

# SEEDBED

*Practitioners in Conversation*



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## Rethinking “Movements”

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## **Rethinking “Movements”**

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# Editorial

# Clues for a More Constructive Conversation about Movements

By S.T. Antonio

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Few topics provoke more potent passions in mission circles than church-planting and disciple-making movements. The “movement” paradigm galvanized many practitioners with stories of Acts-like advance of the gospel among the least reached, giving hope that with certain strategic shifts, one might prepare the soil for similar future breakthroughs.<sup>1</sup> What some found inspirational, others found concerning, troubled by unanswered biblical, theological, and pastoral questions. While these disagreements sometimes generated healthy debates about the diverse lenses with which we envision participation in God’s mission,<sup>2</sup> they have also degenerated into strawmen and simplistic “either-or” framing which generate more heat than light.

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1. Key precursors to the movement paradigm include Rolland Allen (1927) and George Patterson (1992). David Garrison’s (1999) work was seminal, while Ott and Wilson’s (2011) provided an early critical balance. Coles and Parks (n.d.) collects a variety of short, accessible articles, while Farah (2020 and 2021a) offers a more scholarly collection (made more accessible by Coles 2025).
  2. See for example, the exchange of views in *Seedbed*’s December 2011 issue (vol. 25, no.2), as well as the with “Movement Catalysts or Church Planters” conversation (with Miller and Little) in the March 2022 issue (vol. 33, no.1).

Yet as with many disagreements in this polarized world, a silent majority often straddles multiple communities, paradigms, and priorities, attempting to reconcile dissonant perspectives and relationships:

- a mission team with a more conventional church-planting mindset serves in the same city as another team with a movemental approach<sup>3</sup>
- a movement practitioner might be persuaded by the strategic shifts in the movement paradigm, yet still cherishes the gifts she received when nurtured by her more traditional church back home
- a movement of house churches emerges in a country with recognized, national churches that have a more institutional, denominational structure
- a theologically-oriented practitioner might be convinced movements are real yet have nagging theological or relational questions not addressed by promotional, anecdotal movement presentations.

Simplistic, “zero-sum” approaches to either defending or denigrating movements often fail to create an environment conducive to navigating the complexity and spectrum of perspectives in a world that often pressures people to choose a side and cancel the other.

A more promising posture for engaging movements welcomes and embraces creative tension. In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch traces the history of the church in its successive paradigms of mission. In various eras—patristic, medieval, Reformation, post-Enlightenment—the church generated new frameworks for understanding and participating in God’s mission. New paradigms typically do not fully replace old ones but coexist with them; established and emerging paradigms often vie for supremacy. Bosch cautions us against two errors: being overly revolutionary and overly reactionary. The first says, “Tear down the old,” the second, “The new has nothing to teach us.” If God’s people in each

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3. While various approaches to movement-oriented ministry exist, most approaches aim for a multi-generational reproduction of disciples and churches characterized by “reproducible methods, viral multiplication, every-believer evangelism, reaching groups and existing social networks, immediate obedience to Scripture, and training and releasing indigenous leaders” (Stevenson 2023, 6).

generation must discern afresh meaningful language to motivate and guide our participation in mission, Bosch argues, it is best to seek a creative tension between the new and the old. We can be critically open to transformative insights of new paradigms while honoring the wisdom passed down from our spiritual fathers and mothers.

While some vacillate between revolutionary and reactionary approaches to movements, a more constructive posture is possible, leveraging tensions and concerns not for tearing down ideas but for seeking creative new ways forward. I experienced a glimpse of this in May 2025 at a conference hosted by the Motus Dei Network in Northern Cyprus. The “MQ (Movement Intelligence) Symposium” gathered diverse voices from the mission world to seek “collective intelligence” to enhance the quality of missiology and theology in response to movements.<sup>4</sup> Attendees and presenters did not fit into a single mold, yet the overall ethos and posture reflected a joint pursuit of the Lord’s wisdom spread throughout different members of his body for a more informed and mature participation in the movement of God’s Spirit to magnify Christ among the nations.

With the blessing of Motus Dei, and the dedication of our editorial team, we present to our readers this special collection of perspectives for “Rethinking ‘Movements.’” Several articles in this issue originated as presentations at Motus Dei symposium, supplemented by additional articles and reviews which expand the theme and diversify the voices at the table. (Special thanks to the Motus Dei facilitation team for their continued support in helping facilitate this issue.) Readers will encounter fresh proposals and conversations from researchers, practitioners, and indigenous movement leaders which might recalibrate or nuance previous assumptions about movement perspectives. This issue reflects a diversity rather than uniformity of perspectives about how to understand and respond to movements; we at *Seedbed* aim not to endorse any

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4. This was the second symposium held by the Motus Dei Network, the first being in 2020 (virtually), whose proceedings were later edited and published in *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations* (ed. Farah).

particular perspective or paradigm but to stimulate thinking and constructive conversation in dialogue with current thinking on relevant topics.<sup>5</sup>

To frame this issue for readers, I unpack six insights I learned both attending the Motus Dei symposium and editing this issue, insights which I believe provide resources for a more constructive, critical engagement with movements. They are clues for a more honest, yet more hopeful conversation about movements which moves beyond a zero-sum “paradigms in conflict” posture to a constructive posture of learning the best from the new, validating genuine concerns and curiosities, and seeking new ways forward in faithfulness.

### ***1. Movements of the Spirit of God do not fit in a box, a formula, or a single growth rate.***

In “Movement Silos in Dialogue,” a movement leader described the movement myths he encounters among Western missionaries: “They are trying to package it in the box and trying to distribute that formula. But I find that movement just can’t be boxed.” Motus Dei co-founder Wes Watkins concurs, acknowledging the formulaic feel of some early movement presentations whereas each movement is unique and often emerges in an environment of experimentation, learning, and contextual adaptation (“Dynamics of Movement Missiology”). An increasing number of movement practitioners and leaders more clearly indicate that movements do not develop at the same rate everywhere. Though exceptions exist, movement approaches have generally speaking gained more traction in the Global South than in the Global North, in collectivistic rather than individualistic cultures, in rural rather than urban communities, and in places of natural population growth rather than decline.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that insights from movements are not relevant or should not be pursued in urban, individualistic, and/or Global

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5. *Seedbed* articles and book reviews are intended to represent the views of its authors, not of the editors nor of Pioneers.

6. See “Dynamics of Movement Missiology” in this issue, as well as his earlier article from the first conference (Farah 2021b, “The Right Set of Circumstances and Social Structure”).

North contexts. It does mean that we should not expect movements to look the same, or grow at the same rate, in all contexts.<sup>7</sup>

The movement of God in Acts is described (Acts 6:7, 9:31), celebrated (Col. 1:3–6), and prayed for (2 Thess. 3:1); it is not promised for every time and place. On the contrary, we are taught to expect diverse responses to the good news in different places (Matt. 10:13–14, 13:1–23). This does not mean we should give up hope for breakthrough; Jesus teaches us to pray to the God who moves mountains (Mark 11:22–25), and the Psalms teach us to look back at God’s mighty deeds of salvation and cry out, “Do it again!” (Psalm 74, 77). But constructive conversation about movements is greatly helped when we clarify that God does not move the same way everywhere—the wind of the Spirit blows varyingly when and where he wills.

## ***2. Indigenous movement leaders think and talk about movements in ways which nuance, correct, and enhance the conventional picture of movements from previous authors and movement trainers.***

For decades, Western authors and trainers have been key interpreters who “translate” what is happening in movements. Yet movement leaders are now starting to tell their own story. *Cabbages in the Desert* and *Living Fire*, both reviewed in this issue, provide firsthand, inside accounts of movements told from Aila Tasse and Aychi B.R.<sup>8</sup> We had the opportunity to hear both Aila and Aychi (along with other leaders like Chendan Sah) in panel discussions (“Movement Silos” and “An Inside Look at Leading a Movement”). Other movement leaders were present and actively participated in the discussions.

As Watkins observes in his lead article, movement leaders often envision and speak about movements differently than Western trainers

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7. Ott and Wilson highlighted the importance that external factors play many years ago (Ott and Wilson 2011, chap.4, “Church-Planting Movements are Influenced by External Factors”).

8. Other examples include Victor John’s *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement That Keeps Multiplying* (2019), *Breakthrough Leadership: Insights from an Asian Movement Leader* (2025), and Ying and Grace Kai’s *Training for Trainers: The Movement That Changed the World* (2019).

and mission writers. In my observation, the missiology of indigenous leaders I met tends to emphasize prayer and the lead of the Holy Spirit over technique. Their missiology gravitates more toward story, parable, and metaphor than universalizing, abstract analysis. It admits greater flexibility and diversity of adaptation; it might be more integrative and less confrontational towards existing church structures and practices. Indigenous missiology seems less captivated by mechanistic or business metaphors (“return on investment”) and more by relational and natural metaphors. It is less preoccupied with outside labels and more on the beautiful faith and heartfelt obedience of everyday disciples loving their Father and proclaiming Christ to the lost.

Unfruitful debates about movements are at times less about substance and more about style of communication. Listening to the unique ways in which indigenous movement leaders narrate and interpret God’s work among them has great potential to breathe new life into our conversations and help us envision more constructive pathways forward.

### ***3. Movement practices are best viewed as “wisdom literature” not “law.”***

An analogy with biblical genres might helpfully recalibrate our movement conversations. Basic rules of biblical interpretation teach us the importance of recognizing categories of literature: we do not interpret biblical poetry as we would an epistle, nor historical narrative as we would an apocalyptic vision.<sup>9</sup> Wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs and Job) and “law” (e.g., Leviticus and Deuteronomy) represent two distinct types of literature. If one interprets wisdom as if it were law, problems result. Just ask any parent whose child has departed from their godly upbringing (Prov. 22:6), or any believer considering answering a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:4). Law, by definition, involves universally-binding imperatives with an obligation to obey with clear reward and punishment attached (Deut. 30:15–17). Wisdom literature collects

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9. See Part 2, “Genre Analysis,” which takes up a full third of Grant Osborne’s tome, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Osborne 2006, 181–343).

practical insights learned through lived experience in contact with God’s general revelation in his ordered creation. Its principles are true generally but must be applied—and sometimes deviated from or tweaked—according to the relational and situational context.<sup>10</sup> Confusing wisdom with law can create unnecessary obligation, guilt, false expectations, and ultimately unwise practice.

Movement practices and principles have sometimes been misunderstood as universal laws: “Do X or you will not get a movement.” (Job’s friends made a similar category mistake.) Yet the more I hear people within movements talk about their movement, the more I hear situations when they deviated from what I had previously heard presented as established “laws” of movements.<sup>11</sup> When we misinterpret movement principles as law, we misconstrue or overpromise what movement principles actually are: practical wisdom learned through experience which has *tended* to bear fruit in multiple—but not all—contexts. Rather than frame movement practice in terms of categorical imperatives to be obeyed, we should frame it as of human wisdom deserving of careful attention. Unlike wisdom in Scripture, movement wisdom is not divinely inspired or infallible and therefore should be critically evaluated and appropriated like all human wisdom. Yet filtered through Scripture, practical wisdom learned through experience is a gift which the wise teachably receive, meditate upon, and thoughtfully emulate. A wisdom versus law distinction can recalibrate our expectations and clear the way for a more measured, constructive conversation about movements.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Cf. Osborne 2006, 243–46.

11. As just one example, compare how Victor John (2019) describes the role of Discovery Bible Study in his Bhojpouri movement with how David Watson describes it (Watson and Watson 2014).

12. This point was inspired by a conversation with Cory Hartman, who first suggested to me that “wisdom literature” and “law” help describe the different ways that movement leaders and Westerners communicate about movement practices.

#### ***4. The pursuit of longevity and spiritual depth of movements can complement the pursuit of their multiplication and breadth.***

Movement skeptics have long criticized a focus on rapid growth at the expense of the slow, steady work of deep discipleship. Movement advocates, on the other hand, challenge traditional approaches with the urgent possibility of reaching more with the gospel than we previously thought possible. Older movements offer a unique perspective which calls into question this simplistic, binary choice. “An Inside Look at Leading a Movement” opens a window on the guardrails, leadership, and structures of accountability within some established movement networks. *Forests in the Seed* (reviewed in *Seedbed*) speaks of pursuing movements which are *wide* (quantity), *deep* (quality), and *long* (enduring).<sup>13</sup> “Movements 2.0” asks movements, “*What next?*” If the Spirit brings multitudes into the kingdom, how are they nurtured into thriving, enduring churches? The authors advocate moving beyond rosy portrayals to more attentive listening to both the “pain” and the “promise” so as to walk alongside our new siblings in Christ toward longevity and maturity.

Rather than assuming a false choice, asking how we might pursue quantity and quality together may produce more constructive, creative ways forward. The churches birthed through the movement of God’s Spirit in Acts were themselves susceptible to losing their first love (Rev. 2:4), forgetting the true gospel (Gal. 1:6), and spiritual decay (Rev. 3:1). This does not undermine the God-glorifying nature of the explosive expansion of the church (2 Thess. 3:1; Col. 1:6), nor does it absolve us from laboring for maturity of disciples and churches (Col. 1:28–29). The Moravians and the Methodists were the fruit of two movements of God in which many encountered Christ, yet today only the Methodist movement remains in some form. If our goal is not a temporary flame but an enduring lampstand for Christ (Rev. 1:20), how might that impact the way we make disciples from day one?<sup>14</sup> Such a question holds promise for a more constructive exploration.

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13. See for example *Forests in the Seed* (Dubois, Parks, and Long 2025, 98), reviewed in this issue.

***5. The collective intelligence of the global body—men and women; Global South and North; Muslim / Christian / Hindu backgrounds; practitioners of diverse (movement and traditional) methods; “apostle / prophet / evangelist” gifts and “shepherd / teacher” gifts (Eph. 4:11)—is all needed to enlarge and enhance our perspective of and participation with the movements of God.***

At the symposium, a leader from India expressed to me his amazement at the uniqueness of a gathering of Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist-background leaders, and Western missiologists of varying expertise. *“What might we do together?”* he dreamed. He lamented the way “legacy” churches in his country sometimes criticized movement churches. *“Let’s not argue about who is right or wrong in legacy versus movement,”* he said. *“Let God decide who is right. Let us focus on accomplishing the Great Commission. Let us instead help each other. We can do more together than apart.”*<sup>15</sup>

Readers of this issue will similarly encounter a variety of frameworks, perspectives, and approaches to movements. “Discovery” (along with “Heresies, Pharisees, and Folk Religion”) engages serious theological concerns with a classic DMM perspective, while “An Alternate Take on Discovery” responds with commonalities with and critiques from a “Four Fields” framework. “The Forgotten Ways” presents practitioners serving the least reached with a different set of categories developed for churches in the West which the author suggests might correct imbalances of DMM. “Presbyterianism and DMM” puts two traditions into constructive dialogue often set in antithesis. “Should We ‘Reactivate the Church as Movement?’” reproduces a theological statement discussed at the symposium along with three constructive, critical responses from missional leaders from across the global church.

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14. David Greenlee, in a personal conversation subsequent to the symposium, shared this immensely helpful insight with me about the Moravian and Methodist movements and how they stimulate our thinking about movement sustainability.

15. My paraphrase of comments shared by leader A.P.

Dialogue benefits when we acknowledge that different frameworks will be meaningful to different people. Diversity of backgrounds, cultures, and personalities shapes the terms, categories, and images we find inspirational (or not) in understanding and participating in God’s mission. Diversity of language is not a problem to be solved but a treasure to be stewarded. It is not always comfortable; misunderstanding happens, and sometimes truth needs to be spoken in love. Yet accepting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, a willingness to both receive and offer insight, and an ethos of love and mutual blessing, enables us to collectively help one another grow closer to the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13). Rather than arguing about words (2 Tim. 2:14), what fresh ideas might be stimulated if we learn to see through the eyes of others?

***6. An authentic movement of Christ will not be centered on “movement,” multiplication, or method but on Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and coming again.***

As Hirsch observes, every human movement—whether political, social, or religious—has a center, a rallying cry which unites it. What distinguishes a “Jesus movement” from every other movement is just that: it is initiated by, centered around, and glorifies the living Christ. In our world of branding, organizations often function as sub-kingdoms which seek to carve out their own niche, philosophy, and value. We often compete for influence, personnel, and resources. However, an authentic church or organization or movement of Jesus must not be centered *in an ultimate sense* on any sub-cause—whether a ministry brand, a kingdom objective, or even “movements” themselves, as good as these things might be. Authentic churches and movements should be centered around the cosmos-changing reality of the living, reigning Christ who died, rose, and is coming again.

An Asian leader at the symposium made a memorable comment after a panel discussion. He asked us to reflect on a question he felt the Lord placed on his heart: “*Are we in the business of directing God to do our will or listening to God and fulfilling his will?*”<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Aila Tasse

gently reminded us that ordinary believers in movements are not preoccupied with fitting into (or arguing about) labels like “DMM” and “CPM.” He urges us to get behind the labels outsiders place on movements and understand movement through the eyes of these everyday believers who are loving Jesus, spreading his good news, and looking to his second coming.

Rather than unfruitful, endless debates over method and strategy, a more constructive conversation will result by asking Hirsch’s diagnostic question for a given ministry or movement: “*Is what we are doing a genuine expression of the way of Jesus?*” When we turn our eyes upon Jesus, debates over methods and paradigms grow dim, leading to more constructive, creative ways of learning together and pointing each other toward the one in whose body we are forever united.

As we continue to navigate diverse perspectives about movements in the mission community, revolutionary and reactionary responses will continue to exert their influence. Those seeking a more creative engagement between the new and the old, however, might find and follow clues such as these to more fruitful pathways of discerning together the length, breadth, height, and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, moves the stars, and heals the nations.

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16. This poignant question was posed by leader A.P.

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# Articles

# Dynamics of Movement Missiology: Charting Developments and Trajectories for the New Era

By Wes Watkins

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Movement thinking is not new—it is grounded in Scripture and rooted in the global church. At its heart, movement thinking seeks to recapture the ethos of Jesus and apostolic practice we see in the New Testament. By God’s providence, we are living in a volatile and exciting age, one in which church multiplication is happening among the least reached. Yet while these movements are advancing, our collective missiological framework for understanding them is still maturing. The emergence of movements signals not just a change in strategy or method, but a deeper paradigm shift that opens up new frontiers for research and theological reflection. To meet this moment, we need a richer, more interdisciplinary missiology of movements. Such a framework will sharpen our discernment, expand our vocabulary, and foster wiser practices for the next era of mission. This article surveys some of the recent developments and future trajectories of a “movement missiology.” For practitioners, students, and mission leaders alike, the stakes are high: our vocabulary will shape how we join what God is already doing.

## The Untapped Potential of Motus Dei

*Motus Dei* (Latin for “the movement of God”) serves as a meta concept—an anchor that supplies a shared, theologically rooted vocabulary for our movement conversations. As A. W. Tozer famously reminds us, what we

think about God shapes everything that follows: “We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God” (1978, 1). In other words, “church-as-movement” flows from “God-as-movement.” This framing transcends static images of God and echoes early Christian thinkers who pictured Father, Son, and Spirit continually weaving in and through one another in generous, other-facing love. They named this mutual indwelling *perichoresis*, which represents a “dynamic communion” within the nature of God himself (Letham 2019, 356). God’s essence never changes, yet he is anything but static. His life is always in motion, endlessly giving and sustaining life.

So rather than replace the *missio Dei* concept, *motus Dei* attempts to give it new energy and activity. While this topic has been addressed recently (Farah 2020; George and Harold 2021; Oumarou 2022; Watkins 2024), below I briefly highlight its still-untapped potential in hopes that practitioners will be equipped with fresh ways to encounter God, such that thoughtful practitioners and theologians will continue developing *motus Dei*.

### ***Humanity as the Moving Image of a Moving God***

Genesis 1 reads like a temple dedication text from the ancient Near East (Walton 2025, 113). On the seventh day of these dedications, the image of the deity would be placed inside the temple. The Hebrew word for “image,” *tselem* (Gen. 1:26) is also sometimes used for “idol” in the Old Testament (e.g., Num. 33:52; 2 Kings 11:18). In God’s creation, which functions as his temple, humans are that image. Adam and Eve were not lifeless statues but living, moving beings who reflected a living and moving God.

Furthermore, in the creation-as-temple motif, God did not choose to dwell in a fixed building. Instead, he used a tabernacle, a mobile home, to be present with his people. He never asked for a grand temple. In fact, Solomon violated several of God’s commands in building one (1 Kings 5:13–18; 9:15), and God allowed it to be destroyed, twice (2 Chron. 36:17–19; Luke 21:5–6)! The narrative around Solomon’s building project

includes forced labor, political alliances, and practices God had prohibited (1 Kings 5:13–18; 9:15), which suggests the temple reflects Israel's kingship more than God's original pattern. The tension within the text is intentional: God inhabits the temple, but the prophetic tradition repeatedly critiques dependence on it (Jeremiah 7; Micah 3; Acts 7). In this context, God's decision to fill the temple with his glory (1 Kings 8:10) is a concession. Instead, the biblical story moves forward through multiplication, from the mandate given to God's image-bearers to "increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28 LXX) to Luke's report that "the word of God increased and the disciples multiplied greatly" (Acts 6:7; 12:24).

In Christ, God's dwelling is with his people, and his people are meant to move with him (John 1:14). Movement is not just something God does; it is part of who he is, and we image that God.

### ***Our Mobile Messiah***

Jesus once said, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). As D.A. Carson points out, this doesn't mean Jesus was penniless, but homeless. The nature of his mission kept him on the move, and his followers would have to be on move too (Carson 2010, 247). Jesus was unhoused and mobile. Even in the incarnation, we see Deity moving toward us. Jesus did not settle into comfort or stability. He embodied movement.

### ***The Kinetic Church***

Another often overlooked evidence of *motus Dei* in the Bible comes from Jesus' words, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). At first glance, it's a simple image. But consider this: gates don't move. They are defensive structures, and this means the church is not huddled in retreat but is advancing with a type of unstoppable kinetic energy. Like Jesus himself, the church is on the move, pushing through the strongholds of darkness. To grasp this biblical image of church as a movement, we must also ground that vision in the reality of a God who moves.

These three perspectives on God, viewed through the lens of *motus Dei*, reshape how we think about church and mission, yet we have only scratched the surface. The concept still holds vast, untapped potential. With that in mind, we turn next to a brief taxonomy of movement thinking that has developed this century.

## Cultivating Intercultural Movemental Intelligence

With an implied and underutilized theology of *motus Dei* as a foundation, let me offer a brief map of the territory. Several conversations about Jesus movements have emerged in this century, and none of them is simple. My effort to describe the three primary streams is necessarily concise, yet I hope it proves helpful; every explanation of complex phenomena is somewhat reductionistic.

The first discourse, movements in the West, is represented by writers such as Alan Hirsch (2016) and Neil Cole (2010). They look at movements in a post-Christian context, places where the church is in steep decline and where it is viewed by the greater society as obsolete (e.g., Smith 2025). Their focus is mainly theological, with aspirational intentions to recommission the church in the West for movement once again. Hirsch digs into the “apostolic genius” he believes is latent in every congregation, recovering APEST gifting (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, cf. Eph. 4:11) and a “missional-incarnational” posture so that Western churches might once again multiply organically. Cole adds a vision of simple, decentralized communities that can thrive outside traditional church structures. Yet this Western stream remains partly siloed from the missionary and Majority World discourses summarized in Table 1, largely because it intentionally addresses Western leaders and theologically critiques European Christendom.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See, for example, Hirsch 2016, *The Forgotten Ways*, pages 52–62.

*Table 1. Three Major Discourses of Movement Thinking Today*

<b>Discourse</b>	<b>Global West</b>	<b>Missionary</b>	<b>Majority World</b>
Voices	Alan Hirsch, Neil Cole	Jerry Trousdale, Steve Addison	Aila Tasse, Aychi B.R., Victor John
Context	Post-Christian	Universal	Particular
Mode	Aspirational	Analytical	Tangible
Focus	Theology	Factors	Innovations

The second discourse of movement thinkers is represented by missionary authors like Jerry Trousdale (2012) and Steve Addison (2011), among many others. This conversation tends to analyze movements into various parts and then universalize the phenomenon by drawing out factors which catalyze movements that may be applied anywhere. Most of the writers in the “missionary” conversation are connected to Majority World catalysts but they still write, to a large extent, from an outsider perspective. Their books and trainings package these lessons into reproducible tools like Discovery Bible Study, obedience-based discipleship, and simple church-multiplication frameworks. The goal is to equip practitioners across cultures with operational tools for catalyzing movements.

The final discourse is connected to the missionary stream but also has its own flavor. When I research movements and talk with Majority World catalysts (Tasse 2024; John 2025; Aychi B.R. 2025), I notice they seldom speak in universals. Instead, they narrate the particulars of their specific movements using stories, parables, and existential issues drawn from real life. Successful catalysts, often from Muslim or Hindu backgrounds, are less concerned with imported doctrine or fixed factors but more focused on innovation. Put simply, I believe every movement is a missiological innovation within its context. It represents an adaptive challenge (Farah 2018), and in adaptive work there is always more than one way through the swamp.

One of the stated goals of Motus Dei's MQ (Movemental Intelligence) Symposium 2025 was to pull these conversations into the same room and cultivate synergy. If we really are aiming for "communal intelligence" (Farah 2021b), then each discourse's strengths must serve the others. To prepare for this endeavor, I explored the field of postcolonial studies, looking for tools to create equitable dialogue for the Symposium. Postcolonial theory's dominant concern involves the protest of power imbalances. However, this concern rarely surfaced among Majority World catalysts I interviewed. I shifted instead to intercultural theory, where the idea of "interculturality" offers a constructive path toward understanding, cooperation, and inclusion (Hill 2024, 74ff).

