our expectations and does things differently than we could have planned or imagined, including at times the miraculous. With that said, I have personally found using Discovery Bible Studies with households of peace to be the most effective tool to make disciples. Nevertheless, I do not believe this is the only method that God uses.

At the same time, I am also not sure how Don can say that the strategic focus on people of peace is “not in Jesus” and “not in the New Testament.” Whatever you think about DMM, it is clear that the seventy-two were sent by Jesus to find households who responded to the offer of peace, offered hospitality, and became the center of the proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God in their community. If such a household was not present, they were to move on to another place. To me, this does not seem incidental to their mission. And the fact that Jesus chose this approach in training his disciples makes me want to seriously consider that it may have a place in effective ministry in other contexts as well. Don is right that I am making a further inference in suggesting that this focus reached and influenced the ministry of Paul. I have personally noted to share this as only a possibility, however likely it may seem to me.

Each experience I have had with a household of peace is unique and does not follow a prescribed pattern. At the same time, there are similarities: 1) a deep response to the offer of sharing a message of peace, 2) the offer of hospitality, and 3) a connection to others in the community (usually family members). I am unconcerned with the variations Don highlighted in the stories of key people in Acts through which God worked to establish churches and save entire households. Sometimes the disciple maker finds the person of peace, sometimes God

causes the person of peace to find the disciple maker. Paul, Peter, and others may not have articulated a “person of peace strategy,” but the basic principle remains the same.

God prepares people in communities to be conduits through which the gospel will pass, disciples will be made, and churches will be established. The person of peace principle only suggests that such people should be prayed for (as in “*pray for workers for the harvest*”) and sought out as key to reaching a new community. I believe that God wants to use people from within a context to establish his church and transform society. An entire household, as a group of believers, is the ideal initial context for such ministry.

This touches on our original question of the role of outside leaders in cross-cultural ministry. When a person or household of peace is identified, the role of the outsider is to teach, disciple, and equip them to reach their community and to make disciples who make disciples that form churches.

Don also shared his concern that those who emphasize catalyzing movements are overly focused on rapid multiplication which can lead to immature or weak churches. Though rapid multiplication of churches is often the result of disciple-making movements, the strategy and behaviors that lead to this multiplication are anything but rapid. They require years of building relationships, discipling, and training key inside leaders. I agree that if this stage is skipped, it is likely such a “movement” will not endure.

I also remain unconvinced by Don’s critique that the ministry of Paul in Ephesus was not purposefully related to catalyzing a movement. The text is clear that Paul’s three years “teaching the entire counsel of God” and “warning with tears” in Ephesus resulted in the entire province of Asia hearing the message and many coming to Jesus. Though the details of how this happened are not shared, such a movement did in fact occur, and it is most unlikely that Paul was the one who physically reached all

the places in that region. His teaching resulted in generations of new disciples and the multiplication of churches throughout a large area. Thus, it must have included the discipling, equipping, and sending of many new disciples to accomplish this mission. And this all happened in a relatively short time. His core generational instruction to Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:2 was surely what he himself would have practiced. Such a movement would have been impossible otherwise.

A further point is that I fear that my comments on the term “Church Planting” may have been misunderstood. Like Don, I believe the establishment of churches that make disciples, and multiply, is a key component of fulfilling Jesus’ commission. My concern with the term is that Jesus is very clear about what needs to be planted—the Word—and what disciples are to focus on in their ministries—making disciples. When obedience to the Word is established and disciples are made, the church will emerge. You cannot read and obey the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament without the church having a central place in your life and ministry.

Yet it is a sad reality that actually being a disciple of Jesus is not really a requirement for being a part of many churches. Attendance (and often financial giving) is usually sufficient to maintain membership. This is the reason that I prefer, rather than using the word “church planting,” to retain the language Jesus used of planting the seed of the Word and making disciples by teaching them to obey everything he commanded, so that true churches can emerge. It does not mean that I believe that the emergence of the church through the work of disciple makers and apostolic workers is unimportant. This may seem like semantics, but I have seen too many “churches” that were planted in Rwanda that are now national genocide monuments. The current disciple-making movement in Rwanda, that now counts more than 1500 house churches, is a direct response to these “churches” that did not disciple people to obey Christ. The recent rapid multiplication of the Rwandan house churches (from 500 to more than 1500 during 2020–2021) was preceded

by almost ten years of intense leadership training and discipleship, and many tears by both inside and outside leaders. The growth was much slower at the beginning before the season of rapid growth began.

I do appreciate, though, that Don brought up the issue of rapid multiplication. I have observed that in the retelling of the stories of movements, too much emphasis can be placed on reports of rapid growth. (One of my colleagues once referred to these as “ministry porn.”) It is too easy to skip over the intense time required for prayer, building relationships, discipling, and training that precedes the multiplication. But none of this will make me shy away from talking about, praying for, and training others to be a part of movements of disciples who make disciples resulting in churches that multiply and reach entire cities, people groups, and nations for Jesus and his kingdom.

Finally, I would like to thank Don for this incredibly helpful discussion and his tone of gentleness and grace throughout. It is easy to fall into missiological echo-chambers in which people who share assumptions continue to repeat the same ideas without considering other perspectives. Don’s comments and critiques have helped to sharpen my thinking and consider ways I may have read my own ideas into the text. Except for my preference to use language other than “church planting,” I can wholeheartedly affirm Don’s statement that it is God who births movements, and that we “pray and work toward seeing God raise up local people, who develop into leaders, who can in turn lead and disciple others, who continue the cycle of multiplying apostolic church planters and churches.” I hope that in all our discussion of methods, the principles shared by my East African friends concerning how outside leaders can be most effective will be helpful regardless of the strategic approach used.

A Final Word from Don

In being invited to offer a final brief reply to Matt in our dialogue, I will limit myself to two points. But first I want to emphasize that I, too, have appreciated the tone of this conversation. It is good to be able to talk about these matters. I am delighted to hear that Matt has found a significant shift towards greater fruitfulness in ministry by applying DMM principles. We all greatly desire to see more and more people come into a life-giving relationship with Jesus that results in life-long disciples. I am *very encouraged* that Matt is seeing considerable breakthrough in his ministry in East Africa. I truly do rejoice with him.

I want to further clarify that I welcome much of the recent (in the last twenty years or so) stress on working with groups, especially with households and existing social networks, in our efforts to advance the kingdom. From the beginning of ministry in North Africa, I sought to focus on working with social networks, long before it was the accepted thing to do.

The main thing I am concerned with is the conviction that this new DMM approach was actually *the* strategy of Jesus and Paul. A lot of problems arise when we assume that a new, often fruitful, sociologically conceived approach is modeled, or even mandated, in the New Testament. I would feel far more comfortable with the principles and language of DMM proponents if they would simply say that they have “discovered” or “been led to” a new strategy that they find very fruitful. Great, let’s try out the new strategy! Reports of fruitfulness encourage many to try it out.

But the attempt to argue that the Scriptures *teach and model* this new method is exegetically unwarranted. Or at least this is the way I see it. When one is convinced (through poor reading of the text) that this method is what Scripture teaches and models, it can lead to negative consequences. One can feel misplaced guilt when one follows the new model year after year, full of faith and earnest prayer, yet sees little or

no fruit. After all, how can there be no fruit if this is Jesus' method? Why doesn't Jesus bless his own method? Additionally, one risks modeling poor habits of Scripture reading.

Matt's assertion is that a "person-of-peace strategy" was what Jesus was modeling and training the disciples to do. He wrote, "Whatever you think about DMM, it is clear that the seventy-two were sent by Jesus to *find households* who responded to the offer of peace, offered hospitality, and became the center of the proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God in their community" (emphasis added).

I disagree. The seventy-two were not sent to "find households... who became the center of the proclamation...." The seventy-two were sent out to *proclaim the kingdom of God, to heal the sick, and to cast out demons*. They were sent out to *announce* and *demonstrate* the arrival of the kingdom of God. This is even clearer in the sending out of the twelve, reported in Luke 9:1-2 and in Matthew 10:1, 7-8. They were sent without any supplies on a short trip of perhaps a week or two (Matt. 10:5-6). They were sent to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom and to demonstrate it through healing people, expelling demons, and even by raising the dead (Matt. 10:8)! This was done to prepare the way for Jesus' upcoming visits to those towns.

Jesus told them to pronounce a blessing on "*whichever house they entered*" (Luke 9:4, 10:5) and remain there until their few days of kingdom proclamation and demonstrating were done. If someone received their blessing, then they were "a son of peace," which seems to be connected to what Jesus says in Matthew about finding and staying with a worthy person. They needed shelter and food for a few days, and they were to expect someone in each town or village that they went to, to provide it for them. They were not building relationships with their hosts. Their mission was *not* about finding "people of peace," but about *proclaiming* the arrival of the kingdom and *demonstrating* its reality through healings and deliverances.

Matt also argues that a rapid CPM-style multiplication of house churches planted by brand new believers that Paul had rapidly trained best explains the success of Paul's ministry in the province of Asia. However, when we carefully re-read the account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, we see something quite different. Yes, we see a major movement of thousands coming to faith in Christ in just three years. But Luke clearly attributes this amazing response to Paul's reasoning/preaching daily in the hall of Tyrannus for two years until "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord," to the fact that powerful signs and wonders were done which demonstrated the reality of the kingdom that he preached (Acts 19:9-20, etc.).

Yes, Paul recruited and trained men and women "from the harvest" to work with him. Once they were trained, he sent them out to appoint elders and to help the local churches organize. He was continuously working to disciple and train leaders for the ministry of the gospel, but the churches were initially established in response to the powerful work of the Spirit through Paul and those he trained, in proclamation, in healing, and in delivering multitudes from the power of Satan. The churches were not established by these trained new believers as a result of going out everywhere and leading Bible studies. Those trained, following the pattern that Jesus taught to the twelve and the seventy-two, were, like Paul, proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and driving out demons. There was *a movement* because the kingdom of God was triumphing over the kingdom of Satan.

There are frequent reports of the powerful working of the Spirit being released in some DMM movements. May God give Matt, and all he works with, the joy of experiencing fresh outpourings of the Spirit of God. May they be able to increasingly demonstrate the reality of the kingdom to which they are inviting men and women to enter as they become disciples of the King. Then they will be operating with the model that Paul and the other apostles actually used.

Questions for Discussion

- What are the key differences between Matt's and Don's perspectives on the role of expatriate disciplers in cross-cultural kingdom work? Where are the key points of agreement?
- Evaluate Matt's and Don's biblical argumentation for their positions. How do you interpret the key passages cited, and what are the implications for how you view your role in your context?

