

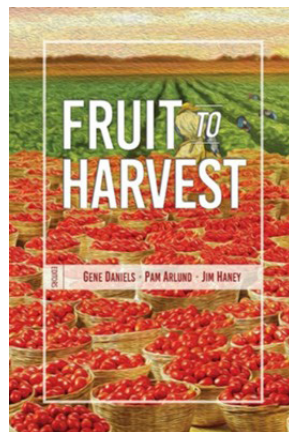
Fruit to Harvest: Witness of God's Great Work Among Muslims

Edited by Gene Daniels, Pam Arlund, Jim Haney

William Carey Press, 2019. 469 pages.

Reviewed by Josh Abdel Fady

Josh (pseudonym) is a husband and father of two teens who, along with his amazing wife, have served in two countries in the Middle East over the last 9 years. Originally from the USA, he is a physician and team leader working among refugees. He finds himself constantly reflecting on how mercy ministries, storytelling, and discipleship can lead to church planting and worship of our triune God.



Too often, we workers come to the field with high expectations of what we will accomplish. But the realities of life—children's needs, busyness with our platform to maintain our visa, and the enormity of the task of multiplying churches planted among our people group—cause us to give up on that goal and settle for smaller goals. Fruit to Harvest—a compendium of essays from the Vision 5:9 Network—aims to restore the vision and define the pathway to see the main goal fulfilled.

Vision 5:9 is a global, diverse group of experienced church planters among Muslims who gathered together twice thus far to see the picture from Revelation 5:9 fulfilled—men and women from every tribe, nation, people and language redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. One of the main ways the Vision 5:9 network carries out this vision is by determining and disseminating best practices in church planting among Muslims.

Their first conference in 2007 resulted in the book *From Seed to Fruit* (previously reviewed in Seedbed). The second conference, held in 2017, produced *Fruit to Harvest*. The Vision 5:9 network and conferences have also led to the production and dissemination of “Fruitful Practices,” both in written and video form, to be used by missions practitioners in the Muslim world to guide their approaches toward those deemed most effective.

The 2017 conference gathered together nearly 1000 practitioners from all over the world. The organizers recruited a diverse mix of participants with 25% Muslim background believers (MBBs), 25% women, and 50% from the Global South, all with an average of 20 years of experience. From this conference, a group of authors were chosen to write the 30 chapters in this book on a wide range of topics (16).

Summary of Content

Because of the large number of contributors writing about their areas of expertise (I counted 52 contributors), the book cannot be said to have a single thesis, although there are broad themes and organizing sections. The book is divided into four sections: Harvest Trends, Harvest Field, Harvest Force, and Harvest Pathways, with each ranging between 4 and 10 chapters.

One of the main themes of the conference that also runs through the book is that of abiding in Christ. The first message is not a secret strategy or a new approach that suddenly make us fruitful but it’s the outworking of remaining deeply connected to our Savior.

Another major theme reflected in the make-up of the conference attendees is that source of workers who are carrying out the task of missions is changing. The Global South and MBBs are playing a more central role. At the conference, for instance, 74% of attending MBBs had successfully planted churches versus 33% of expatriate workers (279).

Because of this, new strategies and structures are needed to support and enable these non-Western workers. Equipping believers to reach the unreached in their own localities without the high expenses of sending them globally is one approach (chap. 23). Training Global South workers who are already in the Middle East for work is another. There is a strong emphasis that expatriate workers need to view their role as supportive, serving under MBB and national leaders (chap. 19). One chapter notes that workers from all backgrounds face an increased number of traumatic events. While traditional expat workers with large organizations are well supported through it, support structures are needed to help national workers and MBBs face trauma with resilience (chap. 14).

Evaluation

The lack of a single thesis and the diversity of authorship is a strength. For instance, you may be used to hearing a strong emphasis on a single CPM model, but in this book you will read very little about any one model. DMM is mentioned, but is the focus of only one chapter (chap. 27). Instead, you are exposed to many different topics and perspectives, some of which may be new to you.

