

Mentoring Indigenous Leaders in Kingdom Movements: An Interview

Interview by Gene Daniels

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William J. DuBois (pseudonym) has been involved in reaching unreached people groups in Asia for over 30 years. He has a bachelor's degree in communication and business from Oral Roberts University and an MA from Yale Divinity School. For most of that time his focus has been on developing indigenous leaders in various kingdom movements.

Editorial Note: In this wide-ranging interview, William Dubois shares lessons learned from his journey mentoring several leaders in kingdom movements, most of whom are from Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu backgrounds. He touches on the priority of relationship and character over methods and projects, navigating outside finances, developing indigenous structures for church and leadership, and culturally-sensitive confrontation and reconciliation. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

Seedbed – *Tell us a little about your own background in ministry.*

DuBois – I grew up in the Assemblies of God and was on track to be a pastor and then a missionary with them. I spent some time with Francis Schafer at L'Abri. It was a checkered spiritual journey.

I started off with the idea of our denomination: you have to work so many years in a local church before you can apply to work cross-cultur-

ally. Then I was invited by the Southern Baptists—this is some 35 years ago now—to participate in a residential training program that focused on the unreached, to see what it would take to initially see a beachhead, but would eventually become a movement.

In 1992, I came to a crisis of faith because I was training people in all kinds of methods and techniques and did not have a lot of clarity as to what my role would be. I read a book by Dr. Bobby Clinton called *Making of a Leader*. Out of that, I changed the direction of what I was doing. Instead of training, I shifted to mentoring. Within a couple of years, instead of mentoring people on various methodologies, I shifted towards mentoring people about character. Within a few years, I completely shifted away from the whole idea of different methods for church-planting movements.

That's fascinating. What caused that shift?

There were two things. The first one is I was working 100% with people from “restricted-access”—now called “creative-access”—countries. I realized I may never actually get to meet with them again due to persecution or suffering or travel restrictions. It just was very humbling to realize that I had the audacity and the arrogance to tell them my nine best ways to do something, as opposed to going over the Scripture together and learning how we can be closer to Jesus, and what did the kingdom look like when it grew in the Old and New Testaments. Realizing that what people wanted was a relationship that went deeper—that was the first main shift.

The second one really was a limitation that I found in my own framework. I had a difficult time understanding if they wanted information, training, or a mentor. I would confuse those, especially cross-culturally. I would perceive that somebody wanted one thing when they actually wanted another. As a part of that shift, I've actually tried to find a way to understand this.

About 30 years ago, I actually came up with a relational contract. That sounds like an odd thing—it's mentioned as a possibility in Clinton's book—where we agreed on one of three different levels of relationship.

Level one was like this: "We've had this great time together, training, an intense time. If the Holy Spirit brings you to mind, I'll pray for you. Honestly, if not, then I'm going to see you in heaven. It was an exchange of information, which is valuable, but we shouldn't pretend it was more than that."

The second one is more like a periodic relationship: "I'd be glad to help. I could occasionally talk, spend some time with you.

Then the third level was: "I'll give my life to whatever you need. I will travel wherever you live. I'll create a business for you. I'll build structures, platforms, and on-ramps. I'll find friends and resources for you. Whatever I can do, I'll do that for the rest of my life."

Then I sat down at that crisis moment and asked the Lord for 12 people, between that moment—which was in 1992—and before I go to heaven. Twelve people that I could work through 2 Timothy 2:2 [with]. All the things that I had learned and who I was becoming, I could pass that on to someone who would learn to pass it on to someone else.

Has God given you those 12 now?

I think I'm at about seven or maybe eight right now. So if the Lord answers my prayer, that means I have a few years left. What I have seen is that when I stay in that lane and mode, that's where I find the most contentment in my life. When I deviate from that, it's when I find an increase of stress. I'm wired to really pour into someone who is a very high-capacity leader, and then they, in turn, pour into people. That's been a sweet spot for me.

So, are they all non-Westerners?

There's been one Westerner, but that person was born overseas, and he grew up overseas. But he is a Westerner by nationality.

Could you describe one or two of these guys to give us a sense of what they are like?

Let's set the one Western guy aside. The rest would all be first-generation Jesus-followers, which means their parents were either Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu. They would be people who were already leaders before they met me. Men who would have already learned their leadership craft and their skill of leadership, administration, and delegation in some other aspect of their lives. They would be very, very strong in their commitment to live a sacrificial, surrendered life to Jesus. Most of the time, they had interacted with other Westerners prior to meeting me, and that did not go well. This is because the way a lot of Westerners lead seems very transactional, and so there were just a lot of miscues along the way.