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Continuing the Conversation on “Proclamational” DBS: Four Reflections from the Motus Dei Network

by Emanuel Prinz, Sandro Oliveira, J. R. Stevenson, and
Trevor Larsen

From the Editorial Team: [The Motus Dei Network](#) is a collaboration of practitioners, missiologists, researchers, and mission leaders who seek to build authentic relationships and coordinate [scholarly research](#) on global discipleship movements in order to promote quality missiology and effective missional praxis for the church among all nations. The following four essays originated in an email exchange among Motus Dei members discussing the recent Seedbed article, “‘Proclamational’ DBS: Biblical Preaching and Teaching in Discovery Bible Studies” (by Jon T., Fall 2021 issue). Click here to read [the original article](#).



DBS and Preaching: A Comparison of Two Discipleship Tools (by Emanuel Prinz)

Dr. Emanuel Prinz has been a movement practitioner since 2001 and was used by God to start a movement among an unengaged Muslim people group in North Africa. Today he is a movement trainer and consultant to missions organizations and networks including Bethany International and New Generations. He is the Global Training Architect of Bethany International, the Associate Director of the Bethany Research Institute, and the author of *Movement Catalysts* (2022) and *Exponential Disciple-Making and Church Planting* (2019). His EXPONENTIAL™ movement training has been translated into ten languages so far and are available at www.exponential-training.com. You can contact him at emanuel.prinz@gmx.net.



From Seminary to Simple

In seminary I learned to preach three-point expository sermons.¹ I strove to hone this art of preaching during my years of pastoral ministry in my country of origin, Germany. When I later moved to serve among an unengaged Muslim people group in Sudan, I started doing Bible study with new disciples in a manner *much* too complicated and complex for their needs. As I kept honing my approach, I always watched for three indicators of needed changes. First, did our disciples remain engaged in the Bible study process, and what indicated they had disengaged? Second, did they live out what we had studied? Third, was the content of the study simple enough that they shared it with others? The more years passed, the simpler my approach became.

When I was first introduced to the Discovery Bible Study (DBS) method, I was taken aback. It was strikingly similar to the approach my team and I had developed! In hindsight we might call it “oral DBS.” In both evangelism and discipleship, we would tell a Bible story in a slightly animated way, then would invite those in the group to repeat the story as many times as was needed—often half a dozen times—until we felt they had accurately recalled the key elements in their retelling. We then asked a set of questions to help them understand the story. Our set of questions was as follows:

1. What does God/Jesus do?
2. What do we learn about him through this?
3. What is a good (or bad) example we learn from?
4. How will I obey what God has spoken to me?

Since then, I have studied the theory of learning in a PhD program in intercultural education and have gained additional lenses that have helped me understand and appreciate the benefits of the DBS model. I will summarize them briefly.

1 Classic texts include Stadelmann [1996] 2013 and Chappell [2005] 2018.

Learning Happens When Learners Do Something

Pedagogy and learning theory hold that learning happens when learners *do* something with the subject matter at hand (Ott 2019). In a DBS group, each learner plays an active role. They ask questions, they study, they discover, they articulate what they discover, they engage with what other group members say, they discuss, and they obey God by applying what they have discovered.

Their active response does not end when the group meeting ends. The final step of DBS is obedience. Every group member discerns prayerfully a step of obedience they feel compelled to take in response to the truth they have discovered during the DBS meeting. They communicate to the group what act of obedience they are committing to; then they go and do it. And additional learning occurs through the process of attempting to obey.

Compare this with the three-point expository preaching model I learned in seminary. How much do congregants in a Sunday morning worship service *do*? How active are they as they sit in their pew or on a chair and listen to a sermon? (Passive listening is not considered *doing* something.) If we honestly assess common practice, do we find many churchgoers who leave a sermon resolved before God to take a step of obedience that is on their hearts? In consequence, how much learning and growth actually happens?

The Way We Do Church is Powerful: The Lens of the Implicit Curriculum

We will understand better how learning is happening when we take a closer look at how ways of “doing church” impact learning. The lens of the so-called “implicit curriculum” is immensely helpful for this (Jackson 1968).

Educators describe as “implicit curriculum” the things taught implicitly through the way teaching and learning happen. Educators commonly

agree that the implicit curriculum *overrides* whatever may be taught in the explicit curriculum (Ferris, Lillis, and Enlow 2018). The lens of the implicit curriculum can help immensely in comparing DBS and preaching.

We do well to ask of both models: How does learning happen? What does the model teach implicitly . . .

- about the Bible?
- about the Holy Spirit?
- about how God speaks to and communes with his people?
- about ordinary disciples and the priesthood of all believers?
- about professionals/experts/clergy?
- about the nature of spiritual fellowship?
- about the nature of discipleship?

Before you read on, go back and consider each question as it relates to the preaching and DBS models. Why do I suggest this? To help you make some discoveries. These discoveries will stick with you because you made them yourself. This will be much more transformational than if you were to simply read *my* discoveries.

After you've considered each question above, you may compare your thoughts and perspective with mine below:

- The Bible: accessible to every disciple, versus only a few; nourishes the heart versus needs to be served as a ready-made meal.
- The Holy Spirit: speaks to all disciples through the Bible and through the body of other disciples versus mainly through a few professionals or clergy.
- How God speaks to and communes with his people: directly versus through a mediator.
- Ordinary disciples and the priesthood of all believers: a reality lived every time they gather together versus simply a beautiful concept.
- Professionals/experts/clergy: equip ordinary disciples for ministry versus feed the flock and perform the ministry themselves.

- The nature of spiritual fellowship: sharing discoveries of truth, commitments to obey, and accountability constitute the heart of the gathering versus an add-on after the actual service.
- The nature of discipleship: obedience to the truth one discovers versus listening to the truth someone else discovered.

The Missing Elements of Small Groups

You might think with regard to the traditional church model, “But what about small groups? Certainly participants in small groups are actively engaged and doing something with scripture. You should compare apples with apples.” Fair enough. Although there are amazing exceptions, I describe common practice in the traditional church model that includes small groups. A group meeting usually contains the following elements (each given different amounts of time in each unique group):

- Fellowship
- Worship
- Prayer
- Bible study

All these elements are important, and they resemble the biblical pattern of Christian community found in Acts 2:42. Let’s compare them with a DBS group meeting, having the following standard elements (Pestke 2019):

- **Fellowship:** sharing of joys and struggles
- **Worship:** thanking God specifically for what group members are grateful for
- **Prayer:** making requests for specific needs of the group and non-disciples that group members reach out to
- **Accountability:** asking and sharing with one another about the obedience step and the sharing with a non-disciple from last meeting
- **Bible study:** in the discovery format described above, culminating in...

- **Obedience:** committing to take a specific step in the coming week
- **Evangelism:** committing to share with someone in the coming week

While we see several common elements, the three circled elements of DBS stand out because they are not found in most small groups. These three lie at the very heart of discipleship, and where they are missing, the healthy formation of disciples is seriously impaired.

What We Don't Do in our Gatherings is Powerful: The Lens of the Null Curriculum

This realization leads us to explore what traditional models lack that the DBS model offers, as well as the significance of what is missing. We often assume that something missing is simply missing. It perhaps leaves a void. But what is missing actually plays a very powerful role in learning. It teaches people a lot. Educators describe this dynamic in learning as the “null curriculum” (Eisner 1985).

Through the absence of concrete obedience, regular gospel sharing, and accountability, traditional small group approaches communicate that such things aren't very important. They convey: “We value fellowship, worship, prayer, and Bible study. Gaining some new insights through studying the Bible is great. But concrete obedience to biblical teaching is optional. You needn't prioritize imminent sharing with someone outside the kingdom. And we will not keep you accountable, because follow-through doesn't matter much. We're happy if you demonstrate your faithfulness by showing up again next week.” Of course, no pastor or small group leader would say that explicitly. It is communicated, though, unwittingly and nonverbally through the null curriculum.

Conclusion

If we're serious about making biblical disciples, we need to wrestle with two vital questions:

5. What do I want to communicate through the way I do church?
6. What might be missing in my model that could help my disciples absorb strong biblical discipleship?

Keep discovering!

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A Global South Perspective on Preaching and DBS (by Sandro Oliveira)

Sandro Oliveira is a Brazilian missionary currently serving with Pioneers in the UK. Apart from his engagement in church planting and evangelism of unreached people groups, Sandro serves as the area leader for the north of the country. He is married to Denise, and they have three children. As most Brazilians, they enjoy watching football and eating a good barbecue.

[The article on "proclamational DBS"](#) stirred up a very healthy discussion in the Motus Dei Network on the issue of Christian discipleship

and spiritual growth among believers. However, I did notice that some participants shared a level of discontentedness with the style of teaching commonly used by churches in the West (preaching and didactic teaching). For some, the form of teaching used in Western churches has not produced the results they would have hoped for in new believers. Those who do not endorse the Western style of preaching feel that a more inductive style of teaching, such as is used in DBS groups, would be better for teaching and discipling believers.

I sympathise with some of these thoughts, and I understand the need to evaluate the efficacy of different methods used in our churches. However, I think too much of our focus may be on teaching methodology.

I have spent the last twelve years serving as a church planter in the United Kingdom, and I have used both the traditional and Disciple-Making Movement models of church planting. I have led culturally homogeneous groups that were made up of foreigners. And I have also led groups that were made up of disciples from all over the world, including the UK. Through my experience in using both preaching and DBS, I've come to realise that both methods have their strengths and weaknesses.

Born and bred in the Global South, I came to know Christ in the context of a great spiritual awakening that is taking place in my part of the world. Where I come from, preaching and didactic teaching are the most common methods of teaching used by churches. Notably the efficacy of these methods in the discipling of believers seems much more positive and transformative in the Brazilian context than what has been observed by some coming from Western church contexts. Why is that?

Considering my personal experience and all that I see happening in those places where Christianity is experiencing growth and vitality, I wonder if the real problem is not the methods, curriculums, or systems that we use, but rather something deeper. Could the issue be something more pervasively cultural, spiritual, and ecclesiological?

I have observed that, for a good number of believers in the West, the Sunday service tends to be the only “church activity” of the week. Now I understand things are done differently from community to community and denomination to denomination. However, based on my personal experience and observation from serving in England, what I have observed is true for a large part of the church membership, particularly among Reformed congregations.