Paul hints at a similar dynamic, "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known" (Eph. 3:10). Paul's word for "manifold" (Greek *polypoikilos*) brings to mind a many-colored tapestry, underscoring the rich complexity of God's wisdom as it is displayed through a single, united people. By using a rarely used word from classical Greek, Paul stretches language to do justice to the church's role in showcasing God's wisdom. The term itself was not new, but its biblical debut in Ephesians 3:10 signals how unprecedented the Jew-Gentile unity of the gospel really is. Guided by that scriptural image and missiological dynamic, the MQ Symposium sought to weave these diverse missiological streams into an intercultural theology of movements—one that honors difference, cultivates mutual learning, and reflects the multicolored wisdom of the *motus Dei*. Yet we still have much work to do as helpful trends develop in movement thinking.

## Trends in Movement Thinking

Today, discussions about movements have grown more nuanced, shifting from an early focus on fast numerical gains to deeper theological and sociological exploration. Leaders now ask not only how many disciples are made but what kind of communities are forming and how faithfully they embody the gospel in their own cultures. From my vantage point, there are three major trends worth mentioning here.

## ***Less Stats and More Missiology***

Early reports focused on counting movements. The count went from “seven” to “thirty-five,” then, in the late 2000s, an internal database was built and eventually fed by more than three dozen organizations and families of movements. When that list became public, the numbers took on a life of their own. Yet credibility requires transparency, and security limits how much detail can be made public (Parks 2023). As a result, attention is shifting toward missiology itself. Projects like *Motus Dei* (Farah 2021a) illustrate this move: phenomenological research and peer-reviewed studies now shape the conversation, and constructive critiques have pushed it forward. Even though not everyone agrees, most people in the movement conversation now focus less on debating the numbers and more on understanding the theological and cultural dynamics behind movements.

## ***Less Pace and More Second-Generation Maturity***

Because some well-documented movements spread quickly, many assumed speed was the benchmark, even the mark of New Testament authenticity (e.g., 2 Thess. 3:1). Others countered that healthy growth is usually slow, and that faithfulness can look like plateau or decline (e.g., Rev. 2:9–10). Today the debate over “pace” feels less central to the conversation. Many mature movements are now fifteen years old or more, and leaders face second-generation questions: how to handle marriage, child-rearing, burial practices, persecution, and sustained theological formation.<sup>2</sup> The conversation is turning from “How fast?” to “How healthy over time?”

## ***Less Methods and More Innovation***

Early presentations of movements sometimes sounded a bit formulaic: adopt a specific method and results will follow if the Holy Spirit moves. That was the best attempt to describe the phenomenon and to

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2. For an example of this, see the article in this issue, “Movements 2.0: Stewarding the Pain and Promise of Movements to Christ in the Next Generations” by Pat Brittenden and Soroush Sadeghzadeh.

transfer insights to practitioners. On the ground, however, every movement shows significant variety. Articles in 2015 compared Disciple Making Movements (DMM) and Training for Trainers (T4T) (Parks and Smith 2015a; 2015b); since then, the “Four Fields” framework has largely replaced T4T, and it seems to me that no movement fits a pure DMM template. Instead, catalysts engage in ongoing experimentation, rigorous learning, and context-specific adaptation (e.g., Larsen 2018). To me, DMM feels more like a ministry philosophy than a fixed strategy. The emphasis has shifted to fostering environments where innovation, adaptability, and incarnational witness can flourish, without forcing a single model on diverse contexts.

## Expanding and Deepening Movement Missiology

Movements are complex realities. Church history, New Testament exegesis, sociology, anthropology, new-religious-movements research, social identity theory, and population demographics all intersect. Faced with that complexity, we can easily slip into what scholars call “*monocausotaxophilia*”—the longing for one single cause that explains everything: “*Movements happen only because of X.*” We do this because it provides us with a clear story and eases the heavy cognitive load in our minds. Yet it blinds us to nuance and multiple causation. Dallas Willard gives the only acceptable single-cause answer, and even his answer presses us deeper, not narrower. Willard insisted that every human problem can be traced to the absence of serious discipleship to Jesus (2006, 4–5). The remedy is not a technique but a return to whole-life apprenticeship to Christ, the very heartbeat of authentic Jesus movements.

A second caution concerns the Western evangelical lens. Much of our discussion still leans on classical evangelicalism which was shaped by figures such as John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. Mission historian Andrew Walls claims that classic evangelicalism was a protest movement against a Christian culture that was not Christian enough (1996, 81). In the

United States, contemporary evangelicalism has morphed into a power movement against a post-Christian culture that is not conservative enough! Either way, white, suburban concerns frame current evangelical priorities (Miller 2025). A highly institutionalized evangelical subculture leaves the movement conversation feeling novel or foreign to some, which is why the meta-concept *motus Dei* is so important. It lets us speak of God's own movement and invites us back to the New Testament, where the church operated with modest structures and a high priority on Christocentric disciple making.

Recent work in movemental ecclesiology argues that the church must be reimagined as a living, distributed network rather than a centralized institution.<sup>3</sup> My current research pursues that line by bringing together the voices of local leaders and the insights of outside observers. This helps show how innovation, social identity, and grassroots theology interact to shape movements in Muslim-majority contexts. Deepening and expanding movement missiology will require this two-tier approach: honoring voices within movements while submitting their stories to robust interdisciplinary inquiry.

Samuel Perry's *Religion for Realists* offers helpful tools (2024). He shows that faith spreads along three rails: social identity, reinforcing norms, and population dynamics. Theology matters, but ideas travel on relational networks that make new behaviors feel normal. Movements rarely arise in regions of demographic decline; they thrive where the population is growing. In other words, the emergence of movements seems to be linked to increasing population demographics. Naming such realities enlarges our movemental toolkit and grounds strategy in observable patterns rather than anecdotes.

At the end of the day, I hope the big idea is clear: richer discourse yields wiser practice. Better conversations help us see what is really happening on the ground and make choices that are more faithful and

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3. See my 2025 lecture, "Movemental Ecclesiology: Recovering a Pre-Christendom Hermeneutic of Church Multiplication" for the Global Alliance for Church Multiplication (GACX) Forum.

fruitful. When theology converses honestly with sociology, we do not weaken the gospel; we illuminate where and why the good news advances. If *motus Dei* describes God's work in the world, and if movements are among the most significant realities shaping global mission today, then our missiology must rise to meet it. That is a matter of biblical stewardship, not missiological fads.

## Conclusion: Living the Paradigm Shift

We are perhaps halfway through an exciting, fifty-year paradigm shift in church and mission. The questions surfacing in Karachi, Sudan, and Chicago today will set the agenda for tomorrow's mission training. Each phase of Christian history introduces new themes because our points of reference shift as the world changes (Walls 1996, 23). Today's movement phenomenon signals a decisive "turn" that is ushering us into a new era of understanding (Watkins 2022). Multiplying transformational churches among all peoples will hinge on the missiological paradigm we embrace. We are not merely ticking off unengaged people groups from a list; we are recovering biblical church and apostolic mission so that the gospel spreads through self-replicating communities rather than simply through centrally managed programs. A movement missiology that brings theology into open dialogue with sociology and the insights of global practitioners will produce the richer, adaptive practices the church needs to steward God's dynamic work in this emerging era of mission. In Christ, it is a fun time to live and move with him.

## Questions for Conversation

1. How does the *Motus Dei* framework sharpen or change your understanding of church-planting movements? Where do you agree or disagree?
2. Which of the three major "Discourses of Movement Thinking" are you most familiar with? How could the others enhance your understanding of movements?

3. Which trends in movement thinking did you find the most encouraging? Why? Were there any that were discouraging?

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# Movement Silos in Dialogue: A Panel Discussion

By Aychi B.R., David Garrison, Alan Hirsch, Aila Tasse, and Wes Watkins


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*David Garrison is a veteran of 31 years with the International Mission Board and retired executive director of Global Gates. With a PhD from the University of Chicago, Garrison is recognized as a pioneer in the understanding of Church Planting Movements. His most recent book, *Insider Church Planting Movements: What 25 Years of Assessments Reveal* (WIGTake, 2026).*

*Alan Hirsch is a global thought-leader on missional movements and leadership. He worked with churches and organizations across the world, mainly in North America, Europe, and Australia. He is the founder of the Movement Leaders Collective, Forge Mission Training Network, and the 5Q Collective, and he has authored numerous award-winning books. His works include *The Forgotten Ways, The Shaping of Things to Come, 5Q, ReJesus, The Faith of Leap, Untamed, Right Here Right Now, On the Verge, and The Permanent Revolution*. His experience includes leading a local church movement among the marginalized, developing training systems for innovative missional leadership, and heading up the mission and revitalization work of his denomination. He is movement mentor for NewThing International as well the embedded consultant for Redeemer City to City in New York.*

*Aychi B.R. is an African Christian who, since high school, has had a passion for sharing the gospel with those who need to hear it. While attending a mission school, God called him to reach out to people from a nearby unreached tribe. This calling later expanded to focus on reaching all the unreached groups in his region of Africa and planting churches among them.*

*Wes Watkins (formerly Warrick Farah) is the editor of Motus Dei (2021) and coeditor of Margins of Islam (2018). He is an adjunct professor at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. As a missiologist with One Collective, Wes facilitates the Motus Dei Network and is a researcher at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.*



Editorial Note: *In his article, “Dynamics of Movement Missiology,” Wes Watkins describes three streams of movement thinking & practice with different ways of talking about movements which would benefit from dialogue: (1) Western missionaries, (2) Majority World movement leaders, and (3) “Missions to the West” thought leaders. In a panel discussion at the MQ (Movemental Intelligence) Symposium in May 2025, four panelists shared brief insights and anecdotes about their unique approach to understanding and talking about movements. Representing Western missiologists, David Garrison is well-known for his research and writing about church-planting movements. Aila Tasse and Aychi B.R. are two fruitful, influential leaders of two significant networks of movements in different parts of Africa. Alan Hirsch is a prolific writer and leader whose work focuses on helping Western Christians reach the West again by recovering the movemental dynamics of the gospel. The brief discussion was moderated by Wes Watkins, founder of the Motus Dei Network. The following has been lightly edited for clarity and length.*

**Wes Watkins:** Aila, help us understand the difference between “praxeology” (practice) and “theology” (ideas and principles) in movements as you have experienced them in different phases of your ministry.

**Aila Tasse:** When I first read the book *Church Planting Movements* by David Garrison (who is sitting right here with us!), I didn’t believe it. When I first attended a movement training, I thought that everything was a lie. I didn’t want to believe it. But I was challenged by God. We started doing training—I was actually doing movement training without believing in it. After a week of resisting in my own heart, I was praying, and the

message I received from God was, "Get out of the way." I was struggling with what I had already done, in my ministry, as well as with the theory and the understanding of the training and the practice that I had just received. I was a pastor, I had founded a church among Muslims, and it was working for me. I had experience, and that experience was standing in the way. Since then, a lot has happened. God did things. And I started looking at what God was doing, away from what I had experienced within the existing church.

Most of what we've been doing comes out of practicing principles and looking at the Scriptures. We step back and we start learning, and sometimes unlearning certain things. We started asking, "What is this that God is doing? What can we learn from it? What are the principles from the Bible that we can apply in this situation?" A lot of what we do came from discovery in the Scriptures. We started building our approach, not focusing on methodology, but focusing much more on what we were practicing. We ask questions like, "What was the early church doing? What was Jesus doing? What can we learn from Paul's writings about the church? How can we practice that?" We started building the basics by looking at the principles **and** the practice. And then we ask, "How can we apply these principles and practices?"

**Wes:** David, tell us about your approach to research and the ten common elements that kicked off this whole conversation. Do you still think that taxonomy was helpful?

**David Garrison:** When I wrote that little booklet, I was taking notes on what we were hearing that God was doing in various corners of the world. That was my contribution. I could take notes and put the notes together. I took it all in. I was so excited about what God was doing. We asked, "What are all the things that God is using?" We listed it all on three whiteboards. David Watson was in that first focus group. He said, "For us, it wasn't what we were doing, so much as what we stopped doing, that caused the movement to break out." Sometimes you have to stop doing some things and get back to some basics.

This little booklet went all over the place. One person who translated it wrote to me, "I love what you've done with the reverse engineering of church planting movements." Reverse engineering? Yes, that's what I was doing. You know what a reverse engineer is? It means that you did not engineer or build it, but that you started with something that God was doing. You asked, "What were the pieces and the parts in this?" The guys that were involved in these movements were telling me that these were the things that were in our movements. They're so broad that it's not like you're putting God in a box when your principles are things like "Abundant Evangelism." Some people were using the Jesus Film, some were using pure "mouth to ear"—a personal testimony, how my life changed, etc. But those universal categories, I still stand by them. I don't think they are really methodologies so much as painting very broad strokes. And then within that, in each place, you decide how that works in your context.

I think that's one reason Islam has been such an effective response to Christianity. It's really designed to stop abundant evangelism and to stop a number of these things that we find in movements. And if in our efforts to contextualize, we succumb to those things, there will be no movement because "we can't do abundant evangelism here." But that's not an accurate assumption; you can always do abundant evangelism. But often there is a price to pay, and you find another way to do it. Someone said once that when water runs down a mountain, sometimes it races down in a waterfall, sometimes it trickles down, sometimes it goes underground and pops out of the base. And to me, that's the fun part of missions: finding the way that it's going to flow in this context. And the way it flows is forever surprising. For every movement you look at, God did it in some really cool way that causes you to think, "Who would have thought of that?" God thought of that! And he inspired it in some way. That's my approach. It's descriptive.

**Wes:** Alan, you've written a lot on the theology of movement. When you hear about movements in the majority world, and when you hear David's ten characteristics, what is something that you wish that these

guys knew? If I'm asking it right, what is something that frustrates you about the way they talk about movements? Though I know it also excites you.

**Alan Hirsch:** It does excite me very much. Actually, I'm very much here to learn.

One of the big insights into my own research into movements was from studying not so much the early church, but studying China. How did China grow from 2 million to 120 million followers of Christ in about seventy or eighty years without all the institutions? A phenomenal growth. They had the institution for so long. They had Christianity. They had the gospel. Thomas went out there, and planted churches, a lot of Orthodox and Nestorian churches. 2000 years of it, but it didn't do much. And under persecution and de-institutionalization, the church discovers something that must have been there already, which I call latent potentials. What I think is important is becoming aware of those latent potentials.

We experience them in movements, but we haven't named them. I think the capacity to name these things actually is to be able to become aware of them and to be able to talk about them meaningfully, because language does that. And the Bible gives us a huge amount of this language, of course. I'm very much for the five-fold, what I call, APEST (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher) dynamics typology of ministry. But the word "apostle" has been suppressed around the world, and most certainly in Western missions. Why? The word comes up 82 times in the Scriptures. It's really important. Why are we not allowed to use that word?

**Wes:** Aychi, you do a lot of training, especially for Western missionaries. What are some of the myths that you come across in the way that Western missionaries think about movements?

**Aychi B.R.:** The first myth is, "I think we've figured it all out. This is the answer. This is the silver bullet."

The second myth is, "It can't be happening here. It is happening there because of a certain specific cultural context, but this is different. Different context, different sociological fabric. So, it's not going to happen here."

The third myth is unbelief, "It must be a miscalculation or misinformation." Those things, I think are pessimistic.

Another myth is, "It's really easy to formulate what's going on in the kingdom world." What I mean is, trying to simplify it by saying, "If we do *this, this, and this*, it's going to happen *that way*." They are trying to package it in the box and trying to distribute that formula. But I find that movement just can't be boxed.

**Wes:** Aychi, do you like the word "innovation"? Do you think that's an accurate word?

**Aychi:** Yes, when innovation comes out of what I call "healthy dissatisfaction." That's how it happened in my life. I have been in missions the last thirty years. The first six years of my life in missions was among the [X people group]. If you counted all the believers, including children, there were less than 200. Out of that, 50% of them were killed for their faith. So you give your life in ministry, but when you see some fruit, then it goes away. Because of our healthy dissatisfaction, we had a vision of planting 10,000 churches within ten years. God is first to see everyone joining the kingdom of God. But how do we actually do that and see that kind of growth of the kingdom? That healthy dissatisfaction really erupted within me and caused me to deconstruct my theology, deconstruct what I call my best experience, or deconstruct what I have learned from other missionaries, either by books or lectures or other things.

**Audience Member:** Aila, you described previously how you faced something new, and then you took it back to Scripture to discern, "Is this congruent with Scripture?" Could you share an example and go into a little more detail about what discernment looks like?

**Aila:** My struggle was seeing what God is doing in other places and myself struggling to believe it can happen in my place. When God started doing those things, even before we could believe it, we had to step back and relearn, “What is this? Why is it happening? What is God doing?” We brought people in a room together and were asking questions, “What did you learn? What does the Scripture say about this?” And then what God was doing started becoming more common among us. We started drawing principles from the Scriptures. I struggled at the beginning, because of my experience, because to me, it should happen “this way” because I have experienced it “this way” and I have a justification because I learned it has to be “this way.” If not, then it's wrong.

But now God is teaching something new to ordinary people, and I have to unlearn, even if what I've learned previously was very beneficial. But God is doing something new. I should allow God to do those things. The problem is not God, the problem is me. I was not able to believe. For me, that was the process to start unlearning and start asking others to help me learn through practice, and not only through ideas in books.

**Alan:** I think unlearning is absolutely, critically important. As one of the older guys here, I wish I'd known this earlier on, but having a process of helping people unlearn in order to engage in the process of *metanoia*, which is very narrowly interpreted in history as “repentance.” Repentance is part of it, but really, *metanoia*, if you break the word down to its etymology, the word *meta* means “over, above, beyond,” and *noia* means “mind, thinking.” In other words, thinking fundamentally different to the way we currently think, which is part of biblical spirituality. But I find that most people have no process of unlearning. So, we stick to a prefigured model. And most of our thinking, at least in the West, was formulated in the Christendom period. We no longer live there, but we still insist on that way of doing the church, because we really don't know how to get to the core paradigm issue. In a way, another translation for *metanoia* is “paradigm shift,” which actually is so important—constantly going through these learning journeys. I just think unlearning is very, very important. All the time. Keep going. Don't stop.

**Aila:** The big question we always help the church to ask is, "What did Jesus come to start? What did he come to do?" We want them to see that the mission of the church is to continue the mission of Jesus, which is the mission of the Father. And so, they understand that we are doing what Jesus came to do.

Most ordinary people will not struggle with the methods. Some people come from outside and say, "You are CPM. You're all those things, right?" Others from outside say to us, "We are DMM. What are you?" Our people do not talk about these things. This language about the methods comes from places that have no practice and teach other people to think in this way. That's why it is always important to look through the eyes of these ordinary people who are loving Jesus and want to take his love to lost people and are looking forward to his second coming. I think as we develop our understanding of movement, we're looking backwards so that we can develop principles that they can use in a simple way. But what are the people in our context looking forward to? The coming King! Motivated by Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, they look to that so much more than their struggles. How are we going to give them the vision to do that?

*Editorial Note: To further explore the panelists' perspectives, check out their contributions elsewhere in this issue:*

- "An Inside Look at Leading a Movement: Learning from Two Leaders of Transformational Networks in South Asia and East Africa" (with Aila Tasse and Chendan Sah)
- "The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements in our Time" (by Alan Hirsch)
- Book Review: *Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Challenging Places*, by Aychi B.R.
- Book Review: *Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements among Unreached Peoples*, by Aila Tasse

## Questions for Conversation

1. How would you describe the differences and similarities in the way the different panelists understand and talk about church-planting movements?
2. What insights or ideas about movements are new or different to what you have heard or read previously?
3. What is the role of Scripture in shaping and evaluating our ministry practice? What is the role of practice and learned experience? How should these two relate to one another as we develop and refine our understanding and practice of the Great Commission?

# The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements in our Time

By Alan Hirsch

*Alan Hirsch is a global thought-leader on missional movements and leadership. He worked with churches and organizations across the world, mainly in North America, Europe, and Australia. He is the founder of the Movement Leaders Collective, Forge Mission Training Network, and the 5Q Collective, and he has authored numerous award-winning books. His works include The Forgotten Ways, The Shaping of Things to Come, 5Q, ReJesus, The Faith of Leap, Untamed, Right Here Right Now, On the Verge, and The Permanent Revolution. His experience includes leading a local church movement among the marginalized, developing training systems for innovative missional leadership, and heading up the mission and revitalization work of his denomination. He is movement mentor for NewThing International as well the embedded consultant for Redeemer City to City in New York.*



We are living in an unprecedented moment in history. Never before has the global church held so much potential to finish what it began at Pentecost—the planting of the Jesus story (the gospel) in every people, tongue, and tribe. The missional challenge, however, is not simply one of geography or access. It is fundamentally one of apostolic (missionary) imagination. The challenge is to awaken within the global Christian body, and specifically within those pioneering spirits laboring among the unreached, a "lost imagination" concerning the church's innate design and purpose.

Our existing approaches to mission, church organization, and leadership are still shaped by outdated assumptions that haven't adapted to the current scale and complexity of the task. I believe we have, through centuries of institutional drift, lost contact with the memory of what we can, and ought, to be as God's people. We need a thorough re-evaluation of what it means to be God's people in unreached areas. This

requires us to rediscover the powerful, movement-oriented nature of early Christianity—what I refer to as “The Forgotten Ways” (Hirsch 2016).

It would be a big mistake to see this call to the recovery of apostolic movements simply as an application of a new methodology. It is a call to recover the buried instincts of the people of God—the original energies which once drove small bands of marginalized believers to ignite movements that would reshape the world. And make no mistake: the very same latent potencies still reside in the Body of Christ in our day, as it has through all eras. They are embedded deep in the life of Jesus, in the patterns of the New Testament church, and in every Spirit-baptized community of disciples. But these latent capacities must be reactivated, especially among those who feel called to pioneer among unreached peoples. That is the purpose of this article—to help us reimagine church as an apostolic movement capable of viral reproduction in the hardest and most resistant places on earth.

This quest, to unearth the latent capacities that lie dormant at the heart of every true believer and every authentic Jesus community, is not some mere fantasy. It is a tangible phenomenon, clearly identifiable in the historical currents of faith, a primal force that has energized the most outstanding Jesus movements throughout history. Consider the startling trajectory of the early Christian movement: from a mere 25,000 adherents in AD 100 to an astounding 20,000,000 by AD 310, blossoming into the Roman Empire's most significant religious force within two centuries (Hirsch 2016, 4–6). How, one must ask, did they achieve such hyperbolic growth against overwhelming odds?

The query echoes through the annals of more recent history as well. The vibrant and undeniably powerful Chinese underground church, despite facing systematic persecution and the forced removal of all institutional reference points—no Bibles, no professional clergy, no official structures, no mass meetings—grew from an estimated 2 million to as many as 120 million in just seventy years (ibid). What hidden force propelled such an extraordinary, world-transforming movement? This

potent, self-replicating energy, the very life force and guiding mechanism of God's people, is what I call Apostolic Genius.

For too long, the discourse around global mission and church planting, particularly in the realm of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs), has often focused on specific techniques or singular elements, as if one silver bullet could solve the multifaceted challenge of reaching unreached people groups. While DMMs correctly emphasize the indispensable role of disciple making, our understanding of Apostolic Genius reveals that it is about activating a complex, systemic interplay of six irreducible components, which I call mDNA (missional DNA). It is the full constellation of these elements, each dynamically interrelated and mutually informing the others, that unlocks the true, world-changing power of movemental thinking and leads to spontaneous expansion.

So, let us delve into these six primal forces, insights which emerged in our efforts at missional revitalization in the West, reinterpreting their profound significance for those committed to reaching the very ends of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

## The Six Elements of mDNA: A Systemic Unveiling

### ***1. Jesus Is Lord: The Epistemological Ground of All Mission***

At its spiritual core, every genuine Christian movement, whether the early church under Roman persecution or the contemporary underground church in China, involves an unshakeable encounter with the One True God, and an all-pervasive consciousness of the absolute centrality of Christ. This is far more than one element among others; it is the very ground zero, the epicenter, around which all other elements of Apostolic Genius coalesce and are guided. In contexts striving to reach unreached people groups, where diverse worldviews and complex belief

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1. The content in this article is drawn largely from my book, *The Forgotten Ways* (2016), adapted here for global frontier mission practitioners.

systems prevail, the distillation of the message to its utter simplicity —"Jesus is Lord"—becomes profoundly transformative and "sneezable."<sup>2</sup>

Persecution, paradoxically, often clarifies this core message, stripping away the cumbersome theological clutter and dogmas that can inadvertently obscure the essential gospel. In these challenging environments, the faith must travel light, unburdened by unnecessary complexities, allowing the raw power of a simple Christology to rapidly transfer along relational lines, becoming easily grasped even by the illiterate. This radical realignment of every aspect of individual and collective life around Jesus, his ways and purposes, is what deposes dualism and creates a seamless experience between faith and life for new converts. For those engaging unreached peoples, this means asking, "Is what we are doing a genuine expression of the way of Jesus?" "Is our movement consistent with his person and his teaching?" "Is this how Jesus would go about incarnating the kingdom in this area?" These are critical exercises for recalibrating communal life around Him. This absolute and ongoing centrality of Jesus is the sustaining and guiding center that enables movements to negotiate massive adaptive challenges.

## ***2. Disciple Making: The Conspiracy of "Little Jesuses"***

While all mDNA elements are critical, disciple making holds a preeminent position alongside "Jesus is Lord." It is the irreplaceable and lifelong task of becoming like Jesus by embodying His message, fulfilling the destiny to be conformed to the image of Christ. Any movement that seeks to change the world operates, at its most fundamental level, as a disciple-making system, where everyone is involved at all levels of the community. The success of the Wesleyan, Franciscan, or Chinese phenomena hinged on leaders and participants who were absolutely committed to reproducing disciples.<sup>3</sup> In the context of unreached people groups, where inherited ecclesial structures are absent, disciple-making

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2. I mean by this term that the idea can spread rapidly—like a virus.