What helped you identify the difference between transactional and covenantal relationship, so that you didn't make the same mistake?

I started pouring over the Old Testament, and I saw that the God we serve was the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I spent several years really trying to understand that in my study and devotional life and recognize that as a Westerner, I was introduced to the gospel of the kingdom as content and as knowledge. But it was actually written as a relational introduction, and the whole theme of Scripture was relationship. So, once I understood that, then I changed the terms of what I was doing. I changed the kinds of information that I would exchange with these leaders. Sometimes we would spend several years either living together or me traveling back and forth to meet them. We would either do no projects or very small, inconsequential projects together as we learned to get to know each other.

So, there wasn't a heavy focus on productivity in the beginning of these relationships?

Not at all.

Is that a pattern that you see them replicating in the people that they're developing?

Let me clarify. I think the tendency at this juncture would be to think, "Oh, so then you just hung out," because that would be the way that a Westerner might read this or hear it. But it's totally the opposite. Instead of intentionality on productivity around a project there was extraordinary intentionality around character and an examination of Scripture. So, it wasn't like, say, "Oh, yeah, let's eat together and see what's happening." It's, "Okay, here's what the Bible says about this issue. Here's what the Bible says about family. How's it going with your wife [and] your children? Here's the struggles I have. How's it going with your relatives?" What the Bible says about government, employer-employee relationships—going over these topics with great intentionality instead of intentionality on productivity.

It sounds like your intentionality was on their development and developing your relationship with them and their character. And any ministry or projects then emerged out of that context rather than something that was bolted onto the side of it. Is that about right?

I would say it this way, just slightly different. When the Lord brought one of these people into my life, it was for my benefit to become more like Jesus, just as much as it was for their benefit to grow in the Lord. We have different roles, and maybe I've been on the path longer, but this relationship was for both of us to become like Jesus.

Then as our bond grew, becoming like Jesus was about other people. We would talk about how Jesus saw the needs around him. Then how did those needs get met in the Old and New Testaments? How would we go about doing that? What shall we do together? But it was never from the context of official mentor-mentee, "I'm here to help you." It was God who brought us together. We use terms like, "let's walk the path together" and "let's minister to each other." Since we're from different cultures

and languages, the only thing we have in common is God's word. And so, we're trading Scriptures back and forth and encouraging one another in the Lord.

If that's the soil of the garden, out of that, a project would arise. Then the project would be measured by how we were growing and how we were learning together. The project would not be measured by some metrics separate from our growth in our relationship with the Lord and other people's growth in their relationship with the Lord. Can I give a specific example?

Years ago, we were working on a micro business platform for a cross-cultural worker to go into Central Asia—all non-Westerners. There was training that needed to be provided, resources, leadership, business acumen, microbusiness training, and some financial capital. It was a small amount that was needed to set up and run this very small dairy farm, like 15 cows.

I said to the person who I was working with at the time, "I don't want any financial receipts." (I had raised the money to grant the business.) "I don't want to see profitability. I don't want this project to become the forefront of our relationship. What I want us to talk about are the disciples that were made out of this business." So rather than having the metrics of the project move to the forefront, it was character and multiplication of discipleship that stayed at the forefront. The project just became the vehicle. In the end, I received more information than anybody could ever want on all of the details of the project, but I didn't ask for it because it was the Lord's money, and I trust this person's character.

At this juncture of a relationship, to want to see a review of taxi receipts, cross-culturally comes across as mistrust. And so that would have been a step backwards. It's more important to see, well, how's the business growing? How's it going? How many people have you helped in this regard? And caring for the poor, widows, and orphans—and all of the

things that the Scripture tells us to do with the abundance that we have. And so, the fruitfulness or the success of the business was part of it, but it's not the most important.

One of the big questions that comes up a lot in these kinds of conversations is how do we, in a healthy way, bring outside resources into movements? Can you give some other examples of things you've learned about how to keep a healthy relationship between outside resources and movement leaders?

The thing about finances is that stewardship is the biblical framework. Finances already entered the picture, or you wouldn't have met them. You either took a plane or a bus or a camel. You have a laptop [and] a passport. You are financially supported by somebody else. To think that finances haven't entered the picture is fairly short-sighted. That other person either took a day off or is salaried somewhere, or their family is funding this moment—the day (or days) you spend together where they are not working.