In the Global South, however, as I have experienced it, church is more of a whole-life experience. When you come to Christ, you are brought into a new “family.” In this context, relationships are very close, and people spend a huge amount of time together. There are also numerous church activities throughout the week. Because of the constant interaction a believer has with his/her community of faith, learning and transformation is not taught, but modelled, encouraged, and expected. New believers are held accountable for their spiritual growth. In this setting, the Sunday preaching is followed up with numerous and constant nudges to live out what we’ve been taught in the world.

On the other hand, I have observed with running DBS groups in the West that if a single DBS gathering is the only faith-based activity a new believer participates in during the week, there is comparatively less noticeable learning and transformation in their lives.

The above comparison is an example of why it seems to me that there are more variables to the discussion about teaching and discipleship in church than simply finding the best teaching model.

Another Look at the Biblical Meaning of “Preaching” and “Teaching” (by J. R. Stevenson)

J. R. Stevenson (pseudonym), from the USA, has been serving in the Arab world for a decade and is focused on starting reproducing churches among unreached and unengaged Arab Muslims. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America,

with a background in both theology and applied linguistics. He has worked in educational leadership and entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

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I am a practitioner who does Discovery Bible Studies regularly in an Arab Muslim context. While believing this to be an effective evangelistic strategy in my context, I have some concerns about the long-term sufficiency of DBS in the life of the church. [Jon T.'s article](#), in my opinion, has significant credibility by acknowledging that the "objections [to DBS] cannot be dismissed as merely the misgivings of 'traditionalists'" (2021, 11), due to the clear presence of teaching and preaching throughout the New Testament. His serious approach to the issue is reflected throughout the article.

Jon T. also weaves practical helps for implementing DBS throughout the article. For example, he notes that in his team's practice, leaders do not only passively ask questions but may proclaim or confront using the text under consideration (15). Further, he trains leaders of DBS groups not only to ask the predetermined DBS questions but also to prompt the group to notice key truths in the text through questions such as "Why is this phrase in verse 12 important?" (19). I also appreciate his note that DBS is a tool that can help discovery groups to develop into churches (10), as well as the needed reminder that leaders often need to hold back information for which the group is not yet ready (20). His acknowledgement that DBS is a tool of a larger strategy also assuages some concerns that DBS could become the only way in which leaders access the Word (20).

Having said that, I would like to raise some questions about Jon T.'s biblical argumentation related to the meaning of preaching and teaching. First, I find some aspects of the biblical usage of preaching to be missing in Jon T.'s presentation. According to Griffiths's analysis of words for preaching in the New Testament—he includes *kerusso*, *euangelizo*, and *katangello*, while Jon T. discusses *dialogomai* instead of *katangello*—

there are three features of preaching: "As used in the New Testament, the verbs typically [1] refer to the act of making a public proclamation; [2] the agent is generally a person of recognized authority; and [3] the substance of the proclamation is normally some aspect of Christ's Person and work, the implications of the gospel, or some other truth from God's word" (2017, 42).

Jon T. cites Griffiths's study at a few points but does not address points 1 and 2 in particular. Those points, in my opinion, are critical for evaluating if DBS can fulfill the role of preaching in the full biblical sense. Griffiths notes that of the fifty-nine occurrences of *kerusso* in the New Testament, all but a few of them refer to an agent of recognized authority. Griffiths concludes that "the New Testament nowhere calls or commands believers as a whole group to 'preach' the gospel" (2017, 51). Griffiths acknowledges that all believers do have a role in speaking the gospel to their communities (believing and unbelieving) but argues that "preach" (*kerusso* in particular) has a narrower semantic range than this general speaking of God's Word, a range limited by the three features noted above.

Jon T. does not engage with this conclusion and indeed states the opposite one: "The biblical use of *kerusso* implies an expectation for all believers to be engaged in proclaiming publicly the good news about Jesus, crucified and resurrected" (2021, 14). While I agree that all believers do have a responsibility to "*give a reason for the hope that is in them*" (1 Pet. 3:15), the biblical usage of *kerusso* does not support that all believers have a responsibility to preach. Perhaps Jon T. has another way of dealing with this data, but it is not presented in the article.

Second, in terms of the biblical passages regarding teaching and teachers, I have two primary reservations about Jon T.'s portrayal of the material.

(1) In my view, he relies on an unstated assumption—which I would question—when he says, "Teaching is connected to disciple making, and

since the mandate for disciple making falls to every believer, the mandate for teaching does as well” (2021, 17). The problematic assumption, from my perspective, is that the command to make disciples is given to all believers in the same way.

The Great Commission has implications for the whole church, but it was given *directly* to the apostles, not to all believers. We all make hermeneutical connections from the apostles (who originally received the commission) to the rest of the church. Jon T. draws a connection directly to all believers, while I would draw a connection to the church as a whole, understood as an institution built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), whose work is guided by the leadership of elders. These different assumptions obviously affect whether “the mandate for teaching” in the Great Commission “falls to every believer,” or whether there are some kinds of teaching that are the direct responsibility of those gifted and called by the Spirit (in distinction to the general responsibility of all believers to teach and admonish one another [Col. 3:16]).

(2) Some biblical examples of teaching in the context of the body of believers are lacking from Jon T.’s presentation that could helpfully inform the discussion. As an example, in 1 Tim. 4:1–16, Paul instructs Timothy to do several things in response to false teaching that was apparently being spread. He says he should “*put these things before the brothers*” (4:6), “*command and teach these things*” (4:11), devote himself “*to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching*” (4:13, ESV). I recognize that Jon T. acknowledges such elements can be incorporated into DBS (2021, 15). However, I would argue these elements are not inherently part of “discovery,” and that therefore the “discovery” element must be supplemented at some point if the full biblical picture is to develop.

For this reason, in my practice, I continue to use DBS as an initial evangelistic tactic and training tool for equipping believers to go out into their communities. However, as the church matures and Christ

gifts it with teachers, I aim to encourage more direct forms of teaching and proclamation to eventually replace DBS in the gathered worship of the church.

Nonetheless, believers in a fully-formed church can continue to be empowered to use DBS as an effective strategy for engaging lost people in study of the Word. I agree with Jon T. that all believers have a role in spreading the Word—what Griffiths calls “the Word ministries of all believers”—and DBS, in my opinion, remains an effective way to activate believers in that.

In conclusion, Jon T. has brought out many wonderful aspects of the role of all believers in ministering the Word to each other, both in terms of biblical support and the practicalities of how DBS can facilitate that ministry. However, as I have described above, I find that the article inadequately deals with several nuances of the biblical material as it relates to the long-term sufficiency of DBS to express biblical preaching and teaching in a fully-formed church.

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The Role of Gifted Bible Teachers in Movements (Trevor Larsen)

Trevor Larsen, PhD, is a teacher and “come-alongside coach” who is convinced of God’s desire for all peoples. A former math teacher, pastor, and wrestling coach, and current seminary professor, he and his wife live in Southeast Asia alongside the “Fruitful Band of Brothers” featured in his books on movements, which are available at <https://focusonfruit.org>.



An important question raised about Disciple-Making Movements is: “If disciples receive biblical content primarily through discovery, what role

(if any) is available for mature believers who have the gift of teaching, as described in the New Testament?" I would like to provide some concrete examples which describe how one set of linked movements I am involved with uses gifted Bible teachers. The result is a larger "Word system" which applies the equipping ministry described in Eph. 4:11 broadly in a way which supports movements which are expanding and branching out to other peoples and places.

Most Christians in the Western world are accustomed to a Bible teacher presenting a monologue to a listening audience of believers, most or all of whom have been believers for many years. Few Western leaders have grappled with how to best use teachers in a context where exponential growth is occurring faster than we can keep up with. So it can be hard for Westerners to imagine how to fit the teaching gift into movements that are expanding in ways similar to the pace and patterns we see in the book of Acts.

The dynamic of quickly expanding church-without-walls-becoming-movements is so foreign to the experience of most Western Christians that we tend to erroneously assume the fruit of such growth must be shallow. We then tend to read the Bible through that assumption, which can skew our interpretation of Scripture. A serious study of Acts shows that the early Church grew quickly and produced linked movements of churches-without-walls numbering thousands of believers. This happened in just a few years in each of these areas: Jerusalem; Antioch; and the provinces of Galatia, Ephesus-Asia Minor, and Macedonia. Strong growth also happened in the Judean province, Samaria, and Achaia.

I doubt any Bible teacher would claim that the fast growth described in Acts was wrong because it was shallow. Luke, as the divinely inspired author, repeatedly emphasized in periodic summaries that everyone was in awe of and celebrated the continuous growth of the church (e.g., Acts 2:47; 5:11-14). The nature of the growing linked-*ekklesia* mosaic described in Acts was expansive: growing in quality and quantity at the same time.

We believe the same thing can happen (and *is* happening) in our time as well.

I would like to share the experience of one set of movements that prioritize multiplication of small groups in which participants discover God's truth together from the Bible. *Teachers have an important role*, not in leading one small or medium-sized group directly, or speaking to large audiences, but in equipping small group leaders of somewhere between five and five hundred linked small groups.

The teachers' concrete equipping activities include the following:

1. **Responding to questions about Bible texts from small group leaders.** Small group leaders, in their cluster of groups, voice questions that emerge in their groups which they do not yet feel they can answer well. Alternatively, the leaders of small regions may ask for help to answer certain questions from small group leaders. For example, in a Bible study series on the book of Mark, questions often arise about how to address issues Muslims have concerning the person of Christ.
2. **Introducing new Bible study series.** After picking three passages out of twenty-five in a series, teachers facilitate these leaders to discuss them in groups (e.g., five breakout groups with four leaders each meeting in the corners of a room—or on Zoom). After discussing the text in groups, each group in the room picks a representative who reports to the larger group what they have discovered from their time in the Word. After hearing each group's summary, the overall facilitator then highlights anything else of significance in the text that was not yet reported by the groups' representatives. This teacher may use time at the end to highlight certain Bible study methods. For example, if the passage is Jesus' three parables in Luke 15, the equipping teacher will highlight Bible study methods specific to interpreting this set of three linked parables.

3. **Developing new Bible study series.** For example, within the group I'm involved with, some local leaders expressed the need for teaching regarding spiritual warfare and the demonic. In response, some teachers prepared a series from the Bible on Satan, demons, and our response to demonic issues. The gifted teachers appreciated this comprehensive series, but additional feedback showed us that a briefer version was needed for the majority of believers who had less time available to devote to this topic, which resulted in a shorter series called "Sixteen Traps of Satan."

In developing a series like this, people with teaching gifts may initiate the effort to develop the series and then connect with other teachers within the same set of believer groups to develop it together.