3. For instance, the Methodists were called by this name because they were so committed to discipling methodology of classes and bands. Francis invited his followers to join him on the road and experience life and mission together, etc.

cannot be reduced to an intellectual assimilation of theological ideas, which often characterizes cultural Christianity in the West. Rather, it must be the vigorous kind of discipleship that marked early Christianity, emphasizing embodiment, action, and radical commitment. The aim is to make the Christian life a "radical minimum standard" for all believers, a "normal Christian life" that is, in fact, extraordinary in its commitment.

The strategy of Jesus was to get many little versions of him infiltrating every nook and cranny of society by reproducing himself in and through his people in every place throughout the world. This is what I like to call the "conspiracy of little Jesuses." For those reaching the unreached, this means that the essence of discipleship is to become a living, breathing representation of Jesus's mission and message within the host culture. Discipleship must be forged in the everyday context of life, integrating faith into normal experiences rather than confining it to separate religious activities. Critically, mission must be a non-negotiable part of what it means to be a disciple, not an optional extra. Just as Jesus formed His disciples thoroughly around the call to mission, involving them in proclaiming the kingdom, serving, healing, and casting out demons from the start (Matt. 10:5–16), so too, new believers among unreached peoples should be engaged in mission from their very genesis. This "action-learning discipleship" fosters a profound unity between thinking and acting, ensuring that spiritual growth is intrinsically tied to participation in God's redemptive purposes.

### ***3. Missional-Incarnational Impulse: Going Out and Going Deep***

This element describes the twin movements essential for remarkable missional movements: (1) the dynamic outward thrust, and (2) the related deepening impulse. It draws its inspiration directly from the incarnation of Jesus, who "moved into the neighborhood" and lived with humanity. For unreached people groups, this means transcending the "attractational" model – where people are expected to come to the church—to embrace a "sent" or "go-to-them" approach. The early church and the Chinese church exemplify this centrifugal movement, scattering like seeds in the

wind rather than being confined to ecclesial storehouses (Hirsch 2016, chap. 6).

Incarnational mission demands deep identification and affinity with the people being reached. This includes *proximity* (physical closeness), *presence* (God in the flesh among them), *powerlessness* (servanthood and humility), and *proclamation* (sharing the gospel story). For unreached peoples, this translates to missionaries and teams living within their host communities, engaging in their daily rhythms, understanding their cultural forms, and becoming a functioning part of the existing culture while seeking to transform it. This means taking the church to people rather than bringing people to church. Key practices include:

- **Proximity and Meaningful Engagement:** Spending significant time "hanging out," building friendships, sharing meals, and engaging in shared projects with those outside the faith. This is how gospel conversations naturally unfold.
- **Proclamation as Conversation:** Recognizing that evangelism in these contexts is more conversation, less presentation; exciting curiosity through storytelling, provoking wonder, and being extraordinarily loving. It's about uncovering the God who is already present in their lives.
- **Contextualizing Community:** Allowing the natural lifestyle patterns of the host community to shape the new faith community's life and worship which ensures the gospel integrates without damaging the innate cultural framework. This requires "missionary listening" to understand the people from the inside.
- **Sending:** Continually sending out small groups from within the community to seed and embed the gospel in new contexts which ensures the inherent reproductive capacity of the church is unleashed.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. APEST Culture: The Fivefold Ministry as Movement Engine**

If missional movements are to flourish, they require a specific kind of leadership and ministry. I am totally convinced that there has never been

a genuine missional movement with exponential growth and transformational impact that did not have APEST ministry—it does not happen. APEST refers to the active presence of apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding (pastoral), and teaching functions, as delineated in Ephesians 4. As can be seen from just the terms associated here, all the functions of ministry are contained in the five. For this reason, in order to be a genuine apostolic movement, we will need both generative (APE) and operative (ST) forms of ministry. These are functions of the Body of Christ and not titles or “offices” (a word that never appears in Scripture). Essentially,

- Apostles pioneer and extend.
- Prophets listen and speak truth.
- Evangelists proclaim and gather.
- Shepherds nurture and heal.
- Teachers ground and guide.

While all five are essential, the apostolic is uniquely catalytic and often the most excluded or delegitimized in institutional settings. It is the “sent one” responsible for designing and leading the “sentness” of the church, pioneering new ground for the gospel, and safeguarding its DNA across time and distance.<sup>5</sup>

For those working among unreached peoples, understanding APEST is vital. Traditional structures, often weighted towards pastor-teacher modes, sideline the very ministries (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic) needed for pioneering and extension. The adaptive challenge of reaching new cultures demands pioneering, innovative leadership. Apostolic leaders, like the Chinese underground church leaders, often operate without formal titles or centralized institutions, wielding authority rooted in calling, character, suffering, and spiritual influence, rather than

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4. Please note these bullet point summaries here and in the rest of the article summarize material I previously wrote about in *The Forgotten Ways*.

5. See for example, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation* by Don Dent (2019), previously [reviewed](#) in *Seedbed* (Jackson 2022).

positional power.<sup>6</sup> Their task is to embed “mDNA” and ensure the new churches “do not mutate into something other than God intended them to be.”<sup>7</sup> A fully functioning APEST system provides a ministry ecology that makes it hard not to be missional. This means empowering all believers to discover and use their gifts, recognizing that every participant in the Jesus movement is a player, someone who can change the world.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Organic Systems: From Monument to Movement

Movements tend to organize very differently to the prevailing forms of organization and leadership. Standard structure tends to centralize power and function and lead from a hierarchical structure. Movements decentralize power and function so that the edges are productive. Remarkable Jesus movements have the feel (vibe) of a movement, the structure of an organic network, and spread like viruses. This element emphasizes moving beyond rigid, mechanistic institutional structures, which often become “movement killers,” to embrace decentralized, reproducible, and adaptable forms of organization that support life and multiplication. In unreached contexts, where external resources are scarce, simplicity is a vital key to multiplication and spontaneous expansion. The complex attractional approaches that demand professional ministry and extensive resources have a contraceptive effect on the church's reproductive capacities.

Instead, movements should focus on the following:

- Movement Ethos: Changing how we think about the church – as a “sneeze-like” movement of disciples, and not a centralized organization.

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6. Cf. my book with Tim Catchim (2012), *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*.

7. Hirsch 2016, 193.

8. For more on APEST in unreached ministry contexts, see the *Seedbed* article, *Sustaining Healthy Churches in Movements: Leveraging the Five Roles of Ephesians 4 for Multiplying Leaders in CPMs* (Lafferty 2023).

- **Organic Structure:** Building around networks of meaningful relationships, where power and responsibility are diffused, and decisions are made by key stakeholders.
- **Virus-like Growth (Simplexity):** Distilling the gospel and the church's ethos to their core, making them "simple to get, simple to spread." This is about unleashing the "ideavirus" of the gospel through relational networks.
- **Multiplication Ethos:** Consciously embedding a "go forth and multiply" commitment into the community's fabric from the beginning, encouraging every person to be a "church planter" and every church a "church-planting church." This "pay-it-forward" principle is how movements achieve hyperbolic growth.

## ***6. Liminality-Communitas: Forged in the Crucible of Shared Ordeal***

The deepest forms of human connection and solidarity, what some call "communitas," emerge in the context of shared ordeal, danger, or an overwhelming task. This is intrinsically linked to liminality, a state of marginality, disorientation, or risk. The early church and the Chinese underground church, forged in persecution and on the fringes of society, exemplify this profound bond. For those reaching unreached people groups, this is not a theoretical concept, but a lived reality. The challenges of cross-cultural engagement, potential hostility, and breaking new ground inherently create conditions of liminality, which, when embraced, foster deep communitas.

This element means:

- **Daring Vision:** Cultivating a daring vision that propels the community out of their comfort zone and into a "risky journey." For unreached contexts, this is the vision of the kingdom infiltrating new territories, confronting the status quo, and challenging deeply ingrained cultural norms.
- **Positioning in the Hub of Life:** Rejecting sacred-secular dualism and intentionally locating the faith community "in the midst of life," where people gather and interact naturally (e.g., marketplaces, homes,

“third places”). This deliberate immersion fosters authentic engagement and *communitas*.

- **Embracing Shared Ordeal:** Actively engaging in joint community projects that bring believers and non-believers together, shoulder-to-shoulder, in meaningful endeavors. The common struggle or purpose creates profound camaraderie.
- **Taking Risks and Experimenting:** Fostering a culture of experimentation and risk-taking, recognizing that without risk, it is highly unlikely that there will be any missional movement at all. This pioneering spirit, born from confronting the adaptive challenges of the unreached world, is the birthplace of deep togetherness and new encounters with God.

## Beyond Disciple-Making Movement Methodology: The Full Tapestry of Apostolic Jesus Movements

While Disciple-Making Movements are a vital and absolutely indispensable part of God's global mission, focusing solely on them can inadvertently obscure the full power of Apostolic Genius. DMMs brilliantly emphasize the multiplication of disciples, which aligns directly with the "Disciple Making" mDNA and the "Organic Systems" (reproducibility) mDNA. However, a fully-fledged apostolic movement, capable of the hyperbolic growth and transformational impact witnessed in the early church and China, requires all six mDNA elements to be present and in dynamic synergy.

The distinction lies in understanding the system as a whole. Disciple making, while necessary, is not sufficient on its own to produce a movement. It must be deeply rooted in the lordship of Jesus, propelled by a missional-incarnational impulse that actively embeds the gospel into new cultures, guided by a comprehensive APEST culture that ensures holistic leadership and activation of all gifts, organized through organic systems that facilitate decentralized, viral multiplication, and forged in the crucible of liminality-*communitas* that builds profound relational bonds through shared mission and adversity. When all these elements

"cook" together, informed by the pervasive work of the Holy Spirit, something fundamentally different is activated: a truly authentic, world-transforming apostolic movement is born.

For those called to reach unreached people groups, this means embracing a broader, more integrated understanding of movement. It's not just about forming disciples, but about forming disciples who are "Little Jesuses", imbued with a missional-incarnational impulse, empowered by the full APEST gifting, operating within organic, reproducible systems, and bound together in *communitas* forged by the very challenges of their frontier mission. The insights we have gleaned in "missions to the West" that energizes the missional movement in that context—the need to break from outmoded paradigms, to understand cultural distance (m0–4 scale),<sup>9</sup> and to adopt adaptive leadership—are universally applicable to any challenging missional frontier.

The hope of the church in this critical century, and especially for the vast regions of the unreached, rests not in re-applying tired formulas or isolated techniques, but in remembering and reactivating the Apostolic Genius that lies latent within God's people. It is a call to recalibrate our entire approach, to move beyond merely adding to the church's numbers, to unleash the exponential, viral power of a fully integrated, Spirit-empowered movement that will truly transform the world in Jesus's name. The path ahead is one of adventure and risk, but it is the path of our Founder, and the destiny of God's people.

## Questions for Conversation

1. Do you agree that our existing mission and church organizations are shaped by outdated assumptions? What aspects do you think need to be re-evaluated?
2. In a church-planting ministry, what would be the difference between applying a new methodology and applying the six mDNA elements?

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9. This is similar to Ralph Winter's E1-E3 scale which distinguishes various levels of cultural distance in evangelism. The "m" in my scale stands for missionary / missional encounter.

3. Which of the six mDNA elements do you see in your ministry or church? What elements are missing?

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# Should We “Reactivate the Church as Movement”? Three Leaders Engage with the Motus Dei Statement


By Yassir Eric, Holy John, Jonathan Kim, and “Reactivating the Church as Movement” authors

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*The principal authors of “Reactivating the Church as Movement” were Dave Coles, Michael Cooper, David Garrison, Evelyn Hibbert, Alan Hirsch, Victor John, Tim Martin, Aila Tasse, and Wes Watkins. Their bios, as well as an explanation of the process followed for discussing and editing the statement, are found in the statement’s [Companion Guide](#).*



**Editorial note:** During the MQ (Movement Intelligence) Symposium in May 2025, the Motus Dei Network facilitated discussions about a working

draft of a theological statement for movement ecclesiology.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to the conference, final edits were made and the statement was published on the *Motus Dei* website, entitled, “*Reactivating the Church as Movement*.” As the statement is addressed to the global church, Seedbed invited missionally-engaged theologians from different parts of the church to respond to the statement reflecting on two questions:

- What value do you find in “*Reactivating the Church as Movement*” for the churches and ministries you represent as they engage in mission?
- From your own perspective and experience, what insights would you add to further clarify, correct, or enhance any part of the “*Reactivating the Church as Movement*”?

For the benefit of our readers, we have reproduced (with permission) the full *Motus Dei* statement below, followed by three responses from a Sudanese bishop-theologian from a Muslim background, a mission leader from the Chinese house-church movement, and a Korean-Canadian missionary-pastor-theologian.

## Statement: Reactivating the Church as Movement

*Principal Authors: Dave Coles, Michael Cooper, David Garrison, Evelyn Hibbert, Alan Hirsch, Victor John, Tim Martin, Aila Tasse, and Wes Watkins*<sup>2</sup>

### Preamble

Over the course of its 2,000-year history, the church has continued Christ’s ministry on earth while adopting structures and organizations to fulfill its mission. Yet today, we find ourselves at a critical threshold—an extraordinary challenge to transcend inherited frameworks as we continue to pursue God’s will for this generation.

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1. *Seedbed* editors S.T. Antonio and M. Johnson attended the conference and contributed feedback to earlier drafts of the statement.

2. Originally published in July 2025 on the *Motus Dei* website at <https://www.motusdei.network/reactivating-the-church/>.

In this era of upheaval and possibility, the church must embody a more dynamic, adaptive, and mission-shaped expression. These circumstances invite us to rediscover the movemental ecclesiology of the early church—a way of being that thrives in the margins, makes vibrant disciples, multiplies churches, meets persecution with faithful resilience, and effects deep societal transformation. This is a recovery of the church’s essential movemental DNA, a call to live boldly in Spirit-led advance.

We long to see all God’s people making disciples and bringing lost people to saving knowledge of Christ, toward the vision of God’s glory filling the whole earth. We invite the global body of Christ into this grand adventure—a journey of creativity and courage, driven by the Spirit, to fulfill our divine purpose as instruments of God’s kingdom.

## ***Core Affirmations***

### **1. The Centrality of Jesus Christ**

As the eternal Word who perfectly reveals God, Jesus himself animates the heart of all initiatives that faithfully bear his name. His life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, reign, and promised return form the cornerstone upon which all missional identity is built. In following Jesus, the head of the church, we are inspired by his exemplary humanity, sacrificial love, redeeming death, and humble obedience to the Father—a divine model for how we approach life and work. We embrace the Father’s sovereign plan in sending the Son, acknowledging the essential role of the Holy Spirit who empowers and sustains every aspect of our Christian journey. Through this Trinitarian vision, we commit to ensuring that Jesus remains central in movements, guiding us toward genuine transformation and kingdom advancement.

(John 1:18; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:1–3)

## **2. Scripture as the Foundation**

We affirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible as our basis for faith and life. Scripture is the living curriculum that shapes our fellowship and directs our mission. We also affirm historic biblical confessions of the faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Lausanne Covenant.

(2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 4:12)

## **3. God is the Author of Movements**

God is the true author of every movement of disciples and churches. The Holy Spirit is always at work, calling all people to embody the ways, works, and words of Jesus. The lifeblood of movements is the active presence of God transforming, empowering, and expanding his kingdom in the hearts of people and communities. This is frequently accompanied by transformed lives, answered prayers, dreams, visions, and demonstrations of God's power. At the same time, human agents partner with the movement of the Spirit through faithful obedience to the teachings of Scripture embodied and passed on by ordinary believers. Our role is to faithfully align with Christ and his Word as we pray, plant, and water the seeds that God can grow into a movement.

(Matt. 16:18; Luke 10:1–11; Acts 2:1–18, 40–47; 1 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:1)

## **4. Disciples Making Disciples**

A disciple follows the ways, words, and works of Jesus to become more like him in all areas of life. We are called not only to be disciples of Jesus ourselves, but also to the ongoing task of disciple-making. Jesus intends every follower of his to live as a reproducing disciple. At the heart of movements is the multiplication of disciples who make disciples who make disciples, resulting in churches that reproduce churches.

(Matt. 4:18–22; John 15:1–17; 2 Tim. 2:1–2; James 1:22–25)

## 5. Healthy Multiplication

Growth, fruitfulness, and reproduction are a natural part of God's creation and lie at the heart of his design for a maturing church. Within every seed is the potential for a tree, and within every tree, the potential for an entire forest. In the same way, God has created every disciple and church with the spiritual potential to reproduce fruitful, maturing disciples and churches. Spirit-empowered movements are characterized by ongoing multiplication of: 1) disciples, 2) churches, 3) leaders, and 4) movements themselves.

(Gen. 1:28; Mark 4:26–32; 1 Cor. 3:5–9; 1 Thess. 1:7–8)

## 6. Generative Ecclesiology

We affirm the intrinsic value of all types of churches, but also recognize the need to move beyond the limitations of pastor-centric, attractional ecclesiology found in much of the Christian tradition. We invite the church to adopt a movemental ecclesiology that releases and empowers every disciple, male and female, regardless of race, ethnic background, age, economic, political, or social status, believing in the potential of all believers (the priesthood of all believers) to play an active role in the church's mission. As a spiritual family, the church should not simply grow larger, but reproduce generationally. Movemental churches are adaptable, thrive under adverse conditions, and equip all disciples through the biblical framework of Eph. 4:11. Here we affirm the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic functions (to initiate and expand) alongside that of the pastoral and teaching functions (to nurture and sustain).

(Acts 13:1–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–14; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:11–13; 1 Pet. 2:9–10)

## 7. Integrating *Motus Dei* with *Missio Dei*

God is multiplying movements of multiplying disciples and churches across the globe. This is *motus Dei*—the movement of God to disciple the nations. *Motus Dei* stresses the dynamic, generative nature of God's redemptive work in the world. It adds to the concept of *missio Dei* by

highlighting disciple multiplication amid all that God does to achieve his purposes. As *missio Dei* invites Christians to participate in God's mission, *motus Dei* invites them to join in his movement to redeem people from every tribe, people, nation, and language on earth.

(Matt. 28:19; John 20:21; Rev. 7:9–10)

## **8. Principled Incarnational Engagement**

Just as Jesus incarnated God's saving presence among us, we too must strive to see the gospel embodied in diverse contexts. This demands not only the continuing contextualization of the gospel message, but also the contextualizing of the church itself in ways faithful to Scripture. Ecclesial forms developed within specific cultural contexts should not simply be imposed on other contexts. Instead, we must create space for the kind of ecclesial innovation that arises from incarnational mission—allowing an indigenous church to take root and flourish in every culture. We affirm that it is underlying biblical and social principles—expressed in a variety of missional methods—that foster kingdom reproduction. In the New Testament, essential elements of church were adapted and reproduced by authentic and dedicated disciples. For this to occur, movements often simplify in order to multiply—nurturing appropriate structures and practices to empower and mobilize every believer for mission and disciple-making.

(1 Cor. 9:19–23; Phil. 2:5–11)

## **9. Church as a Living Network**

Movements are extended families of disciples and churches, characterized by the Holy Spirit empowering ordinary people to provide a variety of servant leadership roles. Authority is distributed across the network according to roles and responsibility, not in a positional hierarchy like worldly institutions. Movemental progress advances through networks and collaborations that share resources, knowledge, and support, fostering mutual accountability and collective impact.

(Matt. 20:25–28; Acts 2:46–47; Eph. 2:13–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–5, 9–10; 5:1–5)

## **10. Holistic Mission**

The movement of God encompasses both spiritual and social dimensions. Movements address the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs of individuals and communities, embodying the holistic ethos of Jesus. As disciples obey everything Jesus commands, their communities, societies, and nations are transformed.

(Mark 1:32–39; Luke 4:16–19; Acts 2:42–47, 6:1–8)

## **11. Unity and Partnership**

All churches are vital members of God’s family having unique contributions to God’s global mission. Movemental ecclesiology does not reject other ecclesiological models, but seeks to complement them and extend kingdom impact. As diverse expressions with one spirit, we have the potential to accelerate and deepen disciple-making and kingdom transformation among every people and nation. This includes places where the church is flourishing, has previously flourished, and where it has not yet been.

(John 17:20–23; 1 Cor. 12:12–13; Philem. 6)

## **12. Prayer, Fasting, and Perseverance in Suffering**

Movements are fueled through abundant prayer, fasting, and faithful perseverance in suffering. Prayer connects us to God’s heart and keeps us aligned with his will. Fasting sharpens our focus on Him. Suffering strengthens our faith and dependence on the Holy Spirit. These practices help shape the church to reflect Jesus and move forward with humility and fruitfulness.

(Luke 4:1–14, 6:12–19; Acts 4:23–31; Col. 1:24, 4:2–6)

## Conclusion

As we seek to deepen the global church's understanding and practice of motus Dei through movemental ecclesiology, we commit to healthy multiplication under Christ's lordship. We remain rooted in the Bible and follow the Holy Spirit's guidance, recognizing and relying on his work among us. We invite all believers to join this movement journey as we strive to make disciples of all nations, transforming lives and communities for the glory of God.

## Response to "Reactivating the Church as Movement"

*By Yassir Eric*

*Bishop Dr. Yassir Eric is an Anglican bishop, theologian, and missiologist, serving as the Presiding Bishop of the Diocese of Ekkios.*

As a bishop and theologian born and raised in the Middle East, serving the global community of believers in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, "Reactivating the Church as a Movement" provides a timely and significant contribution to contemporary ecclesiological and missiological discussions. Its main argument, that the church needs to rediscover a more dynamic, adaptable, and movement-oriented way of life and mission, is especially vital in contexts where Christian communities lack cultural privilege, institutional security, or a public presence. Often, the church thrives not through formal structures but through prayer, scriptural formation, relational discipleship, costly obedience, and Christ embodying himself in everyday people. Therefore, the call to restore the movement character of the church is both compelling and highly relevant. Any renewal of movement-based ecclesiology must be deeply rooted in theological understanding, ecclesial accountability, and the full worshiping life of the church.

A particularly strong point of the statement is its focus on Jesus Christ as the foundation. This emphasis is crucial in ministry to believers

in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, where Christianity might be viewed as a foreign religion, cultural identity, or civilizational heritage. The main concern is not assimilation into “Christian culture,” but experiencing the living Christ. By grounding the church’s identity in the person and work of Jesus Christ—his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, exaltation, and promised return—the statement creates a Christ-centered foundation for mission.

Related to this Christological emphasis is the affirmation of Scripture as the foundation for faith and practice. This is especially significant where most believers lack formal theological training and where ecclesial entities emerge in relational and sometimes unstable environments. Scripture is not just doctrinal authority; it is the living curriculum of the church. It makes disciples, nurtures families, trains leaders, and guides communities toward faithful obedience. Scriptural rootedness is critically essential for spiritual resilience.

Another strength of the document is its affirmation that God himself is the true author of movements. This safeguards against manipulative techniques, managerial reductionism, and triumphalist understandings of mission. It reminds the church that genuine spiritual awakening cannot be manufactured; such work is the prerogative of the divine Spirit. Therefore, any movement rooted in divine action always points people toward Jesus and remains faithful to God’s revealed word.

The focus on disciples making disciples is equally important. In many contexts involving believers in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, the church cannot rely solely on ordained clergy, institutional structures, or public programs. Believers might live scattered, marginalized lives and have limited opportunities to meet publicly. In these cases, every disciple should be prepared to engage in witness, prayer, teaching, and pastoral care. The document rightly challenges pastor-centered models that limit the missionary role of God’s people. In many contexts, passing on the faith occurs within families and social networks where women play a vital role, acknowledging that both men and women need to have the power to participate in God’s mission.

The statement's generative ecclesiology is transformative. In many Middle Eastern and similar contexts, the church is birthed not as an institution, but as a Spirit-led family gathered around Scripture, prayer, hospitality, and mutual care. These simple practices are not provisional or inferior; they form the ecclesial foundation where faith is cultivated and passed on amid pressure. The focus on generational continuity rather than numerical enlargement points to an ecclesiology that is strong, replicable, and adaptable while staying true to biblical identity.

The document's emphasis on incarnational engagement is also important. The church should be contextualized in ways that stay true to Scripture. For believers in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, this means the gospel can take root without the need for life to be shaped by foreign models, while still connecting with local languages, relational patterns, and social realities. Indigenous expression is an integral part of faithful incarnation.

It is commendable in the way it treats the church as a living network of Christ's body and discusses holistic mission, unity, prayer, fasting, and perseverance in suffering. In communities characterized by dispersion, vulnerability, or social fragmentation, networked fellowship is indispensable for theological support, mutual encouragement, and practical care. A biblical mission must be holistic, addressing the whole person and community. Prayer and fasting are essential disciplines of dependence, and suffering is a typical part of discipleship.

At the same time, there are several areas where the document could benefit from clarification and improvement. First, it should more clearly state that movement is not a rejection of the historic church. In the Middle East, ancient churches have preserved the confession of Christ through centuries of marginalization and adversity. Their inherited doctrine, liturgy, and public witness are timelessly valuable. What we need then is not replacement but renewal—not contempt for historic forms, but their reactivation for missionary faithfulness. Movement without memory can become shallow, just as an institution without a mission can stagnate.

Second, the declaration should also emphasize theological and sacramental depth along with multiplication. The early church was catechetical, pastoral, sacramental, and morally serious. The faithful need not only reproduction but also formation in truth and holiness, repentance and baptism, the Lord's table, and theological maturity.

Third, the document could also spell out the communal costs of discipleship. For many believers in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, following Jesus means losing family trust, social honor, economic security, and physical safety. In these contexts, the church must genuinely be a family of belonging, care, and protection.