In each of the cases I'm thinking about, we ask sociological questions about how, in their culture, they safeguard good stewardship. Then we followed those patterns. Of course, if there was something ungodly, then we wouldn't do it. But we learned, for instance, if you were starting two projects with two different people, and those people know each other, better to start on the same day, so you're not creating any chance of envy. ("Oh, you got it the day before. You must have had more.") We would ask them about the accountability that they're used to in their own culture. And then we would recreate that same pattern, so it was not a cross-cultural experience for them.

I found that many other Western organizations export their reporting structure and then wonder why it doesn't work. We operate from the vantage point of an incarnational principle. If we want to enter someone's world like Jesus did, we should not come with our framework of how you do financial accountability. We should ask them for the guardrails of their stewardship.

Some people said, "Well, we just have receipts." Okay, let's go for receipts. Somebody else said, "We don't do receipts. What we do is we have a mirrored operation of a finance department. That person is there at the exchange of any finances and takes a picture, and there's a document, like a contract signed and picture validated." I said, "Okay, then let's do that."

I said, "Well, how would you measure progress?" To one person who was a believer, a former jihadi guy, I said, "Okay, in your former life, if you were using bullets to go destroy a village and you ran out of bullets, how did you go back to the depot to get more bullets?" He said, "Oh, I'd have to turn in a report." I said, "What does the report look like?" Then they designed their report, and I said, "Okay, we're going to do this for Jesus." They said, "Oh, is that all you mean?" I said, "Yeah, that's all I mean." They said, "Oh, well, if we weren't honest about what we did for the bullets, we would never get more bullets." I said, "Well, how can you do less for Jesus?"

It took a lot of time to learn their sociological guardrails for financial stewardship, but that, in the end, protected us. Afterward we had to translate that into how it works in our culture--with the CPAs, audits, and all that stuff. I've gotten some good help from CPAs to help me learn how to do that.

Let's talk about leadership structure and what it looks like for the guys that you're working with, particularly thinking about the next generation of leaders. Does it look like eldership? Pastoral ministry? What do you call it? How do they frame their leadership structures?

Great question! When I met this moment of my frustration and crisis of faith, I went back and began to look at the sociological development of leaders in the Old and New Testaments. Not the content, but the social framework of how people were promoted from one group to another. Then I tried to find people in history who replicated that social framework with a different content. I was trying to learn social patterns of leadership without Scripture or theological words.

Now you know where we've been working, so I basically studied three people: Lenin, the Ayatollah Khomeini from the '70s, and then more recently, Osama bin Laden. I studied their sociological leadership structure, their charitable giving, and their financial structures to determine how they were able to motivate their leaders in those cultural frameworks. Then with that knowledge, I went to various people that I was mentoring—some from a Hindu background, some Buddhist, and some Muslim—and I would ask questions like: "Tell me about how leadership development happens in your culture, totally separate from the Scripture." They would build out a framework.

Then I would say, "That sounds British to me, or that sounds like a Russian system, or that sounds maybe a little German. I think those systems were laid on your culture. So, peel those back and tell me [about leadership development] at a clan, a family, a tribal, or a social culture [level]." And then I'd get extraordinary detail of how they develop leaders. And it could be from learning to farm, to running a business, to starting a family. There would be a lot of repeating back and forth to make sure I understood what happened socially for them. Then I would open up the Scripture and say, "Let's look at social leadership development structures in Scripture, not theology, just the structure."

We would look at places like Exodus 18. You have Jethro, who's a Midianite, most likely from northwest Saudi Arabia, or somewhere in that Gulf area or the Levant. Here he is talking to a Jewish person about leadership. Then I would say, "Hey, look, these are people from different cultures. This person is not from the children of Israel, yet he's teaching Moses, the second greatest leader of the Old Testament." And then we would go through Paul, go through David, back and forth, Old and New Testament.

Once someone said, "We have been doing what the Bible says, but for the devil." So, they would begin to discover a leadership pattern in their own culture and recognize they used that pattern to propagate evil instead of the kingdom. Once we reach that point, it's super easy. "How

do we do church? Let's look at Titus. Let's look at 1 Timothy 3. Let's look at Titus 3. What's an elder?"