4. **Including the teacher's voice in inductive studies for groups.** Teachers work to protect our value that 90 to 95 percent of each series consists directly of Bible passages, teaching people to search the scriptures themselves. For the other 5 to 10 percent, the teacher develops passage summary titles and introductory and transitional remarks using the teacher's voice. The passages they select for the series, plus these remarks, frame the entire discovery process. They select passages that develop some aspect of disciples' spiritual growth, and in their remarks use terms familiar to local people, to convey the biblical meaning.
5. **Writing other Bible mentoring tools.** These include, for example, teaching on various Bible study methods, a dialogue showing how to answer common questions, or some light commentaries on critical issues. Such tools can vary widely.
6. **Working with IT experts to make sure their library of Bible study series and linked Word tools are available widely and inexpensively.** We put the entire Bible and our Bible study series within an app (available free from Android Play Store), in the most

widely used language. (We hope to go into other languages, but this will require much additional work.)

7. **Developing short teaching videos on critical issues.** The idea is for these videos (which can be sent by WhatsApp attachment with low bandwidth) to have a particular equipping function, especially on sharpening skills in Bible study. For example, one teacher prepared three short videos on three topics in Proverbs which were used to improve skills for reading and applying Proverbs.
8. **Teaching in occasional medium-sized gatherings of twenty to two hundred people.** Such gatherings reach to a range of different kinds of believers and their contacts. One example is a teaching session regarding the celebration of Eid Al-Adha on the Islamic calendar, remembering Abraham's sacrifice of his son. At this gathering, teachers convey a walk-through-the-Bible teaching on true sacrifice from the Bible. During the fasting month, they give a similar teaching on true fasting. On other occasions, they hold one-day seminars on harmonious families. Another example of this is a special twelve-hour generosity training to equip teachers which highlights passages in the Bible about giving. These trainings can be done face to face or by Zoom. Teachers intentionally try to model good Bible study methods in the way they address relevant needs and questions in their context in order to equip hearers in their own reading and application of the Bible.

In this particular network of rapidly expanding movements, gifted Bible teachers play numerous vital roles in equipping God's people and building up the body of Christ. Although the roles look different than what most Westerners envision teachers doing, these teachers exercise their gifts in forms of teaching that meet the needs of the fast expanding movements in which they serve.

Questions for Discussion

- What do you think of the authors' different perspectives on "preaching" and "teaching" in Discovery Bible Studies? What are the biblical, cultural, and educational factors that influence the way we define and practice "preaching" and "teaching"?
- How would you assess and compare the Discovery Bible Study model with the expository preaching model? Is one more biblical than the other? Is one more effective? Does your assessment change depending on whether it is used with seekers, new believers, leaders, or fully-formed churches?

Book Reviews



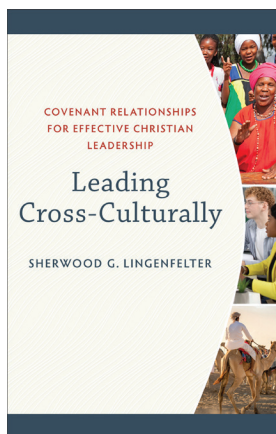
Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership

by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter

Baker Academic, 2008. 176 Pages.

Reviewed by Alex Peterson

Alex Peterson (pseudonym) has led cross-cultural teams for over a decade in the Middle East in both non-profit and church contexts. The organization he led had members from 20 different nationalities, many of whom serve as cross-cultural ministry workers. He is currently involved in training and equipping of new cross-cultural workers.



Leadership is inherently hard, while leading cross-culturally adds extra burdens of potentially-damaging miscommunication. Learning to lead teams through these minefields is essential for the health and effectiveness of cross-cultural ministries.

Multicultural teams are the default today, with any ministry or tentmaker position often requiring interaction with people from multiple cultures. Many minister alongside national churches or in other cross-cultural contexts, often in positions of formal or informal leadership. International churches—multicultural families themselves—are a growing juggernaut in places where there is no indigenous church. Cross-cultural leadership isn't just required – it's inherent in the work.

Drawing from numerous case studies and his own experience in higher education leadership, Dr. Sherwood Lingenfelter gives wise, if sometimes one-dimensional, advice to those who have leadership responsibilities in cross-cultural ministries. Lingenfelter is the Provost Emeritus and Senior Professor of Anthropology at Fuller Seminary and former provost of Biola University. He has researched leadership in cross-cultural contexts, and he has written *Leading Cross-Culturally* with the cross-cultural worker and the missions world in mind.

Lingenfelter opens each chapter with a leadership case study which he refers to throughout the chapter. The case studies build on one another throughout the book to flesh out the book's foundational thesis that cultivating "covenant relationships" is the best foundation for cross-cultural leadership and building healthy multicultural teams.

Lingenfelter defines leadership primarily as establishing and maintaining healthy relationships between members of the organization and team. The health of these relationships depends on the leader casting a clear vision for the community to participate in and work toward. People from different cultures, however, have different approaches to both vision casting and achieving the team's vision.

To address this, Lingenfelter provides a helpful matrix in chapter four which describes how individuals approach relationships based on their group/individualist orientation and how they understand roles within the organizational structure (whether rigidly or less so). Problems arise when people approach organizational life from different perspectives without even realizing it, causing friction as expectations are not met.

Therefore, a role of the leader is to understand how people from different cultural backgrounds understand team and to unite them behind a shared vision of how the team will work. Within this framework, Lingenfelter distinguishes between "task-focused" teams and "covenant community" teams. He argues that teams with a focus on community

over task create deeper bonds and trust and are better able to weather inevitable storms.

When considering cross-cultural teams, I recommend leaders consider what Kevin DeYoung calls “epistemic humility” (2020), which is a fancy way of saying, “We don’t know what we don’t know, and we should remember that in humility.” When approaching cross-cultural relationships, particularly when we are new to the culture, there is much that we do not know. Getting to know our team and their perspectives on teamwork takes time, conversations, mistakes, forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, and grace to work out differences. Lingenfelter suggests the leader is the first to demonstrate humility, and more importantly, sacrificial love, even if that means sacrificing honor and reputation (chapter 11). When miscommunication happens, and when the team is fractured, the leader should make the first move to understand people and reconcile broken relationships.

Another helpful framework that Lingenfelter gives is the distinction between “responsible-for” and “responsible-to” (chapter 10). “Responsible-for” leaders, he says, “demonstrate emotional attachment to their role and results, and they exercise power and control to achieve results and assure quality” (133). Leaders acting in this way may care more about their own standing than that of the people around them. “Responsible-to” leaders are quicker to “grant authority, responsibility, and freedom” to the people with whom they work and who work beneath them (133). Often times, acting in a “responsible-to” manner is more effective and gives opportunities to show grace which allows people to grow in their own work. When leaders become consumed by their own success, they are driven to consolidate their power, which is a rich soil for pride and selfishness. It is difficult to act in a “responsible-to” manner, particularly when we feel our own reputations are on the line. However, remembering we are responsible to the people we lead helps us remember that our primary focus is not about accomplishing tasks but about loving people.

Lingenfelter has experience in leadership, both in practice and in research, thus I find myself hesitant to be critical. However, there some questions I might ask, if given the opportunity, from my own leadership experience as the executive director of an organization in the Middle East with staff from twenty nationalities (the majority being Arab and Muslim), in which I was responsible for operations and worked with a multicultural, multi-religious board to drive the vision.

First, Lingenfelter seems to imply that cultural behaviors are largely neutral (chapter 4). And they usually are. But I would ask, "How do we discern when cultural behavior isn't neutral, but rather negative?" Lingenfelter may object that he does not claim culture is neutral. Indeed, he writes, "The second problem with my early definition is the idea that culture is 'neutral.' After years of reflection on texts of Scripture that reference the world, ideas, doctrines, ancestors, myths, and genealogies, I have concluded that Scripture takes a rather negative stance toward the fallen human cultural ways of life" (60). However, Lingenfelter does not develop a framework for evaluating cultural practices. Further in the chapter, he seems to view culture as a neutral vessel that the cross-cultural leader must learn to interpret.

It is largely true that cultural behaviors are usually neutral. However, there are times when leaders need to make judgment calls on whether our actions or that of the people we lead are right or wrong. Sometimes leaders' cultures have blinded them to their own unbiblical behaviors. At other times, leaders may need to address a sinful practice of a team member from a different culture. Making such judgment calls is complicated by biases and sinful hearts, leading easily to mistakes and miscommunication.

This was particularly relevant when leading my middle managers. Their only experience of leadership, or being led, was command and control. This meant my leaders tended to manage harshly. But it was also considered part of the cultural and leadership landscape. How is someone like me, from a different culture, to address this?

In this regard, I appreciated Lingenfelter's council on covenant relationships, humility, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for direction. These elements are critical for navigating the treacherous waters of cross-cultural conflict and evaluation. When we rely on the Holy Spirit and engage with those whom we lead and serve, we grow in humility and gain additional perspective, better able to discern when our own or others' actions need to be corrected. Then when a moral judgment is required, leaders have the right heart attitude and right goal in mind.

Second, what happens when a team member does not perform their tasks adequately and acts selfishly? While I believe Lingenfelter is correct to value the covenant relationship of the community over task completion, the team must still accomplish tasks such as pastoral ministry, mercy ministries, or administration. Lingenfelter gives a wise process of listening, prayer, discernment, and confrontation in love to address issues. The result, he infers, is that the person will improve their performance as they lean in to covenant community or, perhaps, discern that they need to move on to another job.

There is much to be commended in this approach. I remember one instance when my frustration towards a staff member boiled over, and the result was more hurt feelings and less improvement in performance. I was more concerned with saving face and accomplishing the task than with the person in front of me. Even so, there are times when a person does not hear a call to move on, their performance does not improve, and the person becomes belligerent. The cross-cultural leader is the one responsible to manage the team. How does the leader know the time to be quick and decisive verses slow and measured?

Third, how does the leader strike the appropriate balance between the need to take time in addressing poor performance and the multi-dimensional goals that pressure most leaders? The case studies seemed one dimensional in that the only relationship in focus was that of the leader and the team. Often, however, the leader is acting within a larger ecosystem of perspectives, goals, and expectations. There may be local

governments, donors, board members, or beneficiaries of the ministry to consider. Those pressures impact how quickly a leader feels he must deal with those who are not contributing to the covenant community.

However, Lingenfelter's advice is still relevant. Leadership, as he notes in chapter 1, is not about telling people what to do; rather, it is about influencing people to accomplish a certain vision. This can include "managing upward" or influencing those to whom cross-cultural leaders report.