Fourth, contextualization requires clear theological boundaries. Not every adaptation remains faithful. The church must stay loyal to Christ, submitted to Scripture, and be committed to baptism, worship, holiness, and discipleship. Networks lacking proven leadership, sound theology, and mutual accountability can collapse or be misused. Similarly, while recognizing dreams, visions, and demonstrations of divine power is pastorally appropriate, the statement should more clearly address the importance of discernment regarding these.

Finally, the concept of *motus Dei* is valuable because it highlights the dynamic and multiplying nature of God's work, but it should not be framed in a way that limits the church's imagination to visible expansion alone. There are times when faithfulness appears as endurance, hidden witness, reconciliation, trauma healing, and caring for displaced and wounded communities—ministries that are not secondary but essential to God's mission.

"Reactivating the Church as a Movement" offers a timely vision for restoring the church's missionary life. Its strengths include its Christocentric focus, grounding in Scripture, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and a call to mobilize all believers in disciple-making missions. For believers in Christ from Muslim backgrounds, these themes are both pastorally and missiologically urgent. A successful movemental

ecclesiology requires integration with the theological, pastoral, sacramental, and communal aspects of the church.

## Response to “Reactivating the Church as Movement”

By Holy John (铭贤)

*Holy John (pen name) is a cross-cultural missionary, mission researcher, and Christian publications worker. The following is an English translation from Mandarin, translated with Microsoft Translator (accessed in Microsoft Word on February 22, 2026) and checked and corrected by Jeanne Wu.*

In July 2025, the Motus Dei Network published the statement “Reactivating the Church as Movement” (hereinafter referred to as “the statement”). The beliefs, theological positions, missionary views, and theories presented in the statement are all evangelical. It can be seen as a concentrated presentation of the key core contents emphasized by previous Lausanne Movement conferences with a practical, in-depth interpretation. The nine authors of the statement are all missionary scholars, many of whom are senior practitioners with experience in Muslim ministry. Therefore, the statement offers appropriate and effective empirical strategies and guidelines for Muslim ministry.

The Chinese church agrees with the concept of motus Dei (God's movement); however, from the perspective of Chinese culture, there are also some concerns. Due to the historical phenomena of political struggle and persecution movements in China, the Chinese church tries to avoid using terms like “movement” to prevent confusion with these other movements. In addition, the Chinese church must always be vigilant against missionary movements that are merely superficial, relying only on slogans, forms, and inaction.

Motus Dei (God's movement) is built upon the belief of missio Dei (God's mission) and as a purpose-oriented effort “highlights motion—the Spirit continually propels the gospel outward, multiplying fresh

expressions of church in ways that remain biblical, responsive, and rooted in love.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the proposal of this concept not only enriches the theory of mission theology but also pays greater attention to the specific practice of mission. This is the essential understanding and interpretation of the mission movement.

The concept of “movement ecclesiology” proposed in the statement can prompt the Chinese church to think more deeply about and practice the concept and theory of the “mission-oriented church.” It can also help the Chinese church to increasingly return to the Bible, to the early church, and to the general mobilization of the church, thus returning to the model of disciples multiplying disciples and expanding the kingdom of God.

“Movement ecclesiology” emphasizes that everyone is a priest and empowers every disciple to commit to missions. The discipleship strategy is the focus of the statement and is also a missionary strategy valued by both the Chinese and global mission movements. However, many of God’s people have a somewhat simple and superficial understanding of discipleship. It is difficult to multiply disciples without first becoming disciples of Jesus Christ and paying the price of discipleship. If a mission movement moves directly from mobilization to deployment, assuming it can achieve the effect of multiplying disciples while ignoring the characteristics of disciples, the commitment to mission, and the price to be paid—as well as the many components of the mission mechanism, such as training, supervision, care, and systematic support—it cannot multiply discipleship effectively. Insufficient discipleship training, a lack of rigor in the selection process, and the resulting uneven quality of assignees are the main reasons for the instability and even unsustainability of a mission movement.

Multiplying disciples is not an arithmetic problem, and there is no shortcut. Each of God’s people must first become a disciple in order to multiply disciples, transform communities, and renew the world to fulfill

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3. See “A Theological Vision for Movements” in the statement “Reactivating the Church as Movement”.

the gospel mission. Disciples should exhibit the characteristics of a mature and well-developed life, a solid foundation of faith, patience and perseverance in suffering, and a clear understanding of the gospel mission and responsibility. They should be followers, learners, imitators, missionaries, contributors, and faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Only in this way can the goal of making disciples of all nations be accomplished.

The statement declares: "A disciple follows the ways, words, and works of Jesus to become more like him in all areas of life" (affirmation four, "Disciples Multiply Disciples"). Farah and Hirsch explain further elsewhere, "As each believer sacrificially serves in a dynamic disciple-making movement ethos within a micro-church network, the potential for church multiplication is increased" (Farah and Hirsch 2021). Warrick Farah, founder and coordinator of the Motus Dei Network, explains this further from a missiology perspective in his book, *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations*. He draws on the Discipleship Movement (DMM) in Asia and Africa, and testimonies among the northern global diaspora. We hope that the Motus Dei Network will provide more experience and in-depth guidance in mission studies related to discipleship and multiplication.

I have written previously how the mission movement is a systematic church-group ministry initiated, promoted, managed, and guided by the triune God himself.<sup>4</sup> It should possess characteristics such as organization, scale, persistence, continuity, practicality, and effectiveness. Furthermore, it should be defined by vision support, a solid theoretical foundation, clear goals, appropriate training, lasting commitment, in-depth practice, demonstrable results, and enduring inheritance.

The Chinese church mission movement also needs to attach great importance to its weak mission research component, which is the main ministry focus of the Motus Dei Network. Chinese churches must learn from the Motus Dei Network and deepen their mission research ministry

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4. Ming Xian 2022, 3.

to elevate the research standards of the Chinese church mission movement. Finally, the Chinese church mission movement needs to align with and cooperate with the global mission movement to advance the gospel with one heart (Phil. 1:5).

## Engaging the Motus Dei Statement: A Pastoral and Missiological Response

*By Jonathan Kim*

*Jonathan Kim has served as Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School since 2021.*

The “Reactivating the Church as Movement” statement by the Motus Dei Network arrives at a critical moment in global Christianity. As pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders navigate what sociologists are calling “the great de-churching,” we are in pressing need of frameworks that help us reimagine the church not as an institution to be maintained but as a movement to be unleashed. This response engages it from both theological reflection and grassroots ministry practice.

### ***What the Statement Gets Right***

The statement’s most significant contribution is its invitation to a genuinely fresh conversation about ecclesiology. Practitioners across diverse contexts—from the urban West wrestling with post-Christian disillusionment to the Global South navigating rapid church multiplication—are asking the same fundamental question: “*Why does the church exist?*” Rather than repackaging familiar vocabulary, it challenges us to interrogate assumptions embedded in our traditional ecclesial structures. In a ministry landscape where the attractional model is struggling to retain, let alone multiply, disciples, this is not academic housekeeping—it is pastoral and missiological urgency.

The framework of “Generative Ecclesiology” (affirmation six) is particularly valuable for the churches and ministries I represent. By naming the limitations of pastor-centric, attractional models and calling

for the release of all believers—regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social standing—into active missional participation, the statement provides theological grounding for something many practitioners have long sensed but struggled to articulate. The language of “movemental ecclesiology” gives leaders a handle for reshaping structures that have inadvertently concentrated mission in the hands of the few.

Equally significant is the statement’s potential to reframe global mission partnership. For too long, the Western church has functioned as the de facto provider of theological frameworks, personnel, and financial resources—sometimes with the best of intentions but often creating dependency rather than indigenous movement. The document’s insistence on principled incarnational engagement and respect for local cultural contexts (affirmation eight) implicitly challenges this asymmetry. If taken seriously by practitioners in both sending and receiving contexts, this could catalyze mutually accountable, locally rooted partnerships that sustain long-term movement growth—a genuine shift from Western-led strategy to collaborative mission.

### ***Insights to Clarify, Correct, and Enhance***

While the statement offers much to commend, several areas invite deeper development.

#### ***1. The Absence of Love as a Governing Motif.***

Perhaps the most striking omission in the statement is its lack of attention to the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–34). The document is admirably robust in its articulation of the Great Commission, but commission without commandment produces workers rather than worshippers. Followers of Christ are not primarily instruments or agents of movement—they are children of God called first to love. Without a robust theology of love as the animating energy of mission and ecclesiology, we risk constructing a disciple-making enterprise that, however efficient, lacks the relational warmth and sacrificial character that drew people to Jesus. A future iteration would

benefit from grounding its vision in the love of God poured out through his people (Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:19), making love not a footnote but the foundation.

## **2. The Task Orientation of Disciple Making.**

Affirmation four rightly centers disciple-making multiplication as the heartbeat of the movement. Yet there is a risk that “disciples making disciples” becomes, in practice, a replication of activity rather than formation of character. The statement would be strengthened by more explicit attention to the *quality* of discipleship—the progressive transformation of believers into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). What does it mean *to become more like Jesus* in the process of making disciples? Without intentional attention to Christlikeness, multiplication can accelerate the spread of shallow faith while leaving the deeper work of sanctification unaddressed.

## **3. Clarifying the Distinctives of Motus Dei.**

The companion guide helpfully notes that *motus Dei* emphasizes “motion” and “disciple multiplication” alongside *missio Dei*’s emphasis on “purpose.” However, this distinction remains underdeveloped in the core affirmations themselves. Practitioners in theological education and cross-cultural mission will benefit from a clearer articulation of how *motus Dei* offers a genuinely distinct contribution—not simply *missio Dei* restated with a multiplication emphasis. Is disciple multiplication already embedded within *missio Dei*, or does *motus Dei* represent a meaningfully new theological category? Sharpening this conceptual boundary will strengthen the statement’s credibility in missiological discourse.

## **4. Expanding Holistic Mission to Include Mental Health.**

Affirmation ten admirably addresses the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social dimensions of mission. However, “emotional” health represents only one facet of what we might more comprehensively name as *mental* health. In an era of global mental health crisis—including among missionaries and ministry workers themselves—a statement on

holistic mission would be well served by explicit acknowledgment of mental well-being as an integral dimension of the church's care for people.

### **5. Toward an Eschatological Horizon.**

Finally, the statement would be enriched by a clearer eschatological direction. The concluding vision points toward the glory of God, but the connection to the consummation of God's kingdom—the gathering of the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, and nation before the throne (Rev. 7:9–10)—could be made far more explicit. Movement is not only about expansion; it is about destination. Where is *motus Dei* ultimately heading? Grounding the statement in this horizon would give the movement a *telos* worthy of its ambitions, framing our mission as anticipatory participation in God's final redemptive purposes.

### **Conclusion**

The "Reactivating the Church as Movement" statement is a timely and theologically substantive contribution to contemporary missiology. Its greatest strength lies in its invitation to reimagine ecclesiology around multiplication, indigenous partnership, and the empowerment of all believers. Its development will be served by centering love as the governing motif, attending more deeply to character formation, sharpening the *motus Dei/missio Dei* distinction, and anchoring the enterprise in its eschatological destination. May those engaged in pastoral ministry, cross-cultural mission, and kingdom-oriented work find in this statement both inspiration and a holy provocation—toward faithful, multiplying, love-driven participation in the movement of God.

## **Questions for Conversation**

1. What ecclesiological assumptions about the church are most influential in your current context among local and/or foreign Christians? How do these assumptions help or hinder the mission of the church in your context?

2. What in the “Reactivating the Church as Movement” statement do you find most significant or helpful? What do you find most significant or helpful in the three reflective responses?
3. What insights, questions, or pushback would you add from your own perspective to this conversation? What insights or questions might be added by local and/or foreign Christians in your context?

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# An Inside Look at Leading a Movement: Q&A with Two Leaders of Transformational Networks in South Asia and East Africa

By Aila Tasse and Chendan Sah

*Dr. Aila Tasse, a Muslim background believer, was born in Kenya. He is the Founder and President of Lifeway Global ([lifewayglobal.org](http://lifewayglobal.org)), and the Regional Director for New Generations in East/Southern Africa. Aila leads Disciple Making Movement (DMM) training around the world and gives much of his time to mentoring and coaching DMM leaders, especially in the 21 countries of East, Horn, and Southern African. He is married to Tiru and has two sons and a daughter. He has an M.A. in Missiology and a Th.M. in Leadership from Presbyterian University (PUCTS) in Seoul, Korea, and a Doctorate in Transformational Leadership (DTL) from Bakke Graduate University in Dallas, Texas.*

*Chendan, a Hindu-background follower of Jesus, makes disciples and leads a multiplying network of indigenous leaders and churches in South Asia.*



**Editorial Note:** *Chendan and Aila each lead a family of multiplying networks in South Asia and East Africa, respectively. At the MQ (Movement Intelligence) Symposium in May 2025, they led a session in which they told their story and fielded a wide range of questions about how they navigate the dynamics of leadership, structure, power distance, spiritual vitality, and sustainability in their expanding networks of churches. The following has been edited for length and clarity.*

**Chendan:** In 2009, my wife and I had an opportunity to start a church planting ministry. We had two options: start an organization on our own and hire people to plant churches, or start a network where we don't hire people but collaborate with like-minded people to learn together and plant churches. Because there are so many things happening already, we started a collaboration with twenty leaders. In the initial years, we began

to learn about multiplication strategy and start home churches. In those years, Brother Victor John was our guru to learn from and collaborate with; his group gave us a platform to share our vision and learn together.

In seven years, we were amazed to see around 3,000 home churches started in one state. DMM helped us, but also our collaborative nature made leaders happy to work with us. We were then working with eighty-five leaders, each representing an indigenous local organization.

On 31 December 2016, I was praying about where God would lead us next. The Lord revealed to us that just as many dissatisfied leaders in one state were willing to collaborate, there were leaders in every state of our country that wanted to come together, learn together, and launch movements. We began to explore that opportunity by starting to collaborate with leaders in two additional states and in a country across the border. We began to train them with “Integrated Disciple Making Movement” (IDMM). Within a few years, we saw another movement started in one of these states, where one leader who started with one church now had over 1,500. He started a network of people in his language group with over fifty different ministry organizations collaborating.

Our work has since spread to several more states and two other countries through collaboration—a network of networks involving over 600 ministry organizations. These are locally led ministry organizations who collaborate and whom we train and coach with IDMM. Some are among difficult people and places, including middle-caste and high-caste Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.

**Aila:** I started with a small church plant in an Islamic context on the border of Kenya and Ethiopia, planting churches and engaging the fourteen unreached people groups in my county. After spending some time in Ethiopia and seeing a movement there, I returned to Kenya in 2008 and started praying, “God, I want to see this kind of movement happen.” I prayed for three months.

I was invited to western Kenya to train. In the first training session, early in the morning, there were people there in the room, and I felt the Holy Spirit telling me, "Go and speak to those guys." God had prepared them, and they are the leaders who have been journeying with me for the last fifteen years, representing most of the eight countries of East Africa.

At the beginning it wasn't a movement; it was just a mission organization. But the goal and call was to plant churches among unreached people groups. As I started learning about "movements," I realized that movements are a different thing, and I struggled with that. Even though we were part of an organization trying to catalyze a movement, we were always looking at the movement through the eyes of an organization. There's the aspect of "*my thing*"—wanting to have "our thing" and our name on it. It should look like us, and its product is "mine." This was a big struggle for me, because whenever we trained people, people wanted to know whether this is "your thing" or "our thing."

When I would start working in a country, after a few months, God would do something. I would hear a report, then I would follow up to go and see what was happening. It came to a point where it was growing through ordinary people, the network was growing, but they didn't have any platform. In most of these countries, because of wars, the believers were not allowed to meet even in a house to have a church, and so they needed to be legally registered. This new thing that they were experiencing was different from the experience they had in the past in the church. When I started going to these countries and building the team, casting the vision with them, mapping the country to areas that are not engaged or people groups that were not engaged, they would always think that I was there to start [a branch of] my organization. That's always the question they would eventually ask: "Can we register Lifeway?" And I said, "No." They were a bit surprised because that's always the tendency. We go to a place and then register our own thing, to put our own names

on it. To have our own identity, to do our own things, for us. The outcome is ours.

I was learning that humanly speaking, there is always the temptation for that. That's what we had experienced. I was a leader of an organization somewhere else, and that's what I had been doing. And as I kept on thinking about movement, I realized it had to *move away from me* and not keep coming back to me, to always carry the DNA *away* and to do what it intends to do—and that's making disciples for Jesus.

With that mindset, when I came to these other countries, we started registering indigenous ministries. We call it a platform where they can come together and be a family, because it's also a legal requirement for the government, so that they can advance the movement in their country while being part of a family. That's how the East Africa Network was born, which is now in seven different countries. Each one of them had different names, but they have the same DNA, and we hold each other accountable.

By God's grace, they all grew. They all started crossing borders, and some started crossing the border into Kenya, where Lifeway existed, even though it was Lifeway that had catalyzed them. So it wasn't about competition, because many times we are tempted to feel, "Why did you cross into my space?" We might start feeling like we own the spaces and the churches, rather than looking at this as a kingdom thing that we can do together. Instead of competing, we asked, "How can we complement each other?" If the motivation is the glory of God, it doesn't matter what happens if we can do it together.

But this collaboration doesn't just happen. We sat in the same room, talked about it, prayed about it, and wrote something that we committed to. One of the commitments was that we would learn the same thing, apply the same principles, learn in different contexts, and teach others how we apply these principles in our contexts. Some choose not to be a part of our group. We have never told anybody to leave, but when they leave, it may be because they are not willing to be part of this journey to

which we have committed. Self-corrections and growth became part of being a small community of practitioners coming together to learn. Catalyst Camp came out of that because we were all gathering to catalyze one another, share stories, fail together, learn together, and trust God together. In those years, we failed many times. But we've also seen God growing things in places that we never expected—up to 27 generations in some countries.

It's very challenging, because I came from a pastoral background. I led an organization. So, I understand organizational leadership; I'm some sort of a CEO in my thinking. I thought that if you have a president and you have this and you have that, then you can tell people what to do, and they will do it because that's the structure. But when it is a movement, it works differently. One of the things we need is to start developing what we call "facilitation" systems and structures rather than organizational structures. We even need to change the wording because wording changes behaviors. In our countries, when somebody is the "leader," they look at you as if you are "up there," and they are "down here." The conversation between you changes; the relationship changes. Even where you sit at the table changes. How they address you changes. The voice that you use with people changes.

But now I wanted to model something I don't have a background in. I also needed to learn from the people I was leading. That's why we had to learn it together. So, this facilitation structure is number one: in each team, place, and country. If I'm a team leader, the team knows what my role is, and how it is different from other people's roles. So, facilitation became centered in the team.

The other thing is having a healthy understanding about growing emerging leaders. Because we have to see this facilitation go away from us and carry the DNA to others rather than remain centralized with us. We must always have emerging leaders identified and model this for them, so that they can be sent when needed.

**Audience Member:** *What are your best practices for how you deal with finances across your networking? How do you protect against non-beneficial practices that could come from outside funding?*

**Chendan:** Our collaboration started with the question, “Where will the money come from?” From the beginning, our approach has been to train leaders because this is not an organization, it is a collaboration. Every leader and organization should have ownership of what they are doing. If there is ownership, then they will own it and invest in it, including money, time and resources. But they needed help. We began to train them with business development skills so that leaders become bi-vocational, they are able to generate income for their family, and they can continue to serve. That has been transformational in our network. In the last five years, many leaders have started their own microbusinesses and are self-supporting. But we also raise funds from the outside, mainly for training, coaching, and providing tools. We don't give any salary as a support to our catalytic leaders. These networks are real, and they're sustainable because they have ownership. This is their work, not our work. We are partnering with them. This is why we integrate financial empowerment with DMM training—integrated DMM (IDMM).

**Aila:** We categorize what we do in threes: starting, multiplying, and sustaining. You think about sustainability when you start, so that you build a DNA of it at the beginning. Part of that is always raising the question of how this group can be independent, local, and raise inside resources. There are five roles in each team: team leader, prayer mobilizer, shepherding data person, training coordinator, and resource mobilizer. The resource mobilizer's work is to help the group identify local resources.

In these networks we do three things together. When we come together (or even when we are far from each other), we learn, we share, and we connect. The sharing part includes resources and money. We share not only money, but also different kinds of resources. To be sustainable, like Chendan said, we developed many different businesses.

There are business trainings, farming, others doing water filtration programs, and small-scale businesses. Different things are happening as part of our training.

**Audience Member:** *Aila, how important is modeling a servant-hearted approach to leadership in building these networks that you're describing?*

**Aila:** I think I Thessalonians is clear about modeling when Paul said, "We didn't only come to you with words, but with our lives" (1 Thess. 1:9 paraphrase). We are very imperfect human beings. We have emotions and personalities. We react to different things at different times in different ways.

When you are a leader in my context, you need to demonstrate that you are a leader by how you speak, where you sit, and what you want to show people. Everybody loves people like that because culturally, that is the definition of leadership. But when we change our language and say "servant leaders," we start to behave differently.

I realized that many of the people I started catalyzing are older than me and sometimes more experienced. They are not stupid. Although they were learning from me, they might be well-informed, in some cases more than me. What makes them listen to me? This is somebody who has a family and is running his family. What makes them sit down, and when I tell them something, they are willing to learn from me?

You asked the question of modeling. I always want to do something that they can do. I don't want to tell them to do it if I'm not doing it. I want them to be part of the journey and write their own stories, not for me to be writing their stories, because I'm also on a journey with them. When I fail, I fail; they know that I failed, and I admit that I failed. That helps them to see that there is grace in failures, that we can help each other to get out of this situation.

I remember one time, our team did a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). While I was in the room, one of the group members came up with a point and said, "The threat is Aila." I

was sitting there thinking, "I thought I was a great man." The worst part was that my wife was in that group. Then one of them clarified to me, "Lead us. Do not pastor us."

**Audience Member:** *Chendan, how do you identify leaders within your network, and what is the process to call them into a position of leadership?*

**Chendan:** When looking for new leaders or networks to collaborate with, we have five indicators we look for in a leader or group of leaders. The first is that *the leader should be dissatisfied*. They have tried many things, but they have not seen the results that they want to see. Because they're dissatisfied, they're willing to learn new things.

Second, we look for a *collaborative leader*; someone who says, "We want to learn, and there are others in my sphere of influence."

Third, the leader should *desire to become self-sustainable*, even financially. We have found leaders who are tired of working with organizations. I mean, this is a sad thing in our country because they have been controlled so much by the organization that they couldn't do what they wanted to do. So, they should want to remain free on their own and decide to become self-sustainable.

Fourth, we partner with *local leaders*. In India, being indigenous and being local are two different things. Because India is not just a country; it is a country of countries. If I'm an Indian from North India, and I go to South India, I'm indigenous but not local. So, we partner with *local* leaders who know the language and the culture, can learn something today, and start doing it by the evening or next morning.

And the fifth one is my preference, because I am a first-generation believer from a Hindu background. We prefer to partner with *first-generation believers*. That doesn't mean that we don't partner with those who are second, third, and fourth generation Christians or believers. But being first generation, the advantage is that we are still in our society, in our sphere of influence, in the community that we know,

and we have relationships so that we can quickly identify people of peace to start home churches.

**Audience Member:** *How do you handle the high-power-distance culture that you come from? How do you handle this hierarchical culture without getting the abuse of power and authority?*

**Chendan:** I think that in this collaboration journey, we have been a counterculture. That is how the Lord has transformed us. In our culture, we want to control. This is what I learned from my grandfather. My grandfather was the head of the family, which included my father, four brothers and sisters, and about 30 people. Since I learned that from him, I thought I also should control others. But the Lord has transformed our lives to be servant leaders and facilitators instead.

Also, we ourselves have learned through the modeling of other Christian leaders around us. (Sorry to name you here, Victor, but you have been a model for me.) When I met Victor John, my wife and I were at the crossroads. We had nowhere to go. He trusted us. God has placed leaders around us who model collaboration and not control. So, this is how we learn. We are counterculture.

**Audience Member:** *Can I follow that up? There's this myth, or maybe a paradox, that these movements have this flat structure, a priesthood of all believers, and everybody can do anything they want. But there really is a power distance that you're talking about, being countercultural. I think a lot of movement trainings maybe miss that, especially with training Western missionaries. So how do you deal with that?*

**Aila:** Yes, people believe that movement goes everywhere, nobody has control over it, and there's no leadership. It's not true. We developed leaders. Disciple-making movement equals leader development. So how do you develop leaders who have goals? For us, we check: do they have passion? Do they have vision, passion for God, and vision for the lost and the Great Commission? Are they teachable, obedient, and do they have commitment?

But also, when we put the five levels of leadership into action, we realize their lack of capacity. So, we develop people's capacity. We have leaders of multiple groups, and we have leaders who are what we call mentors and coaches at a higher level. We have movement leaders, those who have seen generations, and lead other leaders. We have catalysts—people that we can now send away as apostolic disciple-makers to start a new work.

All those leaders start growing through what they have been doing. Depending on their level of leadership, we develop their capacities. Some even go through seminary-like training because now they are receiving questions coming out of their ministry practice and questions being asked by others. They're not only experiencing multiplication; we also need to take care of the quality of what they are doing, so they are able to go deeper. There is specific training and content for this leadership development. They are leaders, not to control, but to facilitate, and they need to have a capacity to answer the realities coming at them. Sometimes the leaders face accusations from people who have experienced classroom education. They come to disqualify the leaders trained by us. How can we develop their capacity to deal with all of these issues? So, to answer your question, movements have leaders, not for control, but for facilitation.

**Audience Member:** *Do they have titles?*

**Aila:** The titles that I give are leaders, facilitators, mentors, and coaches. Rather than *titles*, we use *roles* to define what they do. Rather than a position, they have a role. We struggled with that issue, which is how it started changing our language.