I'll give you one fun story. This was a group of people from Central Asia, West Asia, and the Gulf. We're all in a meeting together, and we're going through Titus verse by verse. We get to Titus 3 and the qualifications of an elder, and a massive conversation starts. I know a tiny bit of some of the languages that were being discussed, but they quickly went to minor languages, so I had no idea what they were saying. After about two hours I said, "I think we're done for tonight." No resolution. The next morning, they came back, and one by one they said, "I'm no longer going to be an elder, because my uncle has more than one wife, or my brother has more than one wife."

Remember, this is a very nuanced culture. I knew enough to understand a lot of them were saying, "I've become a Jesus follower, and I have more than one wife." But they can't say that culturally in the meeting. After that, I just stopped. I said, "Okay, let's go back and read the very beginning. Paul says to Titus, 'My dearly beloved son, Titus.'" I said, "It's a family of God. It's not an institution, a government, or a military unit. It's not an education or a school. It's a family. You were brought into this family by Jesus, and you had a natural family. How can you honor your natural family?"

At that point, they came up with all kinds of answers about how to care for their wives or their uncle's wives, how to pass that on, how to honor their first wife, and then how to teach this as a leadership principle to the next generation. I never had to confront the theology because all I did was present the Scripture once we had an understanding of the sociology.

This helps put the flesh on the bones of what you talked about regarding intentionality about character. Is that right?

Yes, absolutely. In that meeting, I said, "Let's say your uncle has four wives, because you and I both know that in Islam, you're only allowed to have

four wives at a time.” Then I said, “I don’t know how many people you’re caring for. But as a Jesus follower, what does Jesus say about who you’re supposed to be to these people? If the family of God is like a family, how do you bring the purity, wholeness, and humility of Jesus into your family? How would your uncle honor all of his wives? How would your uncle tell all of his children from these wives to follow Jesus?”

Once [you’ve talked about that] familial structure, it’s very easy to say, “Then what does church look like?” For us, church is based on the family unit. House churches are combinations of trusted family units, or spheres of influence in a more modern environment, but they follow these natural structural lines.

A lot of people will say, “Well, how do you grow leaders?” And so, we always say, “We never train a potential leader. We only affirm and help grow proven leaders.”

The second thing is that we base the leadership development from one level to the next on obedience as opposed to knowledge. If someone has a training about multiplying groups, it’s only the people who have multiplied groups [who] get to go to the advanced training. If there’s training on administration, that’s only for people who are already administering something. We’re not going to give that class to a young person who has a great future. We’re going to say to that young person or new believer, “Make disciples! Then as you get to the place of multiplication, we’ll give you an opportunity to grow in that through training.” In that way, we safeguard people from being puffed up with knowledge without having the experience drive their desire to learn.

In a context like that, inevitably the issue of discipline has to come up—dealing with church leaders that fail in whatever way or fall short in their Christ-likeness. Can you give any insights about how you or the leaders you’re mentoring have dealt with disciplining other leaders?

Maybe the reason this is not a difficult issue for me at all is because the Lord has, by his own mercy, given me incredible mentors who have been

very kind and gracious to me. They have helped me deal with issues in my own personal life, from character issues to blind spots and stuff in between. It's the most natural part of helping somebody to become more like Jesus. I'll tell you a story.

One of the key guys I'm mentoring brought his leaders into a meeting, and those leaders brought a few of their people [who are] like two or three degrees from me. Then one person, three degrees down, confronted me publicly and accused me of something. I don't remember what it was. I responded sternly, "That's not true. We're not going to discuss this." I said this over and over in a stern way. Nobody said anything.

The next day at our meeting, about 20 people in the room, one of the men came up to me (not the person that I'm mentoring, but a person who they're mentoring). He said, "Before we begin, I want you to forgive me because I could tell yesterday your heart was hurt, and I'm not really sure why your heart was hurt, but I think it had to do with something I said or one of my leaders said. I can't be in a meeting today unless things are straight between you and me. I want to know if you'll forgive me."

Then the next guy comes up, who wasn't even involved but was one of that guy's leaders as well. He asked for forgiveness. And then, one by one, they're all coming up to me and they're asking forgiveness for saying something in a way that caused me to respond sternly. It's such a beautiful example from their culture. I didn't really think that I had been out of line, but by the way they did this I could tell that I hurt their hearts by my stern response. But instead of them coming to me and saying, "Hey, you really hurt my heart," they were the first to ask for forgiveness. So, I turn around and ask them for forgiveness.