This variety makes for engaging reading. Each writer does not have the opportunity to painstakingly build a case for a certain approach. Instead, each author goes directly from a summary of a principle of church planting to application and examples of how it worked out in real life.

This brevity of presentation keeps the book moving, but it also has a liability. Laying the scriptural foundation for the methods being espoused was not a strong emphasis of the book. This is a critique not simply of this book, but of a broader emphasis in missiology in general. Applying research and practitioner experience to our work is a helpful addition to share wisdom and hopefully improve results. However, this pragmatic focus on “what has worked” can sometimes become untethered from the foundational role of scripture in shaping our model(s).

This liability, however, does not mean the book is not an extremely helpful overview for shaping our work. It just makes me want to go back and forth between Scripture and the ideas shared, as I form a model to apply to my situation.

The Practitioner's Angle: Comments on Relevance

My most frequent time to read is the few minutes after getting into bed when I am winding down. A good boring book has me asleep in minutes. Fruit to Harvest is not one of those books! This book addresses the situations I face and the questions I am asking, and so I often found it gripping.

The book provides an excellent survey of many topics. This book played a diagnostic role in my own ministry by causing me to ask, "Am I doing this?" "Should I be considering this?" At a time of ministry focus transition, it was helpful for me to think through how I might improve my effectiveness. Our team has traditionally been more of a track team than a basketball team, with people focusing on different ministries. Recently, we began a discussion about how to narrow our vision enough that we can imagine and expect it to lead to churches being planted, by God's grace.

One topic that grabbed my attention was a discussion between African Inland Mission and Operation Mobilization leaders. Their organizations developed many complicated support structures to sustain many good ministries that did not ultimately lead to the end goal of seeing church planting movements among every people group with a special emphasis on the unengaged and unreached (chap. 8). The discussion focused on the process of deconstructing and reconstructing their organizations around that single focus.

I was also struck by the creativity and effectiveness of different approaches being adapted to fit challenging circumstances. In Nigeria, Christians from the North that have fled Boko Haram along with

numerous Muslims and are now living in shared living circumstances in the South and being disciplined to reach their neighbors (chap. 13). Household workers from Africa and the Philippines who are serving in Middle Eastern households are being trained to reach their “masters” for Christ through constant prayer and power encounters that flow out of being present when the households go through crises (chap. 22).

Another encouraging topic that rang true to my experience was the benefit of whole families ministering to whole families (chap. 6). How often we have seen individuals come to faith only to be ostracized from their families. Instead, this chapter encourages workers to minister family-to-family so that all enter into the conversation about Jesus and the Bible together. This brings a greater hope that families will come to faith together and better weather persecution together.

Not only is this beneficial for those we minister to, it benefits our own families. I remember a counselor of one of my children saying that my child had a strong desire to make a difference in the world, and that the more we involve the child in , the more satisfied the child would be with our calling and its impact on them. We have seen that work itself out as we, as a family, visit one particular local family. The father is an MBB whom I disciple, my wife shares with his wife and daughter, and my son and daughter have befriended their children and come along to talk or play.

Finally, I found it helpful that the book placed a strong emphasis on communion with Christ as we carry out this work. Instead of simply being an information transfer, the book has a devotional character that calls our hearts into prayer and dependence on the Lord.

Recommendation

I strongly recommend this book to global Christian workers. It would be helpful in the pre-field stage as one tries to narrow down the key elements for a team or ministry that a worker would like to join. It would also be helpful for people coming to the end of language learning as they

make decisions about ministry focus and determine how their passions, giftings, vocational training, and experience line up with strategies shown to be effective in leading to CPMs. Finally, it would help seasoned team leaders reflect on and refine their current approaches to church planting.

If you don't have time to read the whole book, the table of contents is organized, detailed, and easy to choose the most relevant chapters for your situation. The chapter titles help you locate topics such as ministering to Muslim women, diaspora ministry, ministry in urban settings, ministering in the context of trauma, media ministry, etc. Also, it is well worth reviewing other material that resulted from these conferences on the Fruitful Practice website and the Fruitful Practice online course.

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