I had a man working among one tribe called "Adam." He had the name or title of "coordinator." The coordinator's role is to coordinate a group of DBSs or local churches. Then we realized, there's another guy, "Emmanuel," who became more skilled in other things than Adam. We were developing him into becoming a mentor for people like Adam, since he grew more skilled than him. So, there was a clash in the field, and I

went there to listen. Adam asked the question, “Is a coordinator bigger than the mentor? And which position is more important?” I realized this is maybe the same thing that Jesus’ disciples struggled with, “Which one? Who will be the leader?”

And so, we said to Adam, “You are important in your own right. God has gifted you in your skills. And you are also important on your own because of God’s gifts. It’s not who is bigger, but which gifts can be used through you, so you can perform well.” In a traditional structure, they don’t understand this because “My seat has to be a little bit bigger than yours. I am the one who introduced you to the movement, and you can’t be sitting in that position.” We often struggle with that. That’s why we had to change the language and what we called the roles so that it changes the behaviors. We have mentors, coaches, movement leaders, and catalysts—the language describes what they do—their role—rather than their positions.

When it comes to “pastor,” somebody said to us, “This group has become a church.” One of the group members said, “Can you appoint me to be the pastor?” The one wanting to be appointed as the pastor is already introducing a different idea. This idea is to introduce or ask for the pastoral gifting to be identified, to be appointed, and for the group to accept. Because what they are used to in other places is leadership being appointed *on* people from outside the group.

Then the question is, “How do you identify gifts within the team and start developing those gifts so that the gifts are appreciated by the people?” If you do not do that process, you develop a structure. In one of our countries, when a structure happened, we lost one whole region. The coordinator of the area was very gifted, and there was multiplication. Somebody came from the US with money and enticed him. The man from the US said, “All these things that you’ve done—it doesn’t have a name.” He lived in the US and some denomination sent him. They had a meeting in a hotel and the man from the US convinced the coordinator that he could become a bishop—without the key leader knowing. The coordinator accepted the idea of him becoming a bishop. Some of his

coordinators became other things and accepted other positions. There was an agreement, and as they were having this conversation, a woman sitting there said, "I have not heard of these things that these people are talking about; it must be against what we've been doing." She called the country leader. By the time the country leader arrived, the whole group was involved and the agreement collapsed. Today, this group is not in the movement anymore. Because of what? The idea of, "You can become `this.'"

How are you going to help people appreciate their roles by building an accountability system in the leadership? And also identifying gifts, because some have pastoral gifts, others have prophetic gifts, within the functions of the team. I think it is more efficient for us to start learning these five levels of leadership rather than in the African mindset of the apostle being the highest level, the prophet being the next level, etc. We are all the same. God has given us the gifts and he gives them for the body. In our context, we can't help looking at it in terms of structures. So, these are the things we are doing, but this thinking is against the thinking in our cultural context.

**Audience Member:** *If you have a new group that you train in a new country, and you encourage them to go try out what they learned, can you give us a picture of what it will look like when you visit them the next time?*

**Aila:** Normally, we get introduced either to a new country or to a place by an existing network somewhere. First, we do a two-day or three-day training of vision casting. We don't do everything these days. We learn about them; we share who we are, what God has been doing, stories from different places, and just give them a few principles. We get all the way to DBS in those three days. Then we tell them, ""In three months, if you've done anything with what you have learned in these three days, and you feel like you now want to engage with this, we'll know by then if you've done anything with what has been taught." So, we follow up in three months. The next training is not for everyone. The first

training is for everyone because it is vision casting. In the next training, we want to see who is trying to look for a person of peace.

Between the time of the first training and the second training, we are always engaging and following up, finding out by ourselves or by somebody else who is there. When we do the next training, are there people who want to attend? Those are the people we pursue. A deeper training, and then, obviously, coaching. It continues until we build a team, and then we build a network, and we regionalize training. We go through about five different steps, but all of them must come out of seeing people put things into practice.

On the second visit, I'm looking for people who started doing something with what we taught them. That tells us that they do not know everything, but they are thinking, and they went out. Because when you come for the second training, the first day always involves asking, "What did you try? What was working?" If they have not done anything with what they learned, you know they will not do much with it in the future. But the people that say, "I tried this, it doesn't work." It's fine, because you tried it. You are attempting it. I'm looking for practitioners, even if it didn't work for them.

At that second meeting, you start seeing signs of leaders. We don't tell them they are leaders, but we already see and notice who will be the next leaders. But we don't tell them.

**Aila:** We learn about Christology and ecclesiology from the Bible at our equipping centers, but without using the words "Christology" and "ecclesiology." Theology is very important, but when you are working with a village woman in Africa, way out in the desert, we want to get away from words that are not used by ordinary people. For catalysts or movement leaders, we encourage them to go to Bible school or seminary, because leaders attend meetings with people who will bring theological questions.

**Chendan:** I myself am studying theology right now. I believe every disciple is a theologian. They don't know what "theology" is, but when ordinary disciples read the creation story and discuss who God is and our relationship with God, they are learning theology—theology of God, of sin and miracles, of salvation, of what is a disciple, what is the church, and the theology of leadership. In our trainings with leaders, we use different words like "worldview change" instead of "theology."

I will share one example. When we began our ministry, every leader was thinking, "I need to be supported financially by an organization to go and plant a church." Is that not a theological belief? And we said, "No, that's not relevant theology for India." That might be relevant for another country, but not for our country. So, we have to have a different theology of "ministry" and "minister." And so, we did theology in our context: theology of work and theology of ministry, including the bi-vocational work and teaching of Paul. So, I would say theological formation is happening in our community.

**Audience Member:** *We want to ask about balance and sustainability. You two are obviously men who love Jesus; you have wisdom and passion. So, in the midst of growth and expansion and new countries, what does it look like for you as disciples to steward spiritual passion, spiritual fervor, spiritual health? How do you hold that space of depth as there's growth? Then how do you do that with the collaborative relationships? How do those relationships stay authentic rather than becoming transactional? Then finally, on the organizational front, how do you balance between growth and health?*

**Aila:** You're asking about how do you feel yourself? How do you stay? I think that's your question if I'm understanding it. It's a challenge. It is treacherous. We have an accountability group that we designed within the team. In East Africa, I have a spiritual leader. We have a spiritual pastor. I'm pastored by the group. This is something we realized, that we go through pain and we struggle even as we do this work. There's a lot of very encouraging things, but there's a lot of discouragement. We go

through a lot. I have a group of people that pray together, and I join if I'm around. But within the network, there is a group to check on us and our family. This year it is a person from [Country]. Each year it changes to a different person. He will call and check on us and our wives. This is how we attempt to do it. It is part of accountability.

I'm not the only one doing everything. The people in the existing network do cross-pollination. Each country is crossing into other countries and they are sending them out two by two. They share best practices with other teams, and they also visit families. This has been the way for all of us. Also in the new countries, we have a coach for countries. I'm not alone in the East African network. This network is starting other networks. I'm just helping the team to do that. That's how we try to solve our problems.

## Questions for Conversation


1. What positive and negative examples of leadership have you observed in your context, whether in ministry or in the broader culture? How do these compare or contrast with the cultural examples described by Aila and Chendan?
2. How would you describe Aila's and Chendan's approaches to leadership in their respective networks? What kind of ethos do they seek to create, and how does it differ from other leadership styles in their cultural contexts?
3. What is one insight from this conversation which you find relevant and applicable in your context? What is one question this conversation stimulated for you which you would like to discuss with others on your team?

# Discovery: Announcing the Gospel in a Way That Replicates

By Cory Hartman and Harry Brown

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*Discovery*, as the term is used by advocates of a mission approach called Disciple-Making Movements (DMM), is a complex idea.<sup>1</sup>

1. It's a particular model of how people learn, especially how they come to know God.

2. *Discovery* can also mean any method of teaching where the instructor deliberately stimulates learning in accord with this model.

3. *Discovery* is a specific phase in the process of catalyzing a disciple-making movement. It happens *after* disciple makers have been welcomed into a social circle by the person with predominant influence in that circle, who wants to hear what the disciple makers have to tell. (This person is often referred to in DMM literature as a "person of peace.") The disciple makers have likely spoken the gospel conversationally in ad hoc and fragmentary ways prior to this point, but this is the stage where

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1. This paper is adapted from Harry Brown, "Disciple Making Movements" (unpublished manuscript, December 18, 2024), Microsoft Word file.

they begin to present the gospel fully to a small group whom God prepared to welcome it.

4. *Discovery* is also shorthand for the tactic we use at that stage: a liturgy called “Discovery Bible Study” or DBS.

Much has been written about the tactic of Discovery Bible Study, whether directions for how to conduct one, success stories from doing so, arguments for its value, or defenses against critics. So why does the world need one more article on Discovery?

Attention has overwhelmingly focused on DBS (definition 4 above), but the tactic has limited value when standing on its own. DBS’s real merit appears when it plays a peculiar role in the broader method referred to in definition 3, which aims to start a disciple-making movement (which we define below). Form follows function: a DBS is built as it is to serve a particular purpose according to particular standards. This article concisely lays out that purpose and those standards and explains how the carefully designed tactic of Discovery Bible Study accomplishes them.

Though few have attempted this, we are by no means the first (Watson 2012; Watson and Watson 2014, 144–52). Yet we may be the first to propose a theological rationale for Discovery according to definition 1 above that’s more sophisticated and stable than a smattering of proof texts of how Jesus and the apostles sometimes taught. We also probe what this rationale implies about the best way to instruct people in life-changing knowledge that they will pass to others (definition 2).

Some readers may consider our presentation overbold. We aim merely for clarity and economy. We are convinced by what we express and believe we would be deceitful to pretend otherwise. Paradoxically, however, we are just as convinced that we don’t have all the answers. We welcome disagreement and alternative viewpoints so that together we might all attain what is highest and best.

## Persons Aren't Things: The Heart of Discovery

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ....' God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:26 NASB). Read in connection with the rest of Scripture, this profound sentence intimates that humans are created to be children of the eternal Father, in the likeness of the Son, enlivened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The divine Trinity of persons made human beings to be persons as they themselves are, interacting as conscious, active agents with each other and with their Maker in ceaseless relationship.

A true-to-life model of learning has to accord with humans' essence as persons created in the image of God for a relationship of love with them and each other. This is especially true of a specific sort of learning: coming to know God, which is particularly sensitive to the deforming effects of sin and the devil on the human race. Coming to know God isn't just acquisition of factual knowledge—it is personal engagement with God, which requires God to overcome humans' disposition to avoid that engagement. In short, a genuine learning model has to treat human beings as active, personal, relational agents who are nonetheless naturally disposed to avoid or spoil the relationships they are made for.

We can illustrate with a series of examples. We know of a high school teacher who used to tell his classes, "There's no such thing as teaching. There's only stimulated learning." Of course he didn't mean that there's *literally* no such thing as teaching; instead he was trying to explain what teaching *is*.

Without thinking about it, people commonly assume that a teacher puts knowledge into students' minds. If that's true, then the teacher is the only true *person* in the classroom. Persons who are healthy and conscious are active—they make choices and do things. But in this model, learners are passive—they don't make choices, and something is done *to* them. The learner isn't really a person but a receptacle.

Treating learners as things is not only wrong, violating their identity as persons created by God in his image. It's also ineffective. Persons learn; things don't. Jamming knowledge into a human's head doesn't make much difference. It either isn't remembered or doesn't transform—it becomes useless trivia squatting in brain cells.

Knowledge *does* last and transform the learner when they find something interesting and explore, consider, play with, imagine from, talk about, experiment with, evaluate, adjust, and apply that knowledge. Here the learner is acting like a person, and the more a teacher treats a learner like a person, the more the person will learn.

This is a much better model of teaching, but for bringing the gospel it still isn't complete. Three more persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are the starting point of this learning. They sent a person (the teacher) to bring the message. They draw a person (the learner) to pay attention to that message, overcoming the person's disposition to avoid them (the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit). And that person (the learner) doesn't come to know mere information—instead, through the message they come to know the persons they've been hungering for the whole time. The entire process is personal, and it all starts with God. That's Discovery.

Yet even this is not quite the whole picture. For illustration purposes we have depicted one teacher and one learner. But in the best learning environments, it is a group of people, personally connected with each other, who discover together. This too accords with what humans were made for: life in the image of a trinity of persons. A communal style of learning is especially important in non-Western cultures, and a disciple-making movement thrives on it.<sup>2</sup>

Discovery is how God has been revealing himself to human beings from Abraham until now. Time and again in Scripture, in all sorts of ways, God speaks and humans hear him, obey him, and share what they heard.

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2. We credit Chandan Sah with this observation.

Anytime someone comes to know God or know him better and is transformed by that knowledge, *Discovery* is how it happens, no matter what means or method God uses to trigger it. So the question is not: “What’s the *one* way to spark Discovery?”—God has used all kinds of ways, including so-called “direct teaching” (unambiguous explanatory, directive monologue). Rather, the question is: “What’s the *best* way to spark Discovery so that it will *catalyze a disciple-making movement among this people*?” By that we mean, what’s the best way we can:

- help *ordinary* people discover God
- so that a *chain reaction* starts
- where these people *multiply* disciples, who obey,
- through their *natural social networks*,
- resulting in *gatherings spawning gatherings*—
- a reaction that maintains its *quality*
- *without depending* on the ones who started it.

These questions are answered by the five essentials of discovery.

## Essential 1: The *Bible* as the God-Revealed Message

To catalyze a disciple-making movement as defined above, we contend that the message must be the Bible, not an evangelistic message that quotes the Bible, an expository sermon from a passage of the Bible, a diagram of the gospel with bits of the Bible, an illustration or parable that makes reference to the Bible, or a string of verses taken from different parts of the Bible. Rather, substantial excerpts of the Bible, many of them, with little to no commentary or rephrasing. In the DMM model that we advocate for, the disciple makers aren’t the content experts. The Bible is its own content expert.

The Bible has several critical advantages over rephrasings and repackagings of the Bible. First, the Bible is the highest-quality message

there is—the only one that’s perfect. Second, the Bible minimizes distortions of the message that human messengers accidentally carry from their own religious culture, life experience, and opinions. (Granted, the Bible carries the cultures in which *it* was written. For this reason, (1) designers of DBS Scripture sets curate passages with less cultural baggage likely to cause confusion, and (2) DBS doesn’t preclude the disciple maker from giving a brief, necessary explanation of what few unfamiliar elements remain.) Third, a learner can transfer the Bible to someone else without depending on the people they received it from, and they can do so immediately, while they are still learning it themselves. Although other memorable, reproducible gospel formulas have been made, we maintain that none match Scripture for depth and for its capacity to keep teaching the learner over time.

This last point is absolutely crucial to a disciple-making movement (DMM). Making the Bible the messenger as well as the message frees the movement from the tiny supply of trained, talented professionals. Instead it qualifies a virtually limitless supply of ordinary people as the workforce. The disciple makers could even be cut off or deported or killed, but as long as the disciples have the Bible, they can keep on and keep growing (Garrison 2004, 182–83).

Moreover, with the Bible a perfect message can be passed by imperfect people; thus, generations of disciples can overlap. While one generation of hearers is learning Genesis 2, they might be telling the next generation Genesis 1. One group doesn’t need to understand *everything* before they pass *anything*. Instead, the message can replicate while it’s still being absorbed. This allows the message to spread fast while people learn it slowly. The overlap of generations gives the illusion of speed.

### ***How Discovery Bible Study Makes the Bible the Message***

Many church-planting-movement advocates assert that for a movement to start, disciple makers must do what’s been called “abundant sowing.” As some describe it, this involves giving as many individuals as possible a succinct gospel presentation with an invitation

to commit and then gathering those disparate individuals into a training circle (Garrison 2004, 177–79, 309–12; Smith 2011, 48–49, 68, 76, 116, 120, 203–22). This isn't what abundant sowing looks like in the DMM approach. DMM disciple makers abundantly build relationships, help people, pray for them, heal them, and testify to Jesus as they do—scattering breadcrumbs, not half a meal in a caplet. Their aim at first is not to win someone to Christ but to identify the aforementioned *person of peace* (inspired by Matt. 10:11–13; Luke 10:5–7). That person has two qualities: first, spiritual interest—meaning they want to know more—and second, community influence—meaning that they have the biggest sway in a social circle and the prerogative to welcome the disciple makers into it.

Disciple makers enter that circle with a series of Scripture passages that, working together, lay out the gospel. Though the series may contain just six to eight passages, it usually has eighteen to thirty. It doesn't give people everything at once but feeds them as much as they can absorb at a time. The series often begins at Genesis 1 and extends through the life of Jesus, sometimes further to the new creation at the end of Revelation. By proceeding through the Bible chronologically as a grand story, learners grasp the Bible on its own terms, including the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They get the big picture, the "whole purpose of God," by seeing it for themselves as Scripture declares it (Acts 20:27).

Equally important is the way Scripture is presented in the Discovery Bible Study itself. At its most basic, a DBS consists of four questions about a passage of Scripture, the first being, "*What does the passage say?*"

Different DBS variants handle this in different ways. Among oral learners, a disciple maker reads or narrates the story orally or plays an audio recording in a language the people understand, then asks them to repeat it back as a group. The disciple maker runs through four or five or even more cycles of this until the group retells the passage correctly with everything in place. When the disciples have the passage memorized, they're able to repeat the process with others. Different techniques are

used among literate people (see, e.g., Trousdale and Sunshine 2018, 215, 323–26). Yet in either case, such techniques ensure that the group firmly grasps what the Bible says, not a highly filtered reduction of it.

## Essential 2: The Bible as the God-Revealed Message

Through the DMM approach, disciple makers ground people in a lifelong lifestyle of actively listening to God. This way disciples can keep learning and maturing even when the original human messengers aren't around. Those disciples can also serve as the messenger to others, and because *those* people also come to hear the Father directly, they can mature in Christ without the presence of *either* generation of messengers. Therefore, if disciples in every generation gain a lifelong lifestyle of actively listening to God, a chain reaction can extend far *and* maintain its quality without depending on the ones who started it.

This is only possible because the Father actively and directly speaks to ordinary people. Through the Son's blood, the Father opened free access to any person who would listen to him (1 Tim. 2:3–6; Heb. 10:19–22). And through the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son open a person's inner ears to hear God's voice, their mind to understand, their attitude to trust, and their will to obey.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible itself testifies that it's normal for God to speak to his people without human mediators.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is equally clear that instruction is *also* passed down from humans to humans, from generation to generation. We see both in a disciple-making movement, operationalized in a Discovery Bible Study. When disciple makers enter the circle of a person of peace, they hand down a firm, unchangeable message that they received from the generation before them, namely, the Bible. But they also train the people in that circle to hear God directly and act on what

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3. See for example John 14:16–17, 26; 16:7–15; Rom. 8:5–17; 1 Cor. 2:6–16; 12:3; Gal. 4:1–7; Eph. 3:16–19.

4. See for example Ps. 25:4–5, 8–9, 12, 14; Isa. 2:2–4; 30:21–22; 54:13; Jer. 31:33–34; Matt. 16:17; John 6:45; 10:3–4, 27; 14:26; 16:13; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 2:27.

they hear, even before these people realize they're doing it, while the Holy Spirit is with them but not yet in them (John 14:17).

## ***How Discovery Bible Study Trains People to Hear God***

This principle works practically through the second main question of a DBS: "*What does the passage mean?*"

In its simplest form, a DBS facilitator asks just this question after the group has gotten very clear about what the passage says; then each person answers it in their own words. One popular variant replaces it with two questions: "*What does it say about God?*" (or about Jesus, especially in the Gospels) and "*What does it say about people?*"

In the small group Bible studies that many of us are used to, this is the part where people drift far away from what the Bible says. Using the passage as a launching pad, they voice their opinions, notions, life lessons, and stuff they're going through that has nothing to do with the passage. Or they cite ideas they heard some teacher (or leadership guru or TED Talk celebrity) say, read notes from the footer of their study Bible, or quote some other Bible verse that, though true, serves to override and distract from what the passage being studied is saying.

But a DBS has features that a run-of-the-mill small group doesn't have and that prevents departures like this. First, to repeat: "*What does it mean?*" is only asked after the group has become rigorously clear on what the text itself says, ruthlessly excluding what they might *think* it says. That prior part of the DBS in clarifying what the text says goes a long way to prepare people to consider what the text means on its own terms.

Second, the disciple makers teach every single member of the group to ask every other member of the group another powerful question: "*Would you show me where the passage says that?*" When asked, sometimes the speaker explains more clearly what they meant and connects it to the passage. Other times they go searching the passage, find that it doesn't connect with what they said before, and revise or retract their statement.

Asking “*What does the passage mean?*” with these safeguards helps people develop a genuinely biblical worldview. When applied to passage after passage across the sweep of the Bible, asking this question drives a group to see the differences between what Scripture says about God, the universe, humanity, salvation, and the future and what they had always heard, believed, and assumed.

It also teaches the group that God speaks through the Bible and that they can hear him themselves. They might not be conscious of this at first, but they learn it by experience. By hearing what God says in Scripture, they begin recognizing thoughts in their minds that sound like something he would say. This roots a lifelong lifestyle of actively listening to God.

Disciple makers communicate the gospel by reading or telling Scripture and then asking questions, not by telling answers. They expectantly ask God to put the answers in people’s minds by his Spirit, and he does. The quality couldn’t be higher because God is the one doing the revealing. And it can replicate, because just as anyone in the group can recite a Scripture story to their social network, anyone can ask simple questions as well. This gets ordinary people into the game right away and enables a chain reaction that keeps going with quality without depending on the ones who started the chain.

### **Essential 3: Immediate Responsive Action**

Whenever God speaks, we have a change to make (or keep making) or a step to take (or keep taking), just as James challenges us to be doers of the word, not just hearers (James 1:22–25). Therefore, a mission approach that catalyzes a disciple-making movement must ingrain immediate responsive action into the lifestyle of every disciple and the culture of every gathering of disciples.

A Discovery Group can’t wait to gain this conviction (immediate responsive action) *after* they become disciples. By then it’s too late. They can’t be allowed to establish a pattern of hearing God’s word and treating

as optional whether they do anything about it. That pattern makes anemic, disobedient disciples, and once it's set it's difficult to break. From the get-go, therefore, learners need to link hearing the message with obeying it so that they keep associating the two forever after.

### ***How Discovery Bible Study Ingrains Immediate Responsive Action***

In the DMM model, disciple makers link hearing and obeying by the third main question of a Discovery Bible Study: *"What will you do?"*

DBS keeps the learners much closer to the text of Scripture than happens in a typical inductive Bible study. As a result, the application steps that learners propose for themselves are closer to the scriptural text too.

In addition, the application commitments that come out of a DBS are more concrete. If it can't be acted on immediately—or at least a plan be made immediately for future action—it doesn't answer the question. So vague wishes like "I want to be more caring" don't work. Even "I'm going to be more caring" doesn't do it. Something like "When my roommate comes home grouchy, I will speak kindly to her instead of snapping back" is more like it. In keeping with this, a learner's answer to *"What will you do?"* is commonly known as an *"I will" statement* in DMM parlance, because in an English-language DBS, if the answer doesn't begin with the words *"I will,"* it doesn't count.

Moreover, the *"I will"* has to be concrete in order to work with another question in a DBS, one that's never found in an inductive Bible study. The next time the catalysts meet with the person of peace and their circle, they introduce a new question even before opening the Bible: *"How did it go?"* In other words, *"How did it go with the thing you said you were going to do the last time we met?"* This is why a person's answer to *"What will you do?"* the previous time has to be concrete enough that they have a real answer to *"How did it go?"* the next time.

The implicit curriculum of a DBS is deliberately built to send a powerful message. Note that at this early point in the group's DBS experience, the disciple makers may never have said, "The Bible is God's word," and haven't said, "When God speaks, we need to do something." These principles haven't yet appeared to the learners through the explicit curriculum, the text of Scripture itself. But the group begins learning these truths from the beginning by *how* the disciple makers bring the message (Prinz et al. 2022).

Asking "*What will you do?*" and "*How did it go?*" have extraordinary power to shape the culture of a gathering of disciples even before they become a gathering of disciples. This is critical for catalyzing a chain reaction of disciple making that maintains high quality without depending on the ones who started it.

## Essential 4: Self-Replicating Process

To catalyze a disciple-making movement, disciple makers need a self-replicating process, a routine every learner follows that has replication built in, not added on after the fact. That routine has to be simple enough that any disciple can repeat it, even if their intellect is average (or lower) for their people and they've scarcely led anything in their lives.

The standard routine in DMM is Discovery Bible Study. A disciple doesn't have to come up with what to say, because the content is nothing more than the Scripture they received. And the process is a series of simple questions that anyone can issue to a room of people. It's an easily repeatable routine that anyone can learn and do.

DBS has replication built in by means of the fourth main question. After members of the group get a strong grasp of the words of the passage ("*What does it say?*"), perceive its import ("*What does it mean?*"), and commit to take a step or make a change as a result ("*What will you do?*"), the facilitator asks, "*Who will you tell?*"

This question directs every person in the group to tell someone outside the group the passage they heard and what they learned from it.

Just as with “*What will you do?*”, each person gives a specific answer that can be verified in the next meeting.

Yet what makes DBS a self-replicating process isn’t only the “*Who will you tell?*” question, but also what learners do when the people they tell respond.

Imagine that a group is doing discovery for the first time by hearing and responding to Genesis 1. One of the attendees, Michael, goes and tells his friend John. John is fascinated by what he hears and wants to know more. Now Michael faces a choice. He could invite John to come with him to the next DBS session. But alternatively, Michael could say to John, “Why don’t you talk to your wife about it and I’ll come to your place. Get your family and friends together, and whatever I learn I’ll bring it to you and we’ll do the same thing.” In other words, at this critical juncture, Michael could draw John into Michael’s circle, or Michael could enter *John’s* circle and take the gospel there. The latter option is replication.