Approaching conflict within the frame of covenant community is helpful both for leaders relating to poor performing team members as well as for leaders relating to larger stakeholders. There have been moments when I have had to work with parents, board members, and other stakeholders to redirect their attention to our mission and vision as focused on people and driven by our love for God. It takes a wise leader to realize team conflicts require multidimensional responses. This relieves the unnecessary performance pressure on the leader and makes space to utilize all available means of grace when dealing a struggling team member.

Lastly, how does Lingenfelter balance the role of leadership in exercising authority and the need to exercise sacrificial love for those being led? Jesus' leadership was sacrificial, and therefore I agree that we are also called to be sacrificial in our leadership. However, Lingenfelter seems to set up a dichotomy between "rule over" language and sacrificial leadership. In some ways, I feel he is correct. "Ruling over" others is often used as a way to describe how leaders utilize their positions of authority to achieve their own selfish ambitions and goals. However, this behavior can be distinguished from proper exercise of authority.

Exercising authority should still be done in the wider context of Christ's sacrificial leadership and our own call to exhibit the same for those we lead. When making hard decisions, we prayerfully and humbly listen, learn, and seek consensus. We seek counsel from mentors and

from the community whom we lead and serve. Yet, the bent of the human heart does not naturally err on the side of exhibiting too much servant leadership. Rather, most leaders – precisely because of our leadership personalities – default to “ruling over” in ways that are “lording over” those whom we lead. The counsel to be sacrificial in our leadership is wise counsel.

I recommend this book for those who are new to cross-cultural leadership or those who need another perspective in diagnosing roadblocks they are experiencing as cross-cultural leaders. While this book does not address all the nuances of cross-cultural leadership, the principles form a solid foundation from which to springboard into the complexities of working with people from different perspectives. It is full of examples and practical suggestions that drive the reader to trust in the Holy Spirit and create covenant communities – a worthy endeavor in any leadership context.

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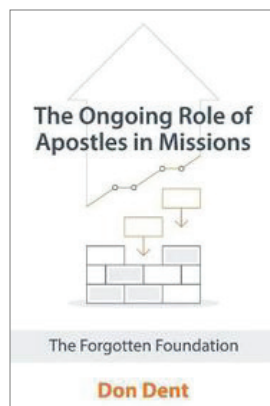
The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation

By Don Dent

WestBow Press, 2019. 258 pages.

Reviewed by William Jackson

William Jackson (pseudonym) has been engaged in church planting among Muslims in South Asia since 2012. He and his family live in a restrictive access country. William taught English to college-age students and is now pursuing another creative access business. He is passionate about evangelism, church formation, vision, strategy, and the development of people around him.



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The role of the apostle is alive today and sorely needed for foundational church planting. Dent argues throughout his book that the gift of apostleship is for every age and churches and missions agencies often fail to realize this (Thesis Statement, para. 1). He says that the word *apostle* was used in the early church for missionaries, and the loss of this word today has negatively affected missions today (Chapter Summaries, para. 2). If Dent is correct in his understanding of the gift of apostleship and its relevance in church planting, then the example of Paul and the apostles in the New Testament is worthy of following (Thesis Statement, para. 1). This topic integrates theology, missiology, and Christian History and is important for any Christian seeking to fulfill God's mission on earth.

Dent worked as a Church Planter and later trainer of new missionaries within the International Mission Board (IMB) for more than three decades (Personal Background, para. 1, 2). Dent is concerned that ineffectiveness in missions today is the result of missionaries not building upon an apostolic, New Testament model and foundation (Personal Background, para. 5).

Summary of Content

Dent rightly begins with Scripture to demonstrate that apostles are God's gift for all generations (Chapter Summaries, para. 4). He says that too often we associate the word *apostle* with a role, an office in the Church, but divorce it from its Scriptural emphasis on mission (chap. 1, para. 1). The English word apostle comes from the Greek *apostolos* which always "denotes a man who is sent...with full authority" (chap. 1., sec. 3). The word *missionary* was developed from the Latin word *mitto* (to send) and was popularized during the colonial period when it described the state's and church's sending of envoys on religious assignments (chap. 1., sec. 3). In the Gospels we see that the Twelve were first called apostles because Jesus sent them (chap. 1., "Task and Authority in the Apostles' Commission"). They were commissioned by Jesus to make disciples among every people group.

Apostles lay a foundation upon Christ in new areas of church planting (chap. 2, "Foundation Builders"). Dent describes four groups of apostles in the New Testament: 1) The Twelve, 2) other commissioned eyewitnesses, 3) missionary apostles, and 4) envoys of the churches (chap. 2, "Persons Identified as Apostles"). Scriptures like 1 Cor. 15:7 demonstrate that this group of apostles was larger than the Twelve (chap. 2, "Other Commissioned Eyewitnesses"). Acts 14:4 shows that Luke also considered fellow missionaries to be apostles (chap. 2, "Missionary Activities"). Paul wrote his appreciation to Andronicus and Junias (presumably a woman) as apostles (Rom. 16:7). Many scholars also believe Paul thought of Apollos as an apostle (1 Cor. 3:4-10,22;

chap. 2, "Missionary Apostles"). Dent argues that Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy should also be considered as apostles given their assistance in foundational church planting in Paul's ministry (chap. 2, "Missionary Apostles"; 1 Thes. 2:6-7). Ephesians 4:11 never gives the impression that God's gift of apostles will end before Christ's return (chap. 2, "Gift to the Church").

Dent also surveys the meaning of "apostle" in early Christian literature and trustworthy historical sources. The *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* use the term *apostle* to describe itinerant Gospel preachers who needed hospitality while on their travels (chap. 1, "Early Church Missionaries as Apostles"). Both Origen and Eusebius use the term apostle for people who were involved in foundational church planting. Today, some theologians say that the term apostle is approximate to the word for what we call missionary today (Demarest, Calvin, Oden, Geisler, Keener), while others say that apostles are no longer necessary (Ladd, Erickson, Saucy, Grudem; cf. chap. 1, "The Evangelical Focus on Scriptural Authority"). In more recent times there has been a resurgence of a rediscovery of the leadership pattern in ministry in Eph. 4:11 (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers – five-fold ministry pattern or APEST) (chap. 1, "Emerging and Missionary Church Advocates).

Unfortunately, the word *apostle* received negative attention when heretics claimed they were apostles, therefore diluting the word, work and office (2 Cor. 11:13; chap. 1, "The Slow Divorce of Task and Authority"). At times the church has assumed that the role of apostles has been antiquated as people thought the fulfillment of the Great Commission had already happened. Ed Stetzer says that when the Reformers rejected apostolic succession, they tacitly deemphasized the sending nature of the church and zeal for missions diminished (chap. 1, "The Slow Divorce of Task and Authority" and "Emerging and Missionary Church Advocates).

Dent describes the Apostle Phase of church planting as one where evangelism is prominent and people are first coming to Christ in an unreached area. New believers are then discipled and the apostles look

for local church leaders to provide leadership for new congregations (chap. 3, "The Apostle Phase and Established Church Phase Compared"). Dent says that miraculous signs, suffering, sacrifice and struggle will most likely be needed and occur in the Apostle Phase of church planting (chap. 3, "The Apostle Phase and Established Church Phase Compared"). He argues that, because the apostle role is needed today, Paul's ministry model should be examined and used contextually since he was an effective church planter we have significant information on (chap. 4, "Paul as Missionary Model"). There are certainly characteristics and social statuses that Paul had that we do not, but principles from his ministry can be applied today. His plans of evangelism, follow up, teaching and leadership development are clearly written in the New Testament (chap. 4, "Foundation of Paul's Strategy"). Paul was not a lone ranger, but developed church planting teams throughout his ministry, something worth emulating today (chap. 4, "Foundation of Paul's Strategy").

Evaluation

Don Dent's writing style helps the reader through complex theological issues in a succinct manner. Dent does not seek to vilify those who disagree with them, but to demonstrate that he understands the complexities of this discussion on the word apostle. He thoughtfully interacts with the Scriptures' use of *apostle*, making the case for his view of its biblical meaning while tactfully acknowledging opposing viewpoints. I think he aptly fulfills his thesis, demonstrating that the loss of the word apostle and its connection to its task of discipling individuals in all people groups negatively affects missions today.

Dent compiles a vast amount of resources to show how the word apostle is used in the New Testament and later Christian sources. He shows that the work of apostles as foundation builders in the church has continued throughout history. I am thankful to be a part of a missions organization that affirms and applies most of Paul's missions strategies listed by Dent. Chapter 4 provides detailed information for the church

planter seeking to apply Paul's principles, ideas, strategy and plans in ministry.

While not a weakness to the book, some readers may not fully agree with Dent, theologically and / or missiologically. His exegesis on Ephesians 4:11, that the five types of leaders in the church continue until Christ's return, is one that not all will find tenable. (I, however do.) I enjoyed Dent's discussion on miracles and their possible involvement in foundational church planting (chap. 3, "Signs – Suffering – Sacrifice – Struggle") along with his survey of missionaries on their experience with miracles (Appendix 1, para. 1).

Relevance for the Practitioner

This book will benefit the global church for multiple reasons I'll list below. Apostolically minded Church planters among unreached peoples will find this book affirming to their gift-set. Missions agencies whose main goal is church planting among UPGs should consider if their Team Leaders are apostolic in nature. It seems most ideal to begin a foundational church planting work with such an individual, coupled with other spiritual gifts once the ground has broken. The role of the apostolic leader is also addressed in *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities*, where Greg Livingstone suggests the apostolic leader consider forming their team with an equal distribution of the leadership gifts presented in Eph. 4:11 (Livingstone 1993, 211). As a ministry develops a foundation upon Christ, the Apostle should prayerfully consider if they need to move on and let the Pastors and Teachers nourish the church and or movement.

Dent's book will also benefit churches in already reached areas as they consider developing the men and women in their congregation according to Eph. 4:11. In most Churches in the West, I see heavy utilization of the Pastor and Teacher roles, but a failure to develop the Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists among them. For such churches, reading through this book will help develop and free such individuals to

minister according to the gifts God has given them. Throughout the book, Dent encourages the reader to strongly consider Paul's ministry methods and apply them. Paul admonished the Corinthians to imitate him (1 Cor. 11:1) and the Philippians to follow his example (Phil. 3:17). This gives me reason to contemplate to what extent we are to follow and imitate Paul's ministry today?