It had nothing to do with the content of the training. It was all to do with the way we honor each other. Dealing with those kinds of issues is something that happens all the time. It's frequently on the table. We ask for

forgiveness. We learn from each other. It's been very mutually edifying. It's helped us be more like Jesus.

I want to tell one other story about this. It's about one of the guys that I have committed to. A decision was reached that I and another Western organization would help this guy carry out a project—a significant financial project, six figures. When it came time to report, there was no report given. A month goes by, two months go by. Everybody knows about the deadline, but nothing.

There are reasons to not hit a deadline. We're all about grace and mercy, but too much time has gone by. So, I went to meet this person. I said, "Hey, let's go to lunch." I said, "Tell me, how are you doing on this project? What's happening? How are you doing on the inside?" And he said, "Yeah, brother, we need to talk."

Essentially, what had happened is that he was to conduct a training, but other people showed up to the training and didn't leave. They were in a crisis moment, so he fed them. But those people never left, because they were being persecuted. And so, they were all on his big farm. Hundreds of people came and stayed for weeks. The money that was supposed to go for the training was actually spent to feed these people. So, the training didn't last as long as it was supposed to.

Once he said all this, I said, "OK, let's fix that together." He said, "What do you mean?" I told him, "I'm going to go raise the funds separately, and we're going to do the project like we promised together. And the next time that you have something like this come up, you're going to call me and say, 'I have a problem. I have these people knocking at my door or at the farm who need funding, and I don't have any money.' But you're never going to use money that was intended for one thing for another."

He looked at me and said, "You mean you're not leaving?" And I said, "Where would I go? I committed to walk with you for the rest of your life. What difference does this make? Let's learn how to do this together."

Rather than allowing the mistake or the issue to be something that came between us, it's something that drew us closer to the Lord.

When the whole thing was done, we called up the guy from the Western organization and said, "Here's how it all went down." And the Western guy said, "You mean twice the money was raised?" I said, "Yeah, because we keep our word. And that's really important for us together." And he said, "Well, you should have told me." I said, "Yeah, well, we're telling you now."

But it wasn't me versus someone I'm mentoring. It was us together as a family helping them work through how to do something where an honest mistake was made. A difficult circumstance came up and a decision was made that was culturally appropriate, but it was definitely not culturally appropriate for the Western organization. So rather than confronting an issue, we just learned to walk together.

Beautiful. I have one more thing I want to ask. If you're speaking to someone out there in the middle of nowhere trying to figure out how to get started with mentoring some people toward a movement—they really have passion, but nothing going yet. What advice would you give them?

I would say two things. First, double the amount of time you pray, however much you pray. Ask the Lord in that prayer time to bring you the key people that he wants you to mentor. Because there are so many cross-cultural pitfalls and nightmares, there's just no way that we know. It's like trying to fish. You think you have a fish on the line, but it's a stick or a boot or something else. You just don't know. So, I would double the amount of prayer.

Then, as soon as possible, I would bring up the most important thing in your life [with the people around you]. So many people I know operate from the vantage point that they want to earn the right to have a spiritual conversation with someone. If somebody had the most important message in the world to give to me, and they waited six months, they either don't love me, or the message isn't important. It's so easy to have spiritual conversations with people if they are not pejorative. Start asking

spiritual questions and learn together as fast as you can and pray twice as much.

Wow, that's great advice. It's not the seven steps to winning the world with movements, right?

Now can I add a third? Never give anybody a methodology. Don't waste your time. Open the Bible and ask someone to walk the path towards Jesus with you, anchored in God's word. And all the methods will come out because it's in the Bible. The issue is, "Am I more like Jesus because I know this person?"

I think we have everything backwards. We're so project-driven that we alienate ourselves cross-culturally. There's nothing wrong with projects, but the rest of the world isn't project-driven. I think when we lead with those projects, we wind up prioritizing the wrong part of our relationship. Shame cultures can tell you what they think you want to hear if the purpose is to have a good project because they think that will bring them closer to you relationally. If the project isn't the topic, but Jesus is the topic, then the Holy Spirit is the one who leads us both to righteousness. So, we become more like Jesus together. The projects are just an opportunity for us to become more like Jesus.

Questions for Conversation

1. Would you describe your mentoring style as "relational" or "transactional"?
2. How much of your mentoring time goes into managing projects, and how much goes into developing character?
3. Do you agree with the way Dubois handled the situation where money was not used according to the project? Why or why not?