Along with the gospel, Michael has learned a process that both impels him to spread the word and equips him to repeat the process in a social circle touching his own. That’s what makes it self-replicating, and that’s how the gospel can spread across interlinked circles to saturate an entire community, even an entire society.

### ***Other Ways Discovery Stimulates Replication***

In addition to these features, Discovery has other qualities that facilitate replication for generations.

First, people naturally pass on what’s personal to them. When someone learns the gospel by discovering the truth for themselves from God’s word, it doesn’t feel like a foreign formula but like a native idiom welling up from within. And when truth is personal, they’ll share it repeatedly, even in the face of intimidation and suffering.

Second, Discovery gets through doors that persuasion shuts. Among many peoples, simply telling people what they ought to believe immediately creates opposition and throws up walls. By contrast, Discovery doesn't tell people what to believe; it invites them to encounter a story and to make of it what they will.

As a final note, a self-replicating process not only spreads the movement wider and longer but also grows disciples deeper. Most people assume that if a disciple grows, the disciple will then multiply. We maintain that if a disciple multiplies, the disciple will grow. We don't wait for a disciple to reach a point called "maturity" and then expect them to replicate. On the contrary, we believe that replicating is the best stimulant to maturity there is. Nothing helps a disciple grow more swiftly and fully than the responsibility to disciple someone else.

## Essential 5: Gathering Pattern Set at the Beginning

A genuine disciple-making movement doesn't consist of branching generational chains of individual disciples but of gatherings, *ekklēsiai*, the Greek word typically rendered as "churches" in the English New Testament. Therefore, to catalyze a DMM, what disciple makers do with a circle of learners at the beginning must prepare them to become a gathering of disciples, an *ekklēsia*, down the line. The gospel-sharing process ought to help learners practice the basics of life in the gathering even before they know they're doing it.

Becoming a Jesus follower requires a person to make a big change of mind and a big change of behavior. That is a heavy lift, but in addition, the new disciple typically needs to agree to go to church often—and not just go, but participate. To do that, the disciple needs to learn many new things that we "church people" have forgotten; to us these ways and ideas are so familiar, but to the new disciple it's like taking up residence in a foreign country. Before they become a believer, we, the seasoned

Christians, see the big gap between them and Christ, while the new disciple sees the big gap between them and the church.

By contrast, imagine a group of unbelievers who are going through a process of discovering God and the gospel in the Bible. Eventually they also discover the concept of the gathering and what it does. Imagine if they were to realize that they've been doing this all along, that it just takes a small step for them to become a gathering, not a giant leap to "join the church." That would make it much easier to catalyze a disciple-making movement with generations of gatherings spawning more gatherings (Trousdale 2012, 107).

Discovery Bible Study is designed to set the gathering pattern at the beginning. In addition to the core questions, many DBS variants include other features that ease the transition from DBS to gathering.

For example, in one version, a DBS session begins with the questions, "*What are you thankful for?*" and "*What challenges do you have?*" This brackets a space in the meeting that will be filled by prayer later on. Several sessions in, when the group answers these questions, the disciple makers introduce and model the practice of thanking God for the good things and asking him to help them with the struggles—not just their own, but each other's. This establishes a routine of prayer and praise that becomes much richer as disciples grow and become a gathering.

The question, "*What challenges do you have?*" can also help train the group to show compassion in practical ways. One DBS variant follows it with the question, "*How can we help?*" This stimulates group members to love each other in action creatively. As an added benefit for replication, when someone answers the question about their challenge, in many cases it's actually a struggle suffered by someone they care about outside the group. That spurs the group to join forces to help someone in the wider community. That in turn not only grows the learners' conformity to Christ's image; it also softens the community's soil for receiving the gospel themselves.

## The Long Way

To sum up, for disciple makers to catalyze a self-sustaining disciple-making movement, their method of sharing the gospel requires these essentials:

- The *Bible* as the God-revealed message
- The Bible as the *God-revealed* message
- Immediate responsive action (obedience)
- A self-replicating process
- Gathering pattern set at the beginning
- These essentials cohere with the model of teaching and learning we call *Discovery*. They are captured in a tactic called *Discovery Bible Study*. Though exceedingly simple, DBS embodies and passes down profound theological and mission principles in a sophisticated way.

Movement advocates have sometimes been accused of cutting corners and taking shortcuts in the arduous work of gospel mission, to have a fixation with speed, an urge to get things done quickly, and a vulnerability to the secular Western idolatry of efficiency, immediacy, and huge results (Williams 2024, Rhodes 2022). Maybe sometimes the critics are right. But if so, whichever disciple makers have these vices aren't committed to *Discovery*. It takes too long for them.

*Discovery* is no shortcut. It's slow. It doesn't come all at once—it takes time to get the message across, time for people to believe it, time for them to adjust their lives to it. *Discovery* is indirect. It can't be forced; it depends on the learners and on the Holy Spirit above all. *Discovery* takes twists and turns. *Discovery* is the long way.

We take the long way because *Discovery* yields benefits we don't get any other way. *Discovery* teaches disciples to hear their Father's voice, which they can hear in any situation at any time. *Discovery* instills a lifelong lifestyle of hearing and obeying Him, setting them on the path to mature until Jesus returns. *Discovery* can be facilitated by anyone with

anyone, which gets all ordinary people into the game of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Discovery enables a chain reaction that maintains quality without depending on the ones who started it. This chain reaction, running through natural social networks, enables an increase of disciples greater than population increase as disciples pass on what they learn while they're still learning. This is a credible path to carry the gospel to the billions of lost people in the world and complete the assignment Jesus gave us. And then the end will come (Matt. 24:14).

If Discovery is the long way, then perhaps the real shortcut is so-called "direct teaching," particularly at the point of initial gospel breakthrough. ("Direct teaching" does play a role in certain situations in a later stage of starting a disciple-making movement. One such situation is described in our other article in this issue, "Heresies, Pharisees, and Folk Religion.") Explaining or persuading rather than letting the text speak for itself, answering questions rather than pointing back to the text that raises the questions or others that illuminate, summarizing or systematizing the gospel rather than letting the text disclose it—all these cut short the slow process of planting the gospel deep in those learning to hear God's word and obey it for the first time. These tactics may seem more sensible, controlled, relevant, even pure, but they fail to account for the essence of humanity as persons—relational agents—created in the image of the Triune God. Worse, these techniques tend to engender dependence and thereby reap seedless grapes: the fruit might taste good but it doesn't reproduce.

To avoid this, DMM disciple makers employ Discovery, relying on the Bible as the self-revealing message, because they're laying a foundation. On that foundation they can build great things that stand the test of time.

## Questions for Conversation

1. Which of the authors' arguments do you find most helpful and convincing? Which parts of the article stimulated questions, push-back, or alternative perspectives?
2. How is Discovery Bible Study understood and practiced in your context? What insights from the article might be most applicable in reaching the people you are called to?
3. Do you agree with the authors that Discovery Bible Study is a way of "announcing the gospel in a way that replicates"? Explain your answer.

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# An Alternate Take on Discovery: A Response from a Four Fields Practitioner

By M. McComb

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Editorial Note: *To highlight diverse approaches to movements, Seedbed invited another practitioner-scholar—who also attended the MQ Symposium—to offer her perspective on the previous article, “Discovery: Announcing the Gospel in a Way that Replicates,” by Cory Hartman and Harry Brown. This response, unlike Hartman and Brown’s article, was not originally presented at the MQ (Movement Intelligence) Symposium. To properly understand this dialogue, we invite readers to read the two articles in order.*

In “Discovery: Announcing the Gospel in a Way That Replicates,” Cory Hartman and Harry Brown seek to propose “a theological rationale for Discovery ... that’s more sophisticated and stable than a smattering of proof texts of how Jesus and the apostles sometimes taught.” In this response article, one of my aims is to evaluate if the authors accomplished their stated goals with a focus on biblical argumentation. Furthermore, as a Church-Planting Movements (CPM) practitioner with a Four-Fields approach, I will identify commonalities and differences, lingering questions, and a brief overview of a Four-Fields approach in light of the Discovery elements described by Hartman and Brown.<sup>1</sup>

## Affirmations and Presuppositions

Before discussing the article further, I want to clearly state convictions and affirmations which serve as presuppositions to my argument; in particular, the sufficiency of Scripture, the supremacy of Christ Jesus, and the priesthood of all believers. As to the sufficiency of Scripture, I fully believe that all things pertaining to salvation and a life of godliness are present in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15–17). I hold that an isolated person on the backside of the Himalayas or in the middle of the Sahara Desert has everything they need to know of God, to have salvation in Jesus Christ, and to follow him, if there is a Bible in their hands. As Philippians 2:9–11 states, so I hold that Christ is supremely exalted at the right hand of God and that every knee will bow and confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, I believe Christ has made every believer a priest in his kingdom in order to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). These affirmations may seem obvious to readers, but they are essential groundwork for not only this response but one’s entire approach to ministry. If anything we do or say is in contradiction to these tenants of Scripture, we must change our practices to conform to the teachings of Scripture.

## Theology of DMM Approach as Described

In a Disciple-Making Movements (DMM) approach to Discovery as described by Hartman and Brown, a catalyst begins by building an abundance of relationships. Eventually the catalyst identifies a relationship that functions as a “person of peace” who has “spiritual interest—meaning they want to know more—and second, community influence—meaning they have the biggest sway in a social circle and the

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1. Four Fields is based on the parable in Mark 4:26–29 and Jesus and his disciples’ ministry as observed throughout the New Testament of entering a new community, sharing the gospel, discipling those who believe, gathering new believers into church, and raising up leaders to continue this process. Great passages to observe these patterns include Mark 1, Luke 7–13, and Acts 13–21.

2. Any direct quotations of the Bible come from the English Standard Version, 2016.

prerogative to welcome disciple makers into it” (subheading, “How Discovery Bible Study Makes the Bible the Message”).<sup>3</sup> Once a catalyst has identified this person of peace who will gather their relational network, they begin walking through a story set from the Bible, typically from Genesis to Revelation, using Discovery Bible Study (DBS) as the process for the meeting time together around each story. The practical form of these steps and DBS questions is described throughout the article along with a theological rationale for each aspect within the DMM approach.

Carefully working through Hartman and Brown’s article, I noted and researched every Scripture reference and how it related to their overall argument in an attempt to understand their perspective theologically. The first of these references, Gen. 1:26, is used to establish the relational and personal nature of man reflecting God’s image, with the authors arguing that Discovery best engages people as relational and personal creatures (subheading, “Persons Aren’t Things: The Heart of Discovery”). Luke 10:5–7 and Matt. 10:11–13 are cited as the inspiration for the concept of a “person of peace,” while Acts 20:27 is referenced to argue that reading stories from Genesis to Revelation using the DBS method gives the group the full picture of God’s Word.

Under “Essential 2: The Bible as the *God-Revealed* Message,” the authors reference 1 Tim. 2:3–6 and Heb. 10:19–22 to argue that new believers can continue hearing from God, obeying his word, and growing in their walk with him because of the Holy Spirit’s promised guidance and their access to the Father through the Son. Footnotes two and three offer a plethora of references for the Spirit of God speaking and teaching believers without a mediator. In essence, this argument addresses the issue of professionalization—the assumed need for a degree-holding leader to teach God’s word. They argue that even if the original catalyst may not always be present (though relationship through coaching remains), since the Holy Spirit is present and the believers have the Bible,

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3. See Kevin Greeson’s (2021) observations around this interpretation of “person of peace.” His project is in response to wrestling with the idea that the person of peace is the movement catalyst in a community; instead, Greeson proposes looking for “fourth soil” people through abundant sowing of the gospel in a community.

they can still grow. Hartman and Brown close this section by using John 14:17 to reason that a group of non-believers can learn to obey the Bible even before they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

No Scripture is provided to support the arguments in “Essentials 3, 4, and 5” which address obedience-based discipleship, a “self-replicating process,” and how gatherings are established over the course of Discovery with a group. The final two Scripture references are found toward the end of the article: James 1:22–25 is cited in an argument for obeying God’s Word immediately, while Matt. 24:14 is referenced regarding the finishing of the task given by Jesus.

## Evaluation of Proposed DMM Discovery Theology

In evaluating this theology of Discovery, the strongest scriptural support in my opinion is for the premise in “Essential 2” that new believers have direct access to the Father, are taught by the Holy Spirit, and can hear from the Lord with or without human mediators. A CPM practitioner of Four Fields, like myself, would agree with the biblical principles of their argument for the Holy Spirit, with the exception of the debatable usage of John 14:17 in this argument. Their use and interpretation of John 14:17 for this argument is debatable, especially considering Christ’s words before and after the verse about the inability of the world to see him, obey him, and love him (see specifically v.17, 19, and 24).

Few Christians would disagree with the relational, personal nature of man that is made in God’s image as stated in Gen. 1:26; however, to use this verse alone to ground the argumentation and diagram of teaching models seems insufficient to support a premise that is so foundational to Hartman and Brown’s theological rationale of Discovery. In the teaching diagrams offered in this section, only the Discovery approach is depicted with the Triune God at work; this seems an unfair depiction and argument, as even Jesus himself used other forms of teaching and explanation aside from the Socratic method of question asking. Examples

include Jesus' directive teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7 and his explanation of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:13-20.

Aside from these brief comments,<sup>4</sup> the primary aspects of their theological argument that I wish to address below relate to the biblical and theological arguments within "Essential 1: The *Bible* as the God-Revealed Message" (which referenced Luke 10:5-7, Matt. 10:11-13, and Acts 20:27) and "Essential 5: Gathering Pattern Set at the Beginning" (which lacks Scriptural argumentation in their article). These two sections reveal the two primary theological differences between a Four-Fields and a DMM approach to Discovery and thus deserve closer consideration.

### ***Consider the Gospel: What are the Essentials to Believe to Be Saved?***

The primary differences between a Four-Fields approach and a DMM approach begin in theological differences, in particular, the message of the gospel and ecclesiology. For example, what is the biblical basis for presenting the gospel inductively over time rather than through a clear, simple gospel presentation? Are there minimum essentials of the faith that somebody must believe to be saved? If so, what are they? How does a gathering become a church? What/who is church?

In a Four-Fields approach, practitioners approach a new field with vision to enter a community, share the gospel, disciple new believers, form churches, and develop leaders (see Mark 4:26-29 and patterns throughout Mark 1, Luke 7-13, and Acts 13-21).<sup>5</sup> DBS is used as a tool for discipleship of new believers, for gathering as church, and for meeting with those who are interested in learning more but have not yet decided to follow Jesus. However, we feel convicted that sharing a simple gospel and, many times, a personal testimony, is an essential piece in the work because (1) we see a pattern of Jesus sharing the good news throughout every village,<sup>6</sup> (2) we see the disciples continue this same pattern of

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4. The final two Scripture references used in the article (James 1:22-25 and Matt. 24:14) need little evaluation, because their connection to the authors' argument is direct and clear.

entering new communities and sharing the good news both in the Gospels and in the book of Acts,<sup>7</sup> and (3) we see clear essentials that were spoken in their gospel presentations and letters throughout the New Testament—specifically Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the difference in DMM and a Four-Fields CPM approach is not in disagreement about the usefulness of Discovery and how it serves as one of the best adult learning tools at this time. The difference is in the overwhelming conviction that a nonbeliever should be able to hear the gospel plainly and simply from the first time they meet a disciple-maker seeking to engage their community. I do not see examples in Scripture that the good news was shared weeks or months after meeting nonbelievers, especially given the number of villages in Galilee which Christ with his disciples visited within his three-year ministry for the purpose of proclaiming the good news with the inhabitants (Mark 1:14–15, 38–39). Furthermore, as Christ fulfilled the promised gospel in his death, burial, and resurrection, disciples of Jesus from then on shared this fulfilled, simple message wherever they went. We live in a post-resurrection world, with the finished work of Christ clearly laid out for us and his new covenant with us firmly established. We cannot rightly claim we know anything less than Christ’s death and resurrection as we proclaim the hope that has been given to us to any people who do not yet know God (Luke 24:46–48; John 20:30–31; Acts 4:2–4, 4:8–20; Rom. 1:3–5; 10:8–10; 1 Pet. 2:9–10). Furthermore, I don’t see an example of a message given that did not contain the kernel of the gospel that is Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Even Acts 17:16–34, which some

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5. While Mark 4:26–29 is used as a primary training parable, the patterns of Christ’s ministry are observable throughout. For example, our discovery study through Mark 1, Luke 7–11 and Acts 13–21 asks the questions, “How/where do they enter?” “What do they say for the gospel?” “Where do we see discipleship taking place?” “Where do we see churches gathering? What are they doing?” and “Where do we see leadership development taking place?” Through asking these questions, a group makes observations about the patterns of Christ and the Apostles’ ministry that serve as normative for church-planters today.

6. For example, see Mark 1:14, 38–39; 2:2.

7. For example, Luke 9:2, 6; 10:1; Acts 8:4; 10:34–43.

8. See examples of when the gospel is shared and the common kernel of the message in each: Luke 24:46–48; Acts 2:14–39; 3:12–26; 4:9–12; 5:29–32; 7:1–56; 10:34–43; 13:16–41; 17:18, 17:22–32; 26:1–23; 1 Cor. 15:3–5, 15:12–20.

may counter is different from the other recorded messages in Acts, contains the important element of Christ's death and resurrection (v. 31; also v. 18).

It is the death, burial, and resurrection that changes everything for believers (1 Cor. 15:12–20)—indeed it is around this very message that the enemy has blinded so many with lies in other religions, especially in Islam. Christ himself speaks of his death, burial, and resurrection three times explicitly, and upon finishing his task, appoints disciples to share this good news.<sup>9</sup> Paul reminded the Corinthian church that he chose to set aside all his previous knowledge and wisdom “except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). The apostle later reminds the church of the message of good news he first delivered to them: “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

Example after example shows the primary pattern of ministry for Christ and his disciples was to engage a person or group of people and share the word of the Lord immediately.<sup>10</sup> If they responded with belief, baptism ensued (typically of the whole household), and discipleship through gathering as church began. Even those with whom Christ or the disciples engaged in longer periods of discussion (for example the Bereans or those Athenians who wanted to hear more) were first engaged with a simple gospel message, whether or not they had previous background knowledge in the law and the prophets. The demon-

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9. Explicitly, Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection – recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels—in Matt. 16:21–23; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Mark 8:31–32; 9:30–32; 10:32–34; Luke 9:21–22; 9:43–45; 18:31. He references it many other times, for example, Luke 13:33; John 10:14–18; 12:7–8. The commission given in Luke 24:46–49 is explicit about the message the disciples are to take to the nations.

10. Consider the demon-possessed man in Mark 5, Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan woman in John 4, the crowd gathered in Jerusalem in Acts 2, the scattered believers in Acts 8:4, Philip to the Samaritans in Acts 8:5–8, the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26–40, Cornelius and his household in Acts 10, scattered believers sharing with Jews and Gentiles in Acts 11:19–21, Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:14–43, Lydia and her household in Acts 16:13–15, the Philippian Jailer and his household in Acts 16:25–34, the Athenians in Acts 17, and so on.

possessed man from the Decapolis (Mark 5), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–12), the Lycaonians (Acts 14:6–18), the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:25–34), the Athenian Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18–34), and King Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 26:1–29) are some examples of those who would not have had background knowledge in the law and the prophets when they heard the good news.

For a practitioner of Four-Fields, sharing a simple gospel presentation upon the first meeting, and even every subsequent meeting, is integral and a responsibility. For such practitioners, DBS comes in after and in conjunction with the gospel being shared. A helpful passage to consider is Acts 17:32–34 in which the response of the crowd is recorded. Upon hearing of the resurrection, (1) some people mocked and ultimately rejected salvation in Christ, (2) some were interested to hear more from Paul on the matter, and (3) some men and women believed and joined Paul. We refer to these responses as “Red, Yellow, Green” lights, respectively.

Based on our observations from this passage and patterns of Jesus and the disciples, if a hearer decides to follow Jesus upon hearing the gospel (green light), we begin walking new believers through basic commands of Christ relayed through stories from his life and the book of Acts, all of which are done in community and are also activities observed by the church in Acts 2.<sup>11</sup> If a hearer is not ready to follow Jesus but is interested to hear more (yellow light), we use DBS to walk them through stories of the Bible. Personally, I walk through stories about Jesus that help them understand more of who he is (for example, the stories of his power in Mark 4–5), but depending on the situation, many practitioners choose to walk through stories from Creation to Christ or stories of the biblical metanarrative that pertain to the target-culture’s worldview.

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11. The lessons include: Repent and Believe, Baptism, Lord’s Supper, Prayer, Giving, Make Disciples, and Love. Different networks across the globe sometimes include one to three more basic commands, such as Gather, Worship and Endure Persecution. For further reference, see the document: “The Commands of Christ: Equipping a Follower of Jesus to Simply Obey His Commands.” Available in [this document](#) and at <https://www.obeychrist.com>.

Various church-planters in different contexts adapt story-sets to the cultural and religious context.

## ***Discovery and Ecclesiology***

I agree with Hartman and Brown that from the first day of gathering—whether to disciple new believers or to walk seekers through “yellow-light” story sets—establishing a pattern for gathering as a church is biblical and necessary; and DBS serves as this pattern. In a Four-Fields approach, the short-term discipleship set, called “the Commands of Christ,” directs new believers toward growing as a healthy church as described in Acts 2:42–47. In this passage, we see the first church devoted to the word through the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, giving, worshiping, loving one another, and multiplying.<sup>12</sup> Even as new churches mature and move into long-term discipleship—such as the metanarrative or working through one of the Gospels passage by passage—when unhealth creeps in, the church and church-planters have the example of a healthy church (and the Commands of Christ) to point back to, until health has returned to the church. For example if a church, young or old, discontinues baptizing, the leaders would pause whatever study they are doing and return to the basic command of baptism, working through passage after passage on the topic until the believers have returned to obedience in this respect. Thus, believers and churches never “graduate” from the Commands of Christ, but return to more stories on each subject with which they may be struggling. Likewise, in order to restore the church to a place of health, Paul admonishes the Corinthian church in his letters to return to obedience to the basic commands of Jesus by observing the Lord’s Supper in a proper manner, giving to the needs of the church, repenting of sin, and loving one another (1 Cor. 11:23–34).

Furthermore, discovery studies are used with leaders to understand who the church is, what the church does, why the church gathers, how

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12. Acts 2:47, “The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The Lord is bringing the fruit, but we know there must have been a continued proclamation of the gospel, making disciples, and gathering as church.

often/when it meets, where the church meets, and other aspects of ecclesiology.<sup>13</sup> These studies are designed not to give answers or create professionalization—the Bible contains the answers and the Holy Spirit teaches the group—but to provide passages from the whole counsel of God on the topic rather than individual passages. This enables the believers to learn from and replicate healthy patterns of being church from multiple examples of church. They are being taught to compare biblical passages to each other, to allow Scripture to be interpreted by Scripture, and to apply what they learn to their gatherings and networks—essentially, they are learning key components of good hermeneutics.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

Discovery is a helpful tool in multiplying disciples and churches across many contexts. Both a DMM approach as described by Hartman and Brown and a Four-Fields approach as I have outlined here include discovery methods. However, theological convictions around understanding/sharing the gospel—perhaps even soteriology<sup>15</sup>—and ecclesiology seem markedly different. On these similarities and differences, I've offered a perspective from a CPM practitioner of the Four Fields paradigm. As we all strive to make disciples who multiply, we do well to continue conversations that challenge us to examine Scripture and adjust our practices accordingly. We rejoice that movements are a tool the Lord is using to bring many to himself, and yet our ultimate goal is not movements but the glory of God in all things. May he alone receive the glory as we continue to sharpen one another and serve together in his harvest.

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13. See an example of a discovery study for a church start here: [Church Start- Worship- Serve- Community \(Google Doc\)](#).

14. Hermeneutics is a term used to describe how we understand and interpret texts, in this case, the Bible.

15. Soteriology refers to our doctrine of salvation.

## Questions for Conversation

1. Compare and contrast the two views of discovery in the previous article (Hartman and Brown) and in this response (McComb). What do they have in common? How do you understand the roots underlying their differences?
2. The author focuses a large part of her response to evaluating the biblical interpretation of the previous article and providing her own biblical interpretation for her perspective. What did you learn from the biblical reflections in these two articles? Which scriptural passages are the most critical, in your view, for understanding, evaluating, and/or practicing discovery as a tactic for making disciples?
3. Reflecting on Scripture, these two articles, and the specifics of your context, how do you think the gospel should be faithfully and effectively communicated? What biblical essentials should be present in any faithful gospel presentation, and what legitimate differences shape diverse ways of announcing the good news?

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# Heresies, Pharisees, and Folk Religion: How the DMM Model Inhibits and Expels False Teaching

By Cory Hartman and Harry Brown

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Many objections to modern church-planting movements and disciple-making movements concern false teaching. Some critics allege that movement methods are themselves false teaching, but some also have concerns about false teaching among the disciples being made in movements. Skeptics fear that CPM and DMM approaches move too fast to make real disciples and raise them to maturity (Lovelace 2007; Rhodes 2022a, 38–39, 74, 77, 95–100). Church planters and disciple makers are said to leave before disciples are rooted and grounded in the faith. Seekers are told to proclaim the gospel before they can possibly know it and are appointed as church leaders before they are even born of God, not to mention godly (Brawner 2007; Rhodes 2022a, 100–3, 187–90; Rhodes 2022b, 23, 25).<sup>1</sup>

The root of the problem appears plain: CPM and DMM methods banish teaching and preaching. The people who aim to start movements

don't perform those biblical roles or appoint people to them; and if they do appoint teachers, they don't adequately equip them (Rhodes 2022a, 80–88, 105; Rhodes 2022b, 25; Vegas 2018, 29–30). Instead they rely on Bible study methods that lift readers' subjective opinions over the witness of Scripture. Neglecting biblical teaching makes so-called churches and believers highly vulnerable to falsehood that they invent or are drawn away to.