As a church planter myself, I would have benefitted from reading this book prior to beginning our ministry among an unreached Muslim people group. I had wondered about the gift of apostle and why it was hard to connect with churches who were not passionate about reproducing themselves. Had I understood the gifting of apostle and its inclusion in Eph. 4:11 as a primal leadership gift in the church, I would have become more confident in who God created me to be. This book will assist those who are apostles, who find it difficult when church leaders do not affirm their giftings, and free them to create new ministries in line with this inherent desire to preach the Gospel and make disciples where Christ has not been named (Rom. 15:20). As our church planting team continues ministry and disciples are made, I believe God wants me to develop other teammates and see what leadership gifts God has given them to build the unity of the church (Eph. 4:13). Ministry is certainly not a "one-man show."

Recommendation

I highly recommend this book to all believers serious about affirming various leadership gifts so that the body of Christ is unified (Eph. 4:11-13). There are biblical reasons to believe the gift of apostle still exists today, and Dent provides the rationale for this and a healthy boundary to this term. This book serves the whole church so that apostles are affirmed, developed and released to plant churches whose foundation is built upon Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-11).

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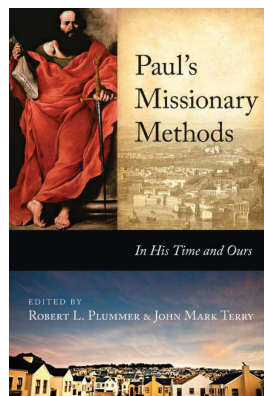
Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours

Edited by Robert L. Plummer & John Mark Terry

InterVarsity Press, 2012. 235 pages.

Reviewed by M. James

M. James (pseudonym) and his family served more than twenty-five years in the Arabian Peninsula, where he was employed in higher education. Together with a team, they co-labored to follow up media inquiries, minister to seekers, disciple believers, and train workers.



C.S. Lewis wrote,

Every age has its own outlook. It is especially good at seeing certain truths and especially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books... Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we, but not the same mistakes. (Lewis 1944, 2-4)

In 1912, Anglican priest and missionary in China, Rev. Roland Allen, published his critical text, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912). Allen analyzed the historical context of the early church, the presentation of the Gospel, instruction of new believers, and the organization of

new churches with a summative conclusion that questioned missionary practices of his day. The work was insightful and eventually inspired many church-growth movements but was not readily accepted in his day. “No one will understand [my writings] until after I’ve been dead for ten years,” Allen said to his grandson and biographer (1995, vii).

True to his prediction, Allen’s work was initially overlooked and considered irrelevant, but was later credited by Donald McGavran as instrumental to the Church-Growth Movement of the twentieth century (168). Furthermore, Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church*, Neil Cole’s *Organic Church*, David Garrison’s *Church Planting Movements*, and many other fundamental texts credit Allen as providing a foundational understanding to *spontaneous* church growth.¹

In 2012, several organizations recognized the one-hundredth anniversary of Allen’s book. The January 2012 volume of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* was dedicated to the theme of missionary methods (Payne 2012). The Oxford Center for Mission Studies dedicated their July 2012 edition to articles about Allen. Robert Plummer and John Mark Terry, professors of New Testament interpretation and missions, respectively, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, edited and published a collection of articles discussing the impact of *Missionary Methods* on missiology and New Testaments studies. This collection is organized into two parts, “Paul in the New Testament” and “Paul’s Influence on Missions.”

Long ago, before my service on the field, I studied New Testament Documents and Early Christianity in my university’s classical studies department. Articles from Part One of the book reminded me of the historical context, cultures, languages, religious beliefs, geographical locations, and political realities through which Paul presented the gospel and established churches across the known world. More than one of the authors noted Paul’s tendency to focus on Greco-Roman cities with

1 Recently 9Marks posted a book review of the 1961 edition, which discussed and critiqued Allen’s philosophy of missions and practice (Greggsen 2020).

a Jewish presence (chap. 1 and 2). Others analyzed Paul's background, missionary calling, travels, suffering, and zeal for presenting the Gospel (chap. 3, 5– 7). The gospel is defined as the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (55). The meaning, nature, ordinances, and eldership of the church, as presented in Paul's letters, are analyzed and conclusions drawn as to Paul's expectation of local church financing, leadership, and expansion (chap. 4).

These articles directly support Allen's stress for self-supporting, self-led, and self-propagating churches. The topics of Part One are interesting but not particularly new to anyone who has studied classical history and the Pauline Epistles. However, the chapter by Craig Keener on spiritual warfare is exceptional in its survey of the New Testament and hermeneutics of Pauline power encounters, which is especially relevant for Western Christians who might be quick to dismiss demonic activity as coincidence or mental illness. Keener's study of Acts and Ephesians highlights the reality of our struggle with evil and the victorious power available for global missions today.

Part Two of the book is far more interesting and controversial. The chapter entitled, "Paul's Missions Strategy," by the late David Hesselgrave is highly recommended for the way it directly addresses many of Allen's assertions. One of these is Allen's use of the term "method," and the implication that the apostle Paul had a particular "method." However, Hesselgrave contends, no procedural "method" can be found, and thus he recommends "strategy" or "principles" as terms which better support Allen's missiological insights.

This analysis is quite relevant, as missionaries can sometimes be lured into thinking there is a particular method or practice that guarantees conversion, baptism, and establishment of a new church. One example I am aware of illustrates this challenge. In the late nineties, God blessed a thirty-day prayer initiative in Tunisia with a number of baptisms and church expansion. As a result, thirty-day prayer initiatives were

implemented across many Arab nations, but most did not experience the same blessing.

Hesselgrave also highlights the importance of “resubmission in each generation of the traditions of men to the Word and Spirit of God” (129). In other words, all missionaries need to assess current practices in light of the Bible and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In 1912, missionary efforts were based in compounds and often complicit with colonialism, nonindigenous pastors, and foreign funding for the church. Allen urged reconsideration of the practices and wrote in the preface to the second edition: “I myself am more convinced than ever that in the careful examination of his [Paul’s] work, above all in the understanding and appreciation of his principles, we shall find the solution of most of our present difficulties” (1912, vii). In Allen’s day, the difficulties were colonialism, changing views on the authority of Scripture, and a fading felt need for world evangelism that had been sparked to life with the 1890s’ Student Volunteer Movement. In comparison, Hesselgrave summarizes some current day difficulties and assesses their effect on contemporary missions, such as ecumenicalism at the expense of biblical authority, new perspectives on Paul, emergent church theology, supersessionism, and holistic mission (140).

Subsequent chapters discuss the emergent church and at times disagree with one another on the nature of Paul’s strategy as recorded in the epistles. Terry asserts that Paul would “allow the national churches to develop theologies and practices that are biblical yet appropriate in their cultural settings” (173), while Lawless believes Paul calls unbelievers to a new life and new community that shared different religious beliefs and practices (221). Both authors, however, agree that Paul expected establishment of new churches with reproduction through continual leadership training and mentorship.

Allen invites us to study the strategies of Paul and consider various aspects of discipleship but unfortunately, not all interpret the text in full hermeneutical agreement. On the field, I experienced similar

disagreement to that of Terry and Lawless when discipling a national believer. I was surprised one day to learn there were two others discipling him: an Egyptian pastor who invited him to a new community of faith, and an American missionary who insisted that he keep his national identity and religion. (He was frustrated with me when I deferred to the study of Bible texts and did not clearly direct him as the others did.)

Personally, I found Chapter 12 by M. David Sills to be helpful in understanding the dangers of the extremes of contextualization. Sills defines contextualization as

the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's elation, especially as put forth in the teaching of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. (196)

In general, indigenous contextualization of music, dress, worship times, leadership styles, meeting location, and language is not particularly controversial. However, contextualization of theology risks syncretism. For Paul, the meaning of circumcision had to change because it was no longer a sign of membership in the community of believers. The purity laws and the food laws of the Torah no longer establish holiness, as that was granted by Jesus Christ, once and for all. Sills' chapter discusses various applicable New Testament passages and implications for the missionary effort today, especially in consideration of the extremes: from the colonial English- language church to adding Jesus to the list of local deities.

Though the evident missionary ethnocentrism of Allen's day has changed, Sills advises caution with regards to attitude, finances, and technology, lest the national believer feel inferior and assume external funding and laptops are required for church propagation. I personally resonated with this, as I experienced a break in relationship with an Egyptian missionary who felt effective media follow-up required a new

computer supplied by me. I felt his current computer was sufficient and had not listed one in the budget, which was not understood or accepted.

In relation to the Muslim context, Sills felt Allen would not endorse “C5” contextualization and “Insider Movements,” though other authors felt Allen would support emergent church theology. Sills quotes Allen,

As [Paul] taught, the one essential condition of life was faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But faith in Jesus Christ involved, in itself, a breach with the past. Faith was not a mere intellectual assent to a new theory of religion which could be held whilst the life remained in what it was before. ... It meant the abandonment of the old conception of life, nay, of the very life itself as he before knew it. It meant the casting away of all the former things. (211)

To balance this quote, Sills recognized that there are

supracultural aspects of the gospel and Christianity that must not be changed or influenced by the myriad cultures of the world, and unity in these essentials will provide the basis for fellowship among all Christians in Christ’s Body. No one culture has a corner on the Truth. Each culture will understand some nuance of Christian truth in their corner of the kingdom in a way that will add to the Body’s understanding. (214)

This collection of articles often reads like a review of Allen’s *Missionary Methods*. Each author discusses a particular aspect of the book, but many concepts are repeated or conversely applied to contemporary missions issues such as the indigenous church, emergent church theology, etc. The divergent perspectives are helpful in considering the breadth of a topic. However, the book is not organized according to missions issues, and the reader is left to draw conclusions from each author’s assessment of Allen’s intention. Though not mentioned, I doubt

there would be consensus on Allen's view of Disciple-Making Movements, for example.

As such, my recommendation is dependent upon the interest and time available to the reader. If the reader is a scholar with time and is seeking to assess current trends in missions practice in light of the New Testament epistles, I recommend reading a revised edition of Allen's 1912 book, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* If the reader is a front-line church planter who is encountering a myriad of missionary issues and methods that "ensure success," I recommend a focus on Part Two of Plummer and Terry's compendium. Lastly, if the reader has time, need, and desire to better understand the historical context of the New Testament and Paul's ministry as a basis for assessing their current mission practice and beliefs related to church growth, Plummer and Terry's collection of articles provides a good introduction and wealth of references for further study.

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Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity: From Pentecost to the Present

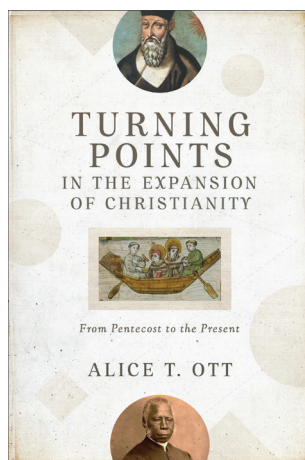
By Alice Ott

Baker, 2021. 320 pages.