Movement advocates like us (the authors) admit that these grave concerns are well-founded—not, in our view, because they accurately represent movements, but because they reflect the concerns of the biblical prophets and apostles and therefore of God himself. The Bible is replete with warnings about false teaching, confrontations between God's true messengers and false ones, and the terrible consequences of going astray. We are repeatedly admonished that in the last days many false teachers will come, which suggests not only that the problem will not go away but also that it will keep getting worse (2 Tim. 3:1–9; 2 Pet. 3:3–7). Even if critics had never raised these objections, we should be acutely concerned about them. We owe it to God and to the lost sheep he is bringing home to keep them from wolves (Acts 20:28–31).

In this article, rather than respond to criticisms per se, we detail the approach we advocate to catalyze a movement, which encourages disciples to resist false teaching from the beginning.

## Defining the Problem and the Solution

When ordinary believers raise concerns about false teaching, they commonly use the label “*heresy*” as a catch-all. Yet “*heresy*” is not a broad enough term to encompass it. Heresy proper occurs when an intelligent teacher or charismatic leader puts forth wrong ideas and bad practices—particularly ones that strike at the heart of the gospel—and draws away a following of Christians who admire him or her (Watson 2012). It is inherently factional.<sup>2</sup> Heresy is false belief from the top down.

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1. Portions of this article are adapted from Harry Brown, “Disciple Making Movements” (unpublished manuscript, December 18, 2024).

By contrast, another category of false belief is *folk religion*, which is when ordinary, untrained people come up with wrong ideas and bad practices on their own. Folk religion is often syncretistic, blending Jesus' way with some religion or customs opposed to it, which corrupts it. In other words, rather than being a departure from settled truth, it is often the continuance or reemergence of prior falsehood that was never fully rooted out. Folk religion is false belief from the bottom up.

Yet there is also a third category of falsehood that is rather more subtle but is at least as prominent in the New Testament—namely, *Pharisaism*. The Pharisees, of course, were a historic group with dogmas and practices that by the first century AD posed a threat to God's people. We do not propose that historical Pharisaism is still a threat but rather that it exemplifies a crucial, often overlooked pattern of falsehood in every age. The pattern has two main features. First, as we will illustrate, Pharisees cannot tell the difference between the Bible and their tradition; to them it is all Scripture, and it all comes from God. Second, Pharisees display their elite knowledge by making a big deal of little rules while belittling the big ones.

For any movement method to succeed, it has to overcome all three forms of false teaching: heresy, folk religion, and Pharisaism.

The solution we propose is found in the mission paradigm called DMM.<sup>3</sup> DMM is not a single formula but rather a firm schema that admits variations for different mission contexts. It involves layered stages wherein disciple makers add practices one by one as God's work progresses. Most of the defense against falsehood is built in the stage we

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2. Before the Greek *hairesis* meant a Christian heresy, it meant a philosophical school of thought and lifestyle or a religious sect. Likewise, a range of its other definitions revolve around *choice*—that a person is confronted with several competing options (Liddell & Scott 1940, s.v. αἵρεσις).

3. The term *DMM*, an abbreviation of *disciple making movement*, has two meanings. *DMM* can mean a specific thing that is happening in which people make disciples who in turn make disciples (and so on) in their social networks. But *DMM* can also refer to a specific approach to ministry that was originally drawn from (but not comprehended by) the teaching of David Watson. People may attempt to catalyze a DMM (first definition) using what we call "the mission paradigm called DMM" (second definition).

call “Discovery”—the time after a person welcomes the disciple makers into their social circle so that the whole entourage will hear what the disciple makers have to say. Disciple makers begin conveying the gospel by means of Discovery Bible Study (DBS).<sup>4</sup> The other pertinent stage for combatting false teaching is sometimes called “Leadership Development.” In this later stage, disciple makers more formally recognize and commission leaders of the new *ekklēsia*<sup>5</sup> and train and coach them for their roles. DMM’s solution to the problem of false teaching can be summed up as follows:

- The Bible is the teacher.
- Talk is cheap.
- Elders are guardians.

## The Bible Is the Teacher

In DMM, the Bible is both the message and the messenger, both the subject and the teacher. The disciple maker does not summarize or explain Scripture but allows it to speak for itself—or properly, for the Holy Spirit to speak through it—especially at the point of initial gospel breakthrough.

Through Discovery Bible Study, lost people learn the truth by seeing it for themselves. The disciple maker supplies a process by which people can grasp God’s message in the Bible; he or she also supplies passages chosen to allow that message to unfold at a rate the people can absorb and adjust their lives accordingly. If the disciple maker perceives that the people are not getting the message—that their worldview stubbornly grinds against the gospel at a certain point—the disciple maker supplies other passages that address the issue. At this early stage of the process,

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4. See our article in this issue entitled “Discovery: Announcing the Gospel in a Way That Replicates.”

5. *Ekklēsia*, Greek for *gathering (of people) or assembly*, is the word commonly translated *church* in the English New Testament. At points in this article, *ekklēsia* is used to label a gathering of disciples that bears resemblance to first-century gatherings of disciples as depicted in the Bible but that might not bear all the characteristics that modern people commonly expect when they hear the word *church*.

the disciple maker does not tell people what they ought to think. Instead, he or she waits for the Holy Spirit to reveal it to them.

Critics take issue with disciple makers doing non-directive DBS with lost people instead of teaching them. They can be forgiven for their concern because DMM advocates have sometimes urged disciple makers to do just that. But stating it this way misunderstands teaching. For one thing, genuine teaching is more interactive and complex than the stereotype of teaching as lecture. For another, when the Bible is read during a DBS, *that is teaching*, or at least the beginning of it.

If we possessed (and could understand) an audio recording of Jesus teaching in the first century, we would probably play it again and again whenever we got together. As it happens, the early disciples *did* have audio recordings of Jesus and the apostles teaching. We now call it the New Testament. We moderns mentally separate writing from speaking, but ancient people did not. The written word was meant to be recited aloud to others—writing was ancient sound recording technology (Wise 2015, 353). To read Jesus’s words from the scroll was to bring his living voice to his people wherever and whenever they were, just as if we played a recording of a modern preacher teaching. In like manner, DBS does not replace teaching; on the contrary, it re-presents the teaching that God’s inspired servants delivered publicly millennia ago.

A similar point could be made about preaching. In everyday English, “preaching” refers to a sort of religious public monologue where the speaker tells an audience what God says is true and good, usually citing or explaining parts of the Bible, and encourages people to do some right thing as a result. But the Greek words translated “preach” in the English New Testament do not mean that. The words most commonly translated “preach”—*kēryssō* and *euangelizomai*—mean “proclaim,” as in “*I have been sent with news that matters to you, and here it is.*” (With the second word it is specifically “good news.”) These words were not religious terms. They do not require a monologue (at least not a long one) and they certainly do not mean an exposition of Scripture. Above all, these

words *do* mean telling the news to people who *don't know it yet*, whereas what English-speakers call “preaching” is delivered almost entirely to people who know the news already.

Doing DBS with lost people, then, *is preaching* from a New Testament point of view. When disciple makers read Scripture in the circle of a person of peace, they are doing *kēryssein* and *euangelizesthai*—they are announcing good news to lost people who haven't heard it before (Jon T. 2021).

Doing DBS repeatedly ingrains the conviction that the Bible is the teacher even if this is never said out loud. Establishing this belief deep in would-be disciples breeds powerful theological antibodies that activate to banish false teaching whenever it arises.

### ***DBS Prevents Folk Religion by Overriding Opinions***

In folk religion, ordinary people uncritically mix what they've been conditioned to believe and do with the new message they're learning. DBS, however, has features that weed out syncretism.

One has already been mentioned—that disciple makers drip the biblical message into the bloodstream of learners over an extended period. That way the Bible surfaces, challenges, and corrects learners' worldview a bit at a time.

Another feature of DBS is that it allows the Bible to override people's opinions by restricting the tendency in typical small group discussion for participants to spout whatever they think. The close attention paid to the text of Scripture and the question, “*Where does it say that?*”—asked of anyone by anyone—help to keep the Bible supreme in the conversation.

### ***DBS Prevents Heresies by Leaving No Seat for the Heretic***

Every heretic proclaims, “Follow me, because I have insight you don't.” In the Old Testament, heretics take the form of false prophets who ignore the Ten Commandments for other gods (Deut. 13:1–5). Jesus uses

the same term for people who would say the Messiah had come when he had not (Matt. 24:11, 23–24). The later epistles, when the apostles were beginning to die off, include many warnings about heretics. They gain a following by using Scripture as a launchpad for complicated debates that show off their intellect. They “want to be teachers of the Law,” but they “teach strange doctrines” that “give rise to mere speculation.” They “turn aside to fruitless discussions,” including “controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law” that “are unprofitable and worthless.” They “wrangle over words” and engage in “worldly and empty chatter” while “they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 2 Tim. 2:14–18; Titus 3:9<sup>6</sup>). Heretics create factions; they tell their followers to reject what others say and try to insulate them from any rival voice because they “love to be first” (Titus 3:10; 2 John 9–10).

If heresy comes from people like this, what has to be in place for them to emerge? *A culture that expects truth to come from a few teachers who have more knowledge and talent than everybody else.* Heresy arises among people who follow the impressive leader, as in the church at Corinth, where people said, “‘I am of Paul,’ and, ‘I of Apollos,’ and, ‘I of Cephas,’ and, ‘I of Christ,’” and where the believers were susceptible to “false apostles, deceitful workers,” who “led [them] astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” by their superior eloquence (1 Cor. 1:12; 2 Cor. 11:2–6, 13–15). In a culture like that, since believers assume that they can’t hear God without talented teachers, it is only natural that “to have their ears tickled, they ... accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and ... turn away their ears from the truth and ... turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

*This is exactly the opposite of the culture of a Discovery Bible Study.* In a DBS, no one stands in the position of authority but the Bible itself. The disciple makers bringing the gospel do not assume that position. Whenever the group asks them a question, they don’t respond with an answer but with a passage of Scripture that provides the answer. So when

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6. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

lost people learn the gospel in a DBS, they also learn that the Bible, not a human expert, is the source of truth.

If anyone tries to lead the group astray by their own genius or eloquence, its immune system kicks in and shuts the person down or turns them away. Like the synagogue at Berea, they check any intriguing presentation against Scripture before they are carried away by it (Acts 17:11). Like the church at Ephesus, they do not “tolerate evil men” but “put [them] to the test” and eject those they “find to be false” (Rev. 2:2).

### ***DBS Prevents Pharisees by Relativizing Traditions***

Folk religion and heresy are types of false teaching that can arise from new disciples. Pharisaism, on the other hand, is a kind that usually comes from the disciple maker.

The historical Pharisees and Jesus had much in common. Against the Sadducees, both believed in angels and demons, the Messiah, and that all the books in the Hebrew Bible are the word of God.

Yet here they diverged. The Pharisees believed that the instruction God gave Moses was passed down in two forms, some in writing, some orally. The oral portion provided the specifics as to how to obey the written part. For instance, the written Torah ordered rest on the Sabbath; the oral Torah defined what constituted work so that Jews could abstain from it (Ferguson 2003, 542–43).

Jesus, on the other hand, made a radical distinction between what had been put in writing and everything else. He asserted that the written Scripture came from God’s mouth and that the oral rules were merely a human product. Therefore, he blasted the Pharisees for confusing “the commandment of God” and “the tradition of men,” observing that at the end of the day, the latter always nullifies the former (Mark 7:1–13).

The Pharisees did not start out this way. Like Ezra during the restoration from exile, they merely wanted their people to obey God as rigorously as his covenant demanded. But over the centuries, the efforts

they made to explain God's word vaulted the explanation over the text it explained. As interpretations and attendant practices were handed down from generation to generation, the line between text and commentary blurred to nonexistence. By Jesus' day, the Pharisees simply could not tell the two apart. They not only disagreed with the distinction Jesus made between the one and the other; they could hardly see it. To reject the tradition *was* to reject Scripture; they were one and the same.

The trap the Pharisees fell into lies open in every era. The Scriptures are not passed down in a vacuum but are carried by a socioreligious form. Over time, the form and the content become one in people's minds and they cannot tell the difference, especially when the one obscures and distorts the other. People who want to pass the content pass the form with it, and the form speaks louder.

Disciple makers, then, carry a pouch not only of pure gospel seed but also of "weed seeds" that choke the word and keep it from multiplying. Weed seeds include how disciples dress, eat, pray, sing, and teach; when and where they meet and what they do when they meet; how they organize, make decisions, and choose leaders (and what leading consists of); how they collect, spend, and distribute money and material things; and more. No one can see enough of one's own weed seeds to cleanse oneself of all of them.

Nevertheless, Discovery Bible Study limits the damage by overcoming the limits of the contextualization paradigm. Contextualization requires gospel bringers to express it in a way that makes sense in the receivers' culture, especially when it varies from their own. It requires gospel bringers to be experts in the gospel, experts in their own culture, and near-experts in the culture they've entered. Unfortunately, very few can translate the whole gospel and its complete application to another culture at all, not to mention well. This doesn't only apply in obvious cross-cultural situations: gospel bringers typically belong to a different *religious* culture than the receivers do, one they take for granted as the normal way to do the Christian faith. In any case, despite their best

efforts, gospel bringers end up standing between the Bible and its recipients as a distorted lens.

By contrast, DBS lays the burden of contextualization on Scripture itself, and, even more so, on God to enlighten the people hearing it. It helps gospel bringers reduce the influence of their own culture on the articulation of the gospel so that those who receive it can recontextualize the message for their situation. Rather than watering down the gospel message, it lets Scripture challenge assumptions of receivers' culture in ways gospel bringers might never imagine. The standard DBS question, "*what will you do about it [i.e., what you learned]?*" also compels learners to customize a lived-out expression of God's word that necessarily pertains to their culture. Thus, gospel bringers and receivers alike avoid Pharisaism by privileging the word of God over the tradition of men (Steinhaus 2011, 11; Watson & Watson 2014, 9–17, 35–37; Farah 2020, 5–6).

## Talk Is Cheap

A common characteristic of false teaching is not only wrong thinking but wrong acting, either by doing the wrong thing or by neglecting the right thing. People usually prefer talking about a good thing to doing it, because doing is costlier. (Thus the English expression, "Talk is cheap.") Yet establishing Discovery Bible Study as the vehicle for the gospel and the staple of the gathering prevents not-walking-the-talk before it takes hold and gradually uproots it where it already has started.

DBS prevents folk religion by making the Bible the rule of life: it links hearing the word and doing it so that it becomes unthinkable to hear without obeying. Also, the comments above pertain here as well: by feeding people Scripture at a rate they can absorb, they change, not only in their thinking but also in behavior.

Yet there is more to be said about how DMM's emphasis on obedience inhibits heresies and Pharisees.

## DBS Prevents Heresies by Choking Self-Gratification

Heretics like talking—they devote their energy to words over action. Paul told Timothy to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to *mere speculation* rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith .... For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to *fruitless discussion*” (1 Tim. 1:3–6, emphasis ours).

Mere speculation and fruitless discussion have no practical outcome and distract from the job at hand. By contrast, Paul says, “the *goal* of our instruction is *love* from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:3–6, emphasis ours). True learning in the faith has a purpose: getting people to love God, each other, and everyone, which is not a matter of mere “word or tongue” but rather “deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

By contrast, heretics’ usual interest is doing the opposite of what God commands. When Peter and Jude describe false teachers, they spend less time critiquing how they talk wrong than exposing how they do wrong—practicing licentiousness, sensuality, self-indulgence, sexual immorality, adultery, carousing, and also greed (2 Peter 2, Jude 4–18). When heretics spout false teaching, they almost always have a hidden motive of making it easier to gratify their flesh.

Consequently, a culture of immediate, active response to the Bible is heretic repellent. Heretics want to *talk* about the Bible; they don’t want to obey what it says. They want to look good in a Bible study by speaking more impressively than everyone else; they don’t want to look bad by exposing week after week that they didn’t do their “I will” statement,<sup>7</sup> if they even declared one. Being directed toward obedience in every Discovery Bible Study is very uncomfortable to the heretic, who is in the game to disobey, so he or she doesn’t stick around very long.

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7. “*I will*” statement is DMM jargon for a person’s answer to the common Discovery Bible Study question, “*what will you do about what you learned?*” The idea is that in an English-language DBS, if a participant’s answer doesn’t begin with the words, “*I will,*” it doesn’t qualify.

## ***DBS Prevents Pharisees by Putting Learning in Its Place***

***The Pharisees knew their Bible better than anybody, but they did not do what it said. In their own estimation and in the eyes of others they were more faithful and obedient to the Scriptures than anyone else, but in reality they were the worst transgressors of all. They preached to everyone to obey the Bible while they disobeyed it at every turn—they said things but did not do them (Matt. 23:3). They checked all the boxes of outward conformity to the tiniest detail while they disregarded what God wants most: “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23, 28).***

***How does this happen? What compels Pharisees to “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel” (Matt. 23:24)? Other Pharisees. In a social environment where conformity to tradition is praised, one has to invent more and more novel, austere, and elaborate ways of demonstrating one’s conformity in order to prove one’s goodness to one’s fellows. (The modern term is “virtue signaling.”) Of course, everyone else is doing the same thing, so the competition becomes intense. Since appearance is everything, attention is trained on the little gestures and subtle vocabulary that validates that one belongs or that give one an edge over the rest.***

Meanwhile, love gets lost. Knowledge without obedience does not produce love—it produces pride. While love builds people up, knowledge puffs people up, and tears others down (1 Cor. 8:1).

The antidote to this form of false teaching is not for disciples to study less but to obey more. Knowledge is a wonderful thing when it is expressed in action—there is no limit to how much a person should try to get (Prov. 4:7). The beauty is that a lifestyle of immediate responsive action, instilled by a group habit of Discovery Bible Study, grants a person more knowledge while disobedience takes away whatever knowledge

someone thinks they have (Matt. 13:12). Pharisees' lovelessness chokes their learning—ironically, “they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Rom. 10:2).

Movements that maintain purity through generations of disciples participate in the dynamic Paul prayed for: that disciples would “be filled with the *knowledge of [God’s] will* in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”—not for its own sake, but so that they would “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” (immediate responsive action), that “bear[s] fruit in every *good work*.” Then, as a result of that good work, disciples would “increas[e] in the *knowledge of God*” even more (Colossians 1:9–10, emphasis ours). A virtuous cycle of knowing, responding, knowing more, and responding more flows throughout a genuine Disciple Making Movement. And that leaves no place for Pharisees.

## Elders Are Guardians

As a group of learners comes to know the gospel, gradually conforming their lives to it, they begin developing into an *ekklēsia* of baptized disciples. Along the way, the disciple maker feeds the group Scripture passages depicting the features of the *ekklēsia*, which include elders.

The principal synonym for *elders* in New Testament *ekklēsiai* is *episkopoi* (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1–2; Titus 1:7; see also 1 Pet. 5:1–2). The word is generally translated “overseers,” but that does not adequately convey the meaning. In English, an overseer denotes a supervisor, someone who orders workers around, perhaps sitting in the shade while they toil in the hot sun. But the *episkopos* watches over disciples in a different sense. Shepherds do not watch over sheep to give them orders but to guard them from wolves and thieves. Likewise, *episkopoi* are the guardians of God’s people.

This significantly clarifies elders’ role. Elders are not really leaders as if their job is to take disciples in some direction. The Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit are the leaders—they are the ones who direct each and every disciple and all the disciples together. The elders’ task is to keep the sheep from straying off track. Repeated Discovery Bible Study instills a culture where every disciple hears and obeys their Father’s voice directly. Yet elders—guardians—have an important backstop function to keep false teachers from arising among the disciples or infiltrating them from without.

### ***How Elders Are Trained***

In the DMM approach, elders are not equipped by matriculating into a course of study, working their way through it, completing a practicum, and passing an approval process that certifies them. Instead, they began being equipped from the very first DBS they experienced, before they were disciples, continued being equipped all the way through the group becoming an *ekklesia* and themselves being recognized as elders, and keep being equipped well beyond that.

Elder training is more directive than what they experienced when they first encountered Scripture, although a discovery component remains. The training includes systematic doctrinal study, but it is delivered discovery-style from pertinent passages of Scripture. Importantly, this knowledge is never divorced from behavior—the DBS routine of asking, “What will you do?” and “How did it go?” remain built into the training to ensure immediate responsive action. Trainees learn, practice, discuss, then repeat the cycle again and again with the disciple maker alongside—and crucially, they pass it on to the next generation of disciples.

### ***When Correction Overrides Discovery***

Of the many monologues by apostles recorded in Acts, one is especially unusual: Paul’s message to the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:18–35. Unlike the others, it is delivered not to unbelievers but to disciples, and it is not an ad hoc response to a sudden demand but a deliberate, planned talk.

The sort of teaching that Paul models and commands here—and in the Pastoral Epistles, which repeat its themes—is a different sort than the kind he uses when dialoguing with people who are not disciples yet. It is not an oblique presentation for the purpose of discovery—it is direct for the purpose of correction. It is not to help people get to know God but to admonish people to stick with him.<sup>8</sup>

This sort of teaching absolutely has a place in a Disciple Making Movement—not in the discovery phase but later on when *ekklēsiai* have emerged and elders have been appointed (Coles 2022). The elders correct disciples when they need to, and elders’ coaches correct elders when they need it themselves.

In a flourishing DMM, everyone has a coach, in part because drift is inevitable. Everything good takes constant maintenance or else it falls into ruin. The people engaged in it may not realize it is happening, so it requires a coach from the outside to recognize it and reorient people to get them back on track. This is what Paul did in his letters, what he urged Timothy and Titus to do in the places he appointed them to, and what Jesus does with the seven *ekklēsiai* of Asia in Revelation.

Correction can and often should be done with a discovery approach, because it is always best to let the Bible do the correcting and for people to hear God through it themselves. Nevertheless, there are times that coaches need to be more direct, to “speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15). In rare cases, a coach or catalyst known and respected in the movement may even need to remove someone from leadership.

A good coach reminds elders of the essentials. Paul urges Timothy to “*retain* the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. *Guard*, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2

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8. In the Pastoral Epistles, the word *teach* appears in this vein in 1 Tim. 4:11, 13; 6:2; 2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:7, 9; 2:3–5. Other examples could be multiplied that don’t include the word *teach* but contain variations on *urge/exhort*, *correct*, *rebuke*, *refute*, and *admonish/warn*.

Tim. 1:13–14, emphasis ours). Constant vigilance in reinforcing the DNA of the gospel and of movement is a hedge against false teaching.

## Conclusion

For two thousand years, Jesus' followers have been tempted by heresies, Pharisees, and folk religion. These threaten Disciple-Making Movements today. But the features of the DMM paradigm instill theological antibodies that inhibit false teaching from starting and expel it when it enters.

False teaching is a valid concern of skeptics and supporters alike because the voices in Scripture care about it and it appears in every age. Yet we also maintain that a Disciple-Making Movement catalyzed according to the DMM model is not unusually susceptible to it. On the contrary, the culture established from the beginning through repeated Discovery Bible Study and maintained by trained elders is hostile to false teaching. It is not fertile soil.

So if false teaching does not thrive in a genuine DMM, where does it thrive? Ironically, in the conventional Christian system, the one most movement advocates and critics alike were formed in and conditioned by. We all are vulnerable to heresy because we attend learned, magnetic, and well-marketed talkers to tell us what's what. We're susceptible to folk religion because our churches' heritage was formed in halfway-Christianized cultures, past or present. And we're liable to be Pharisees because we learned to recognize friends, foes, and rivals by our religious cultures' peculiar status markers, which we can hardly distinguish from Scripture.

There *is* false teaching among Christians—plenty of it. Believers *are* being “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,” a maelstrom that leaves concerned followers of Jesus shouting into the wind sometimes (Eph. 4:14). But the DMM approach isn't the culprit or an accelerant. On the contrary, it may be a big part of

the cure. When perplexed by the confusion and delusions taking people down all around us, we won't find our way out by fixating on failings suspected of movements. Rather, we'll find many disciples there on firmer ground than we stand on, extending a hand with much to teach us.

## Questions for Conversation

1. What are the sources and forms of false teaching in your ministry context? In your home context? How helpful do you find the authors' three categories (heresies, Pharisees, and folk religion) for understanding different theological dangers?
2. What are different ways Christians seek to counter false teaching in your context? Compare and contrast this article's approach to countering false teaching with other approaches.
3. Which insights in this article do you find most helpful, convincing, or relevant in helping counter false teaching in your context? Which parts of the article stimulate questions, push-back, or different perspectives?

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# Presbyterianism and DMM: Ecclesiological Explorations

By J.R. Stevenson

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## Introduction

Debates over disciple-making movements (DMM), and the broader parent category of church-planting movements (CPM), often focus on ecclesiology. Some advocates of DMM argue that one of the two major inhibitors to these movements is “hierarchical or institutional ecclesiologies” (Farah 2021, 51). While “hierarchical” and “institutional” do not clearly identify specific ecclesiologies, Presbyterianism, with a strong concept of ordination, and multiple levels of church government, seems to be possibly included.<sup>1</sup> From an opposing angle, critics of DMM argue that DMM has weak or no ecclesiology. DMM advocates “criticize careful attention to ecclesiology,” suggest Folmar and Logsdon (2025, 13) who go on to claim that “Movement-driven missions considers the Bible largely silent on how churches should be led” (Folmar 2025, 52).