Reviewed by C. A.

C. A. is a husband, father, and CP team leader.

He and his family have lived in North Africa for 13 years. They serve the church through evangelism, discipleship, and translation.



Our task is complex. As workers, we are commissioned by Christ and his church to proclaim the good news and establish churches in cultural contexts often radically different from our own. Who among us has not struggled to clearly share the gospel, debated how to disciple new believers through situations we have never faced, or been perplexed about how to discern the true character of a potential leader?

Church history helps answer these questions and many others. By discovering how Christians applied the Scriptures to their situations in various cultural contexts throughout history, we are better equipped to carry out our own ministry. As one practitioner encourages us, “the Latin and Greek Fathers, the Medieval apologists, the Reformers, the Puritans,

the Particular Baptists, and the leaders of eighteenth-century evangelicalism is an exercise in cross-cultural hermeneutics” (Burns 2021, 144).

Hence, church-planting practitioners ought recognize the importance of books like Dr. Alice Ott’s *Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity*. Dr. Ott tells the story of twelve key events, or eras, that evidence a shift in the way the gospel crossed cultures. While not a complete history of missions (many key individuals and eras are left untouched), this book focuses on the most significant paradigm shifts in missiological theology and practice.

Alice Ott is an affiliate professor of history of mission and world Christianity at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School with years of church planting experience in Germany. She writes in an accessible, narrative style, utilizing many primary historical sources as well as non-western and pre-Reformation examples of mission practice as her distinctive contribution to the literature (23). While the book is aimed at historically curious believers and not gospel workers specifically, workers are among those who would most benefit.

The book begins with a familiar story: the biblical narrative of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. Then after a chapter on Saint Patrick, Ott recounts a story less familiar to Protestants: the East Syrian mission to China in the seventh and eighth centuries. Known in the West as the Nestorian Church, this ancient East Syrian Church was a thriving center of missional monasticism and theology for centuries. East Syrian monks and merchants took the gospel across the Silk Road, reaching as far as China in 635 during the Tang dynasty (95). Regrettably, these missions’ cultural accommodation to Taoist and Buddhist beliefs expanded over time until the church grew weak and disappeared from the historical record until the thirteenth century (121).

The English and Irish work among Germanic tribes in the seventh and eight centuries is followed by a leap of nearly a millennium to Jesuit work among the Chinese, especially that of Matthew Ricci. Mission for the

Jesuits involved significant cultural accommodation to Confucian beliefs, which was in stark contrast to undertakings by Dominican and Franciscan monks (175). Ricci and his colleagues went so far as to downplay the cross in their evangelism, and their work lacked lasting fruit (190). However, the Jesuit mission did ensure “cultural accommodation” (or, we might say, “contextualization”) would remain a crucial question for future generations of cross-cultural workers (170).

Ott then moves on to Protestant history with the story of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian workers, who were models of sacrifice, self-support, cultural adaptation, and wise evangelism (207). Chapter seven is about the father of modern missions, William Carey. Influenced by the Moravians, Carey’s example and writings were the primary catalyst for the rapid expansion of Protestant global mission in the nineteenth century. Carey’s work in adapting the voluntary society as a structure for missions, his Bible translation work, and his confronting of social injustices remains influential today (245).

After surveying the “Christianity, commerce and civilization” approach that corresponded with British abolitionism, the book moves to significant practical questions, which emerged among workers in global mission. As Protestant missions expanded, the question of the end goal became more pressing: how should local churches function? The most influential voice at this time was Henry Venn, the secretary of the Church Missionary Society. His conviction that local churches needed to be “self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending” continues to guide missiology today, even though application of these principles was inconsistent during his lifetime (321).

Chapter ten presents a more political story of the high imperialist period of the late nineteenth century and how cross-cultural workers, especially those in Africa, interacted with foreign government operations. Chapter eleven describes the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910. This conference is contrasted in the final chapter with the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, which was less ecumenical, more

evangelistic, and more global in its delegation (424). Ott relates the stories of these twelve turning points with little commentary, leaving readers to draw conclusions in regards to the wisdom and ongoing significance of various ideas and practices. However, she does draw out some common themes in her conclusion, themes which I will build upon in sharing some takeaways from the book.

Foremost is a theme that theology matters: our practice is affected by our understanding of God and the gospel. I was surprised to read how often eschatology was a significant factor, such as the missionary motivation for Patrick who believed the world was soon to end. Similarly, generations of believers after the Reformation did not believe Gentiles would come to faith in large numbers until there was a turning among the Jews. Ecclesiology (including clericalism, the roles of lay believers, the ongoing function of apostleship), and soteriology (hyper-Calvinism) played major roles in determining (or preventing) mission practice.

Some key theological questions we are facing today include: what is the church? What elements are essential to its nature? What is biblical teaching (monologue, dialogue, etc.)? How do we teach in various church contexts? What is the role of gospel workers? Should they model their ministry after Paul's? The more we think biblically and theologically about these questions, and the more we learn from the experiences of those who have gone before us, the better we are prepared to serve faithfully.

Second, beliefs regarding the church-state relationship have seriously impacted missionary practice. Early Reformers assumed the initiative for missions was the responsibility of benevolent, Christian rulers, while many workers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were compelled to cooperate with colonial powers. Similarly, today's gospel workers must decide how they present their identity, interact with hostile host governments, and "honor the emperor" while obeying Jesus above all.

Third, the importance of a long-term perspective is evident throughout the book. Surveying nearly 2,000 years of church history gives practitioners a perspective of our humble roles in God's continuous,

grand mission. The fact that there have been ongoing campaigns for the “evangelization of the world in our generation” since at least the late nineteenth century should make us pause and consider whether such a goal should be the lodestar of mission. Those who served faithfully and bore long-term fruit focused less on immediate results and instead sought to foster growth that would last for eternity—fruit they could bring before God’s throne.

This was especially evident in the way story after story emphasized that training leaders was crucial to the overall stability of a fledgling church. Aidan, an Irish monk working among Germanic tribes, established a school for ministry. William Carey “continued and furthered the training and empowerment of indigenous church leaders begun by the Danish-Halle and Moravian missions” (245), and the “Nevius Plan” in Korea resulted in massive breakthroughs as believers and leaders were trained. Our task is to humbly and faithfully teach believers to obey everything that Jesus has commanded and to present them to him as a pure bride. We must be careful not to finish the task prematurely.

Fourth, I was encouraged by the fact that many effective gospel workers were business people or professionals who took their jobs to other parts of the world. Syriac businessmen, for whom “merchant” was a metaphor for “ministry,” took the gospel down the Silk Road, while the Moravians formed guilds of artisans who took their trades wherever they went. While I am regularly frustrated by the demands of business responsibilities, church history teaches that these very responsibilities can be a catalyst for fruitful gospel work, a comfort for our hearts! The “team” structure of the Moravians emphasized “intense fellowship” and communal living while being closely integrated into local society (231). William Carey was highly influenced by their approach and encouraged teams to operate from a common purse and include a number of professionals, whose main task was to provide funds and freedom for teammates to preach unencumbered (257).

A broad survey of Christian history can be overwhelming, but Ott's clear writing style and self-contained chapters (each can be read on its own) make the book accessible. And because *Turning Points* is a broad overview, the juxtaposition of these major events helped me understand the most significant lessons from the history of cross-cultural ministry. The stories were accompanied by a robust bibliography, which pointed me to additional resources for learning more about these relevant historical periods and figures. Ott does not tell you what specific implications practitioners should draw from these stories as there is little direct application to modern missions. However, she does give a great deal of material which you can apply to your context.

Practitioners could gain quite a bit from a quick skim of the book; the general concept of each turning point is clearly articulated at the beginning and end of each chapter. The entire book has value, but for the reader with limited time, I recommend chapters three (the East Syrian mission to Asia), five (the Jesuit work in China), six (the Moravians), seven (William Carey), and nine (Three-Self Movement). Reading *Turning Points* will not solve your thorny issue, but it may help shape your thinking and start you in the right direction for further insight.

We are responsible to bring the gospel to our own generation and host contexts, but we need not do it alone or reinvent the wheel. Church history is a helpful companion in ministry and *Turning Points* guides you exactly where to find that help.

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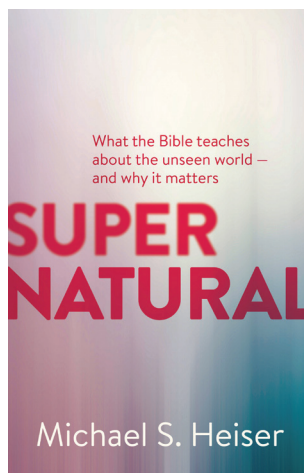
Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World – and Why it Matters

By Michael S. Heiser

Lexham Press, 2015. 163 pages.

Reviewed by Pepper Potts

Pepper Potts (pseudonym) is a young American who has started her journey into the world of missions. She spent time in East Africa and recently finished a four-month internship in South Asia. She is in her third year of Bible college and looks forward to continuing to use what she is learning on the field.



Let's face it: there are some really strange things in the Bible. Who are the "sons of God" that have relations with "the daughters of men"? Does God have a divine council? Are angels and demons real? What's going on with the passage in Jude about "spirits locked up"? And does any of this matter for our daily lives and ministries? These passages reveal key truths about the unseen, spiritual realm, which surrounds us. When we learn to recognize the power of the unseen realm, it changes the way we do ministry among those who have never heard the name of Jesus. When we view the world through the lens of the biblical authors, we are able to understand and minister to people with different backgrounds from our own.

In *Supernatural*, Michael Heiser attempts to unveil for us the mysteries about the divine world. He sees a direct correlation between the truths of the unseen world and our lives and ministries. His observations and applications ring especially true for those doing ministry among unreached people groups. Understanding the divine realm helps us grasp more of the big story God is writing. It also helps us grasp the way he has chosen to use each of us, and our ministries, to draw more people into that story.

Michael Heiser is an American Old Testament scholar who specializes in the study of the divine world (and has written numerous books on the topic). *Supernatural* is the popular-level version of Heiser's more academic work, *The Unseen Realm*. It is written in an engaging style which is easy and enjoyable to read for believers of a variety of backgrounds. Although I believe he writes primarily with the average American believer in mind, the applications he draws out are broad enough for believers in other contexts, and certainly for those who minister cross-culturally. His argument is grounded in the biblical text and the historical context to help us understand what is really going on in the divine realm. He quotes Scripture extensively from both the New and Old Testaments. Having done his own research on the topic, he does not cite other authors and scholars.

Most valuable is the practical angle Heiser brings to each topic. He doesn't stop with looking at what the Bible says; he takes time to explore how it might intersect with and impact life and ministry. Each chapter ends with a section discussing why the particular topic in that chapter matters for our lives and ministries.

For example, in chapter eight, Heiser unpacks the concept of sacred space and speaks about how any space that God occupies is holy. He then brings that concept to our world and talks about how we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore our lives are sacred space (86). Another thread which Heiser repeatedly emphasizes throughout the book is the idea that many Christians (primarily western Christians) do

not take the power of supernatural beings seriously (134). These powers are real, and some of them are terrible. They want to thwart God's plan to advance his kingdom. When we as cross-cultural church planters forget that the forces we fight against are real spiritual powers, we become lazy in our ministry.

On the other hand, Heiser emphasizes that we need to be careful not to swing too far in the other direction, remembering that the power of Jesus is greater (116). This truth helps us to minister more effectively in contexts where spiritual powers are feared. The power of Jesus is greater, and God's kingdom is coming: this is the good news the world needs to hear. Through this book and observing cultures in East Africa and South Asia, I realized that having an insufficient view of the spiritual realm makes ministering to people who believe in supernatural powers more difficult. Although Heiser is a Bible scholar and doesn't have overseas ministry experience, the implications for life that he draws from the discussion of the divine realm are hugely important to the life of a cross-cultural church planter.

Heiser's book follows a clear flow of thought from the beginning to the end by reading like a story. Each chapter builds neatly upon the chapter before, which results in a full picture of what the Bible says about the supernatural world and what it means for us. Heiser makes the case that if we viewed the world through the same lens as the Biblical authors, we would see that the unseen realm is full of real spiritual powers and that these powers have a fundamental connection to our lives, purpose, and ministry. He begins by discussing how God's family consists of both human and divine beings (32-33). Both have been given authority to rule under the authority of God. Both humans and divine beings have chosen to rebel and reject God's authority at various points in history. The result was God dividing up the nations and placing them under the authority of divine beings instead of his gracious rule (48). But he isn't done with the nations: God kept the nation of Israel for himself and had a plan from the beginning to use them to bring the nations back to himself (64).

Heiser spends time in the middle of the book discussing the ways that Israel was to be set apart and used by God to bring the other nations back to himself. He describes how God is different than other divine beings and how the nation of Israel, their land, and their temple, had to be holy, sacred spaces for God's indwelling presence. In light of this, Heiser views Israel's conquest of Canaan as God reclaiming his land for himself (94).

The book then presents how Jesus was the solution to the problem. The nation of Israel failed to bring all the other nations back under God's rule, and so God himself had to come down in human form to address the problem (98). In Jesus' arrival on earth, the battle against evil and rebellion was taken to a new level. Heiser takes his reader on a journey through the gospels, looking at the ways Jesus revealed the supernatural realm in his life, death, and resurrection. He devotes all of chapter twelve to how the phrase "Son of Man" (from Daniel 7) is applied to Jesus with all its significance.

The story continues with the beginning of the church. Heiser shows his readers how the events at Pentecost are crafted to be a reversal of what took place at Babel. Beginning with Israel, all the nations are coming back under the rule of the Most High God. Each individual believer is now the holy space that the presence of God occupies (129-130). As Christians, we are engaged in the battle against the darkness. As Christians, we are sons of God – partakers in the divine nature through Jesus (149). And when God's rule is fully established on earth through the second return of King Jesus, Christians will rule alongside him, even over the angels (157). Everything we do in our lives as Christians matters and affects the spiritual war going on around us. The scary thing is that many don't often recognize this.

This topic can certainly be controversial. Many western Christians don't acknowledge that the supernatural realm is real and that evil supernatural beings possess real power. Perhaps it makes us uncomfortable to think there are other gods out there. Heiser recognizes

that many are skeptical of his claims (13). He faithfully turns to Scripture to show how he formed his beliefs about the supernatural world and urges the reader to come to the same conclusion. Some people may object to his use of historical context to inform his understanding of the meaning behind the biblical text. However, I think this is one of the greatest strengths of Heiser's work. He has taken the time to learn about the culture in which the Bible was written, and explains how this informs our understanding of the supernatural, which the biblical authors take so seriously.

Throughout the book, Heiser takes us on a journey through the biblical text. At times he reaches into the historical context to give us an idea of how the original readers and authors might have thought. One of the most poignant sections is his explanation of the significance of Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Christ. Heiser shows us from history that this location was viewed as ground zero for the dark powers. Peter's bold declaration and the transfiguration in the next passage were effectively challenging the evil powers to try and stop God's plan if they could (114). But of course, God's plan can never be thwarted because His power is enormously greater than any other.

At the end of each chapter, Heiser takes us on a journey of discovery for application to our lives. For example, he discusses the way Paul and the other early believers had a supernatural perspective on life. They understood their role in God's story was to take the gospel to places where the name of Jesus had not yet been named. They knew that doing this involved fighting against the demonic powers. Heiser notes that there are still places on earth where the demonic powers rule (145). As cross-cultural church planters, we are taking the gospel to places that are still under the sway of dark spiritual forces. Our role in the story is the same as Paul's. We must work to understand the weightiness of our responsibility. Although Heiser draws specific conclusions, the overarching theme is that God intends for his rule to be extended once more over the entire world. We, as part of God's family, are also a part of this plan.

We are supposed to be engaged in the battle against the darkness and the spreading of God's kingdom. This is our mission.

This is where I feel the book is particularly valuable for those engaged in overseas disciple-making. As Christians, we are the family of God, we are his representatives, we are the ones restoring God's rule. As overseas workers, we find ourselves in contexts that are currently under the rule of dark divine powers. I clearly remember the first time I experienced something in East Africa that made me think about the actual power of these dark forces. At an Islamic school during their time of prayer, I felt an oppressiveness that I would later attribute to the presence of spiritual beings. For me, this book confirmed those powers are real. I was encouraged by the reminder that the power of Jesus, which dwells within me, is greater than the power of any dark divine power. I carry that power with me as I travel down my street or to the other side of the world. As Heiser writes,

Each of us is vital to someone's path to the kingdom and the defense of that kingdom. Each day affords us contact with people under the dominion of darkness and opportunities to encourage each other in the hard task of fulfilling our purpose in an imperfect world. Everything we do and say matters, though we may never know why or how. (163)

This book will either open your eyes to the reality of the supernatural realm for the first time or remind you of its power. It will encourage you as you engage daily in the fight against darkness. Go forth and shine the light of God's kingdom!

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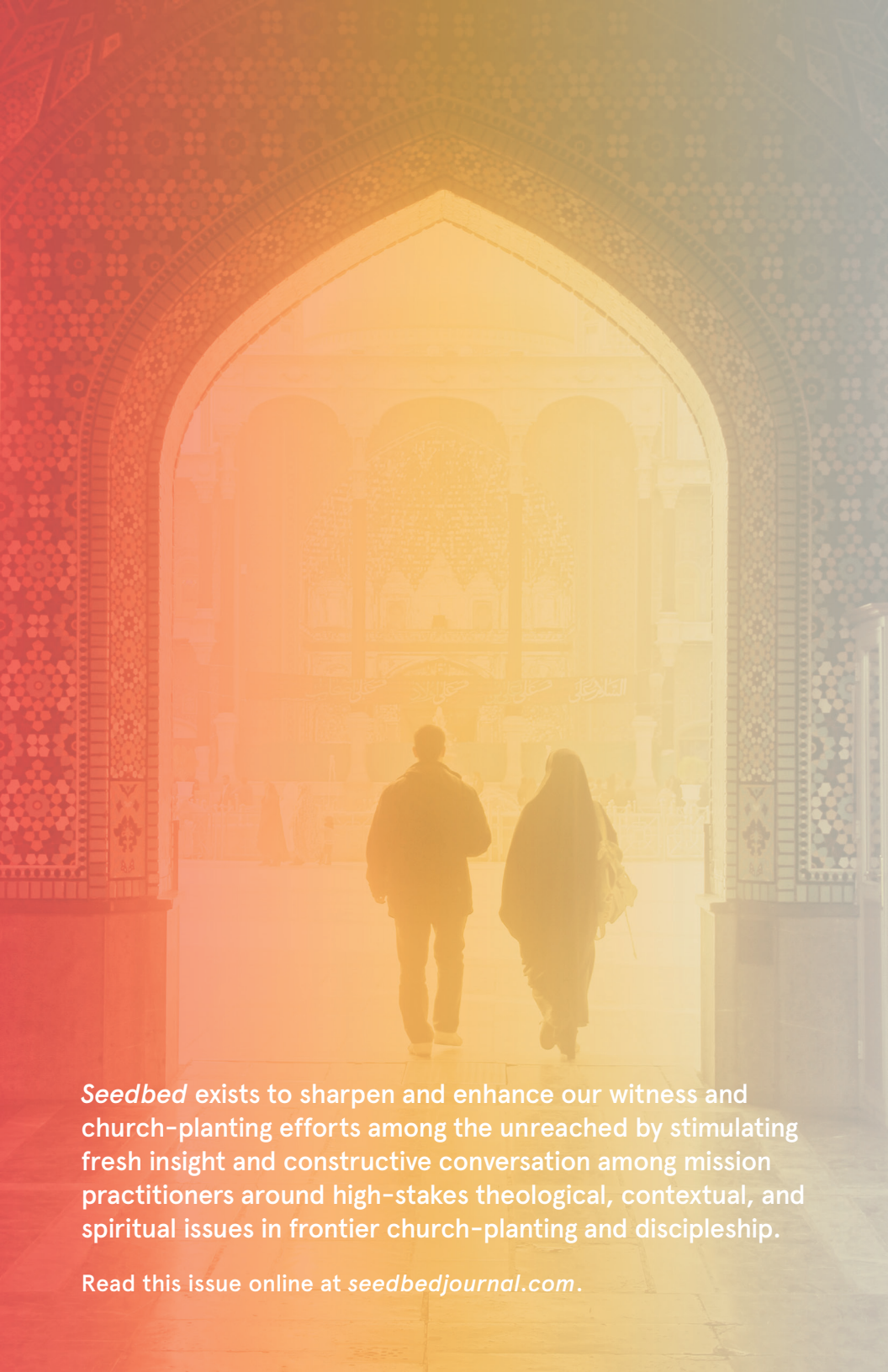
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