Often missing in this discussion is careful engagement with the specific ecclesiological claims being made from both sides. On the one hand, some DMM advocates have offered explicit reflections on ecclesiology that merit closer attention. On the other hand, concerns regarding institutional and hierarchical ecclesiologies seem to be based

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1. This does not mean that I accept that “hierarchical” is a good term to apply to Presbyterianism; it usually implies increasing power is invested in one person, such as a bishop, which is not the case in Presbyterianism. But as the specific target is unclear, I am considering the opposition to broadly be directed at Presbyterianism as well.

on an aversion to religious tradition and structure rather than theological understanding and disagreement. For example, in a comparison of “typical ecclesiology” and “movemental ecclesiology,” the description of the typical mixes elements like “pastor-led” with the presence of church buildings (Farah 2026). In other words, what exists is primarily phenomenological criticism rather than theological engagement, which further exacerbates the perception that movement advocates do not engage with ecclesiology but are more pragmatically driven.

In light of this gap, I will compare the ecclesiology of DMM advocate Trevor Larsen with that of Reformed Presbyterianism. Why these two sources? Trevor Larsen has published both academic material (Larsen 2021) and practical training guides (Larsen 2018 and 2020) for his DMM approach. While CPM and DMM approaches vary, his approach is representative of many of the broad lines of DMM practice. In particular, his work engages the biblical uses of *ekklesia* and relates that to DMM practice in Southeast Asia, making him an ideal conversation partner.

Why include Reformed Presbyterianism in this discussion? First, I am an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America. By conviction, I believe Presbyterianism best expresses the Bible’s teachings on how churches are to be led. Second, I am laboring to see churches planted among an unreached people group. Over the years of pursuing that goal, I have aimed at both multiplication and alignment to my Presbyterian convictions. Seeking organic multiplication within the guardrails of Presbyterian polity is therefore a personal and practical concern.

To draw these strands together, I will distill representative Presbyterian voices from different eras, with guidance from Clay Quarterman (2005), who has written a definitive work on Presbyterian ecclesiology and missiology. I then explain Larsen’s approach, followed by a comparison with Presbyterianism’s essential elements. Finally, I explore a few implications, arguing that Presbyterian ecclesiology can support the organic multiplication desired by DMM.

## Presbyterianism and Larsen's DMM

### *Defining Presbyterianism*

In order to make the case for coherence between Larsen's approach and Presbyterianism, I must first define the essence of Presbyterianism in the context of other models of church government.

The more commonly recognized aspects of Presbyterianism include a plurality of elders overseeing local churches, with all the elders representing churches in a particular region constituting a presbytery. Unlike episcopalianism, no power is invested in a single person (i.e., a bishop), and unlike Baptists (congregationalism), there is church authority beyond only the local congregation. Presbyterians are also generally associated with other theological positions, but for our purposes here we are only looking at church government.

### **Presbyterians on the Meaning of Church in Scripture**

Presbyterians have historically recognized that the Scripture uses *ekklesia* in multifaceted ways. For example, James Bannerman (2015, 14), in his well-known Presbyterian ecclesiology, *The Church of Christ*, notes that at least four meanings are present.<sup>2</sup> Of special relevance for this discussion are three of them, which indicate that the word or concept of church, as used in Scripture, can refer to (1) a particular group of believers who gather for worshipping God (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:19, "the church that meets in their house"); (2) the collection of groups of believers who exist (e.g., Acts 9:31, "the church throughout all Judea..."); and (3) the leaders of those groups when they gather together to represent the body of believers (e.g., elders exercising church discipline as described in Matt. 18:17).<sup>3</sup>

Due to these varied uses, Vos notes that providing a simple definition for "church" is not so simple. However, he does argue, in consonance

with Bannerman, that *ekklesia* can refer to “the local, visible church—thus, the gathering of believers who meet in a particular place or city” (Vos 2016, 19). Additionally, he argues from Acts 9:31 specifically and the general teaching of the New Testament, that there is a “collective meaning, so that it would stand for the union of a number of local churches in a certain region or country” (Vos 2016, 19–20).

“Presbyterians are prepared to prove,” Bannerman notes, that *ekklesia* “is frequently used in Scripture to denote a combination of more than one congregation, united together under a common government, administered by one body of elders associated for the purpose” (Bannerman 2015, 844). These usages have direct implications for how Presbyterians understand the organization of churches and mission, requiring further clarification of Presbyterianism itself.

### Presbyterians on Presbyterianism

Critical to establishing some level of coherence between Presbyterianism and Larsen’s DMM is describing what Presbyterianism is in terms of our narrow focus on church government.

Quarterman, in his PhD dissertation on Presbyterianism in missions, recognizes the difficulty in distinguishing between the “root principles” of Presbyterianism and “culturally determined areas” (2005, 277). Nevertheless, we must accept in principle a difference between the Presbyterianism’s essence and the particular shape it takes in unique historical contexts.<sup>4</sup> Despite this difficulty, Quarterman, drawing on Abraham Kuyper and others, provides a simple summary: “Presbyterianism is a system of church rule whereby Christ as the only Head rules spiritually through the joint leadership of elders as they associate with other churches” (2005, 49).<sup>5</sup>

Supporting this definition, Lucas frames the concept of Presbyterianism around authority (2025, 45–57). He notes that authority

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3. Baptists would challenge this understanding of Matt. 18:17. Presbyterians generally view “telling it to the church” as referring to elders as representing the church, particularly when connected to Matt. 16:19. My purpose here is not to defend these specific readings but merely to describe them. For the opposing view, see Leeman 2020, 84 and 138.

is mediated via Christ's rule through elders; through them, Christ exercises authority by their shepherding. This authority is exercised not individually but together as a group of elders and is focused on declaring doctrine, ordering worship, and exercising discipline.<sup>6</sup> Witherow suggests that the church has a plurality of elders as its leaders, that those elders are chosen by the people and confirmed by groups of other elders (a presbytery),<sup>7</sup> and that the people can appeal to that group of elders (2020, loc.844).

When comparing these various sources, we can see that the following elements seem to be clear elements of Presbyterianism, roughly adhering to the definition identified by Quarterman previously:

- Elders lead a community of believers together.
- Elders representing multiple communities are connected to oversee the broader church collectively.
- Communities of believers are connected as a broader church.
- Elders are chosen by the people over whom they exercise authority.
- Elders are confirmed by the community of elders.<sup>8</sup>

Considering these elements, can we describe Presbyterianism as "hierarchical" or "institutional"? As these terms are not clearly defined by

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2. "1. The whole body of the faithful 2. The whole body throughout the world of those that outwardly profess faith in Christ 3. The body of believers in any particular place, associated together in the worship of God 4. A number of congregations associated together under a common government 5. The body of professing believers in any place, as represented by their rulers and office-bearers" (Bannerman 2025, 14).

4. Presbyterians have typically distinguished here between *elements* (what is demanded by Scripture) and *circumstances*, which are "those things that are necessary for government to happen but are open to commonsense wisdom and local circumstance" (Lucas 2025, 44).

5. Quarterman expands this definition further: "The working definition may be stated in a fuller and more precise form: Presbyterianism is a system of church rule whereby Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the only Head who rules dynamically throughout the whole church, exercising his will normally through the joint spiritual leadership of elders, guiding them by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The recognition of this catholic unity in Christ inevitably calls forth practical expressions of connectionalism, association, and fellowship as the church by these means seeks to know and to do the will of Jesus Christ, her living Head" (Quarterman 2005, 50).

6. Lucas, 45-57. These constitute the headings under which Lucas explains Presbyterianism.

their critics, it is difficult to know if they would interpret these elements in those terms. Presbyterians would generally reject the term “hierarchical,” as it often refers to power being vested in individuals who exercise ecclesiastical authority. In the sense, however, that there are multiple levels of authority (local church, elders over all churches in a region), perhaps it is in view. Similarly, if by “institutional” critics mean structure that is established and through which authority is exercised, then Presbyterianism is clearly institutional. If the term targets the specific ways in which that structure is established culturally (e.g., educational requirements for ordination), then I acknowledge that Presbyterianism *often* reflects those characteristics. The point of this article, however, is to focus the discussion on the underlying principles rather than the specific applications.

### Presbyterians and Mission

Given Presbyterians’ insistence on a plurality of leaders, how does this relate to outward expansion efforts? Vos argues that the church is both the

(1) the company of believers (*coetus fidelium*)—that is, the manifestation of the body of Christ in visible form through the assembly of the individual members; (2) the mother of believers (*mater fidelium*)—that is, the matrix of the seed from which the church of the future grows. (Vos 2016, 75)

In other words, Presbyterians believe that the shape of *ekklesia* should support the expansion of *ekklesia*. However, a tension in Presbyterian thought is how to organize the expansion of the church into places where it does not yet exist without violating the core principles noted above. For example, before there are multiple leaders, how can

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8. The details of this may be handled differently in various Presbyterian denominations.

Depending on the specific role, the confirmation may come from the local body of elders (commonly referred to as a “session”) or to the regional body of elders (the presbytery).

7. A presbytery generally consists of the elders from churches in a geographic area. My own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, has 80+ presbyteries. For example, Metro Atlanta is a presbytery consisting of the elders of all PCA churches in the Atlanta area.

elders lead a community of believers together? If this is what Scripture demands, as Presbyterians argue, how does this operate in missions contexts?

Quarterman's dissertation answers that question in some detail, but for our purposes, we can simply describe his answers from Presbyterian missions history. The Presbyterian solution has been to ordain some elders as evangelists, who can exercise oversight temporarily until local leadership is established. As much as possible, plurality and connection are desired such that a temporary session (group of elders) can oversee a new body of believers until local leadership is established. The specific details of how this is managed vary culturally, but Quarterman notes that it was an attempt to structure Presbyterianism for mission while also holding to the accepted Presbyterian principles (2005, 185). There is another way that Presbyterians have historically recognized the necessity of transition periods. Until such time as local, plural leadership is established, churches are considered "mission churches." After leadership is established, they are termed "particular churches."<sup>9</sup>

The above relates to oversight of the mission, but Quarterman describes how Nevius also "counseled an immediate involvement of all people in active evangelism and Bible study, creating a sense of mission and urgency and a context of growth" (Quarterman 2005, 185). This natural expansion was supported in Nevius's work by unofficial leaders who continued the natural expansion "beyond the immediate group to those who can be reached through them" (Quarterman 2005, 185). In other words, the local, newly gathered groups of believers should also be replicating and growing, even before leaders from among them are fully raised up. Mission to new areas was through those sent out for that work with authority to oversee the development of new churches.<sup>10</sup>

Having described what Presbyterianism is and some dynamics related to missions, we now turn to Larsen's DMM approach.

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9. The precise terms used may vary among Presbyterians, but the concept is common.

## Defining Larsen's DMM Approach

### *Larsen on the Meaning of Ekklesia in Scripture*

Larsen's reflections on the nature of the *ekklesia* in Scripture fall into two categories: (1) foregrounded metaphors for the *ekklesia*, and (2) the range of how *ekklesia* is used in Scripture.

First, in conjunction with his Southeast Asian colleagues, Larsen foregrounds two metaphors: the *ekklesia* as (1) spiritual family (e.g., "household of faith" in Gal. 6:10) and as (2) expanding organism, by which he means the following: "What emerges in the biblical images is that *ekklesia* by nature is a living, growing organism, in the process of being built up and expanding. *Ekklesia* is expansive, not static, by nature because the gospel that produces it continuously adds more adherents, and this produces movements." In other words, *ekklesia* should be continually reproducing and growing because by its nature (family and organism) it is replicative.<sup>11</sup>

Larsen argues for three primary uses of *ekklesia* in the New Testament: (1) house *ekklesia*, which were smaller groups of believers (usually less than 20) who gathered regularly (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:19 refers to the "church in their house") (Larsen 2021, 217); (2) city *ekklesia*, which represented a collection of house *ekklesia* (e.g., the joint identity of the church in Rome from Romans 16) (Larsen 2021, 217); and finally (3) the regional *ekklesia* which was the collection of several city *ekklesia* (Larsen 2021, 219).

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10. How was this conceived as differing from other approaches? Quarterman (2005, 140) answers: "For example, while other evangelicals may plant house churches without a clearly defined authority structure, Presbyterians have the specific aim from the outset to strive for the clarity of Christ's authority through elders and for the interconnection of every Christian body. In this way, Presbyterians give expression to the headship of Christ alone and to the unity of his Body, with Christ not only carrying out his mission generally through the working of the Holy Spirit in every part of the Body, but also directing that work specifically through the leadership He has provided in ruling and teaching elders."

11. "Ekklesia in Samaria, Judea, Achaia, and Galilee were described as each having a regional identity (Acts 9:31; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:2) and each consisting of many city *ekklesia* (the churches of Galatia, 1 Cor. 16:19; the churches of Judea, Gal. 1:22)" (Larsen 2021, 218).

## ***Larsen on the Shape of Ekklesia***

Considering the three primary uses of *ekklesia* listed above, what is the shape of *ekklesia*? First, house churches are the “prominent feature of kingdom expansion” among UPGs (Larsen 2021, 226). In Southeast Asia, security concerns often require these house churches to remain small. The house churches have leaders raised up from among them, requiring the “constant and most urgent challenge”<sup>12</sup> of leadership development (2021, 226). House churches are linked together into a city or cluster church “led by a team of elders” (2021, 226). These elders “oversee the collection and use of a cluster purse, baptisms, the influence of the Word, and the Lord’s Supper” (2021, 226). Because larger gatherings pose security risks, the full cluster church meets together as one only when the elders determine it to be wise. Cluster leaders meet regularly for mutual support, oversight, and leadership development, including visiting one another’s groups to build relational trust.

“*Ekklesia* in Samaria, Judea, Achai, and Galilee were described as each having a regional identity (Acts 9:31; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:2) and each consisting of many city *ekklesia* (the churches of Galatia, 1 Cor. 16:19; the churches of Judea, Gal. 1:22)” (Larsen 2021, 218).

## ***Larsen on the Social Structures of Ekklesia***

Arising from the above understanding of *ekklesia*’s meaning in Scripture, Larsen (2021, 224) describes how *ekklesia* is socially structured in his context in Southeast Asia. He summarizes in three points:

1. *Ekklēsia* is a living organism with two interdependent wings: apostolic teams and multiple local *ekklēsia*.
2. *Ekklēsia* is an expanding network, linking God’s family at three levels.
3. Both wings of *ekklēsia* are led by teams of leaders. (Larsen 2021, 224)

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12.

He describes how those social structures work together towards the expansion of the church:

This mission team catalyzes the formation of many house churches, linking them so that each is joined to a “cluster church” of ten to fifteen home groups. Likewise, each cluster church is joined to a “small region church” of three or more linked clusters. And they work to connect each cluster church to a “wide region church” of three or more linked small region churches. Apostolic teams set multiplication of small groups into the DNA of movements: small groups that study the Bible inductively, pray, and serve one another and their community. They establish the fruit by linking house churches into clusters, under teams of local elders. They develop teams of leaders over each cluster church and over each regional church. The leadership teams they equip oversee increasingly larger sets of believer groups, as these movements multiply. (Larsen 2021, 224)

How do the initial house churches become established? As natural groups begin to discuss spiritual topics, they become discovery groups. A discovery group “becomes a mini group when one or two of the local people in the discovery group become believers,” with that mini group becoming a “believer group when three or more locals believe” (Larsen 2020, 62). It is those believer groups with the DNA of reproduction that are linked together into an ekklesia cluster.

With regard to development of local leaders, Larsen (drawing on Acts 14:23) argues that the mission teams in Acts followed a regular pattern of “transferring leadership of a newly established city ekklēsia from the mission team to local elders within one year of people hearing the gospel” (2021, 221). Larsen describes a process in which those choosing them are led through inductive studies of the qualifications of elders in the New Testament (2020, 292). Cluster leaders (elders) must fit those qualifications, be fruitful, and be chosen. An additional step is the

agreement of the cluster’s mentor, providing external confirmation and validation.

Additionally, Larsen draws on Acts 15 to support the practice in their movement of a “multi-region leadership team” meeting quarterly for several days to “jointly tackle challenges, discuss the Bible, and mutually support one another in a strong brotherhood” (2021, 228). In other words, the leaders are linked at each level to provide oversight to the believers.

## Comparing Presbyterianism to Larsen

Having described both Presbyterianism and Larsen’s DMM, we can now review the essentials of Presbyterianism to see what aligns with Larsen (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Presbyterian Elements Aligned with Larsen.*

<b>Presbyterian Element</b>	<b>Presence of Element in Larsen</b>
(1) Elders lead a community of believers together	Clearly present; however, the group that the elders oversee rarely, if ever, meets as one congregation.
(2) Elders representing multiple communities are connected to oversee the broader church collectively	Clearly present
(3) Communities of believers are connected as a broader church	Clearly present
(4) Elders are chosen by the people over whom they exercise authority	Present, but group facilitators may choose the elders, but as group facilitators are chosen by members, the representative element is still present
(5) Elders are confirmed by the community of elders	Present in concept; in practice, the confirmation may be only from one “mentor” rather than the body of elders

To the above, we can also add that in terms of how expansion to new unreached places proceeds, both also encourage teams of leaders to be involved as much as possible, with Presbyterians providing specific guard rails when a plurality is temporarily impossible. It is unclear in Larsen's writings if the "apostolic teams" are accountable to the local *ekklesia* from which they come. If so, this would parallel how "evangelists" operate within Presbyterianism. If they operate separately, then this would contradict how ecclesial authority is structured in Presbyterianism.

With these parallels in mind, I argue that Larsen's movement approach reflects enough Presbyterian emphases that we might consider it a version of Presbyterianism, with a few caveats.

First, this does not mean that Larsen's DMM approach mirrors the *practical outworking* of most Presbyterian denominations today. Quarterman indicates that one of the largest challenges for Presbyterians in missions is that since the practical outworking of Presbyterian principles has developed over time with context-specific rules, it is challenging when expanding into new contexts to separate the context-driven applications of essential principles from the principles themselves. Further, I recognize that much of the concern from DMM advocates towards Presbyterian (and most other institutional ecclesiologies) has to do with those specific applications which seem restrictive to multiplication, such as educational requirements for ordination. Nonetheless, my purpose here is to argue that Presbyterianism is a specific type of ecclesiology that operates by essential principles, rather than the specific applications made in the West. Those essential principles of Presbyterian church government are reflected to a large extent in Larsen's movement ecclesiology.

Second, this does not mean that Larsen's DMM approach comprehensively embodies all principles connected to Presbyterianism, only the simple summary principles of Presbyterian structure as identified above.<sup>13</sup> I am not attempting to defend that Presbyterians

should or even could affirm all of Larsen's model, only that the overlap between Larsen's DMM and Presbyterianism is significant enough to say that, in terms of organization and oversight, they mirror each other in many underlying principles.

## Implications and Directions for Further Study

Having established the significant resonance between Larsen's DMM and the essence of Presbyterianism, we can draw out some implications for the state of the movement conversation in missiology, for movement advocates, and for Presbyterians and others in the Reformed world.

### *Implications for the Movement Conversation*

First, to advance the conversation, we need constructive engagement between streams of thought that do not normally interact. As noted in the introduction, much of the disagreement in the movement conversation fails to engage at the level of specifics. By attending carefully to specifics rather than broad generalizations, we may find areas of agreement and thereby be able to isolate more carefully the areas of disagreement.

Second, to advance the conversation, we need more theological discussion between movement advocates and critics. Simply dismissing "legacy" approaches as enamored with tradition without listening to the underlying theological guiding principles will not gain movement advocates an ear with Presbyterians or others steeped in historic theological traditions. Engaging at a theological level will enable the conversation to move forward. Similarly, dismissing all CPM/DMM approaches by claiming that they think the Bible is silent on how churches should be led does not allow for the theological engagement with what they are actually saying.

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13. It is obvious even from the terminology used, that different metaphors are foregrounded: family and organism versus government. Further, space did not allow for exploring a key element of Presbyterian ecclesiology: the marks of the church. Its absence does not reflect a denial of their importance. This article is focused on the question of structure and its relation to multiplication.

## *Implications for Movement Advocates*

First, movement advocates should recognize value in the history of theological reflection on the church. While I too am excited by the increasing numbers of people, particularly in Muslim UPGs, who are coming to faith in recent decades, we can recognize the value of theological tradition that has reflected on the church in other contexts, many of which also went through seasons of persecution.<sup>14</sup> The resemblance between Presbyterianism and the patterns of church leadership in Larsen's associated movements suggests that such movements may benefit from engaging historic reflections that reached similar conclusions.

Second, movement practitioners should pay attention to those like Larsen who have reflected biblically on the meaning of church and what it means practically. While the argument of this article points to movement advocates who have reflected on ecclesiology, my experience suggests that not all movement advocates and practitioners on the ground are conversant with that type of thinking. This leads to approaches which, on the surface at least, can give the impression that leadership and oversight are not valued. Larsen's approach challenges that, and as a Presbyterian, I would argue that our theological traditions may also further enrich thinking through how to combine biblical principles on church government with pioneer evangelistic contexts.

Third, some aspects of what Larsen describes sound as if a smaller, hierarchical group does (or at least could) develop, which would violate core Presbyterian principles. If elders over a cluster of "house ekklesia" are not chosen by the members of those house ekklesia—which would be difficult since the full number rarely if ever gathers—then it seems possible that this small group of elders could have significant influence and authority over those who do not have close knowledge of them. Similarly, if the mission teams operate apart from the oversight of the

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14. For example, consider John Knox's (2015, 133–39) letter addressed to persecuted Scottish believers. What he advises is not dissimilar to the shape of discovery Bible studies.

sending bodies, then it seems possible that something more like a plural bishopric is established. Closer knowledge of how things actually operate in Larsen's model might resolve this concern, but on the surface, this seems like both a theological and a practical concern.

### ***Implications for Presbyterians and Other Reformed Practitioners***

First, we should examine the practices in Larsen's DMM to find help in working out our Presbyterian principles in UPG contexts without imposing the particular applications arising from our Presbyterian history. The distinction between Presbyterian essence and particular circumstantial application is not new; many historic Presbyterians, Nevius and Bannerman included, recognized this and sought to maintain that essence while also adapting to the realities of gospel advance. Today, the movement conversation is an opportunity for us to re-investigate that distinction with humility, learning from Larsen and others in the process.

Second, given that Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists clearly have ecclesiological differences, and given that much of the strident anti-CPM/DMM sentiment has come from Reformed Baptists, we should carefully discuss how our underlying ecclesiological differences affect our reading of the movement conversation. Obviously, the critiques of movements go beyond the issues of church government addressed in this article. Still, as Reformed Baptists do not believe that *ekklesia* can be applied to anything beyond one local congregation that meets together, it makes sense that they would object to Larsen's approach on those grounds.<sup>15</sup> Because of that, we should be careful to discuss our underlying presuppositions to better understand what is shaping our perspectives. We may not agree, but at least we can bring to the surface the root ideas guiding our perspectives in the movement conversation.

Third, and more practically, Presbyterians can consider applying two aspects of Larsen's model in our own Presbyterianism. First, we can

consider developing additional categories prior to “mission church.” We recognize that groups of believers who gather before they have their own local elders are *ekklesia*, but we designate them with “mission” status until they have their own local elders. There is some parallel in Larsen in how mission teams operate in establishing fruit in new areas, though not described in the same ways. As noted, Larsen uses categories of discovery group, mini group, and then believing group. After believing groups form, the goal is to weave them into the cluster of believing groups which together form *ekklesia* overseen by elders. What Larsen contributes here is additional categories of seeking the salvation of unbelievers in UPGs through the witness of ordinary believers as a prior step before “mission church.” Secondly, because the effort of elders focuses on the growth and multiplication of the small groups, an intentional peer-coaching process is used in leaders’ meetings. Presbyterians do of course discuss church planting as part of presbytery (regional elder) meetings. Various types of formal and informal support related to ministry efforts also happen as part of those meetings. However, this intentional focus on the multiplication of believing groups among previously unbelieving communities as part of leaders’ meetings could contribute powerful mission focus to presbytery (and session) meetings.

## Conclusion

Conflict in the movement conversation often centers around ecclesiology. Movement advocates claim that “hierarchical and institutional” ecclesiologies inhibit movements, while movement critics claim that CPM and DMM approaches lack sufficient ecclesiology. To address those claims, I have compared the essential principles of Presbyterianism with the movement approach articulated by Trevor Larsen, highlighting the convergence between the two.

Based on this connection, I argue that Presbyterian ecclesiology, with its multi-level system of oversight by a plurality of elders, does not

*inherently* inhibit movements. Further, I have shown that some versions of DMM/CPM do indeed have an articulated ecclesiology. Taken together, the ecclesiology of Presbyterianism, including the clear institutional structure and multiple levels of oversight, can potentially support the organic multiplication desired by DMM.

I conclude this theological article with a brief personal reflection. As someone working in a people group that has not seen significant gospel breakthrough in 1,400 years, how do these insights affect my work practically? In the early stage, many of my activities resemble those of other DMM practitioners. I sow broadly and focus on inviting groups of people into participatory studies of the Word. I aim, imperfectly, at giving as much ownership as possible early on. I encourage people to share what they are learning from God's word—and how they are changing—with their existing social networks. I have not yet had the privilege of witnessing the fruit that Larsen describes but pray and long for it. I ask myself if specific assumptions from my (ecclesial) cultural background may inhibit multiplication. But I also accept that my Presbyterian convictions will guide the development and maturation of the fruit differently than others. Quarterman summarizes how this may differ as the work progresses:

For example, while other evangelicals may plant house churches without a clearly defined authority structure, Presbyterians have the specific aim from the outset to strive for the clarity of Christ's authority through elders and for the interconnection of every Christian body. In this way, Presbyterians give expression to the headship of Christ alone and to the unity of his Body, with Christ not only carrying out his mission generally through the working of the Holy Spirit in every part of the Body, but also directing that work specifically through the

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15. See for example Leeman's (2020) argument against multisite and multi-service church models. He argues that even having two services violates the biblical understanding of *ekklesia* as assembling in one location.

leadership He has provided in ruling and teaching elders. (Quarterman 2005, 144)

At our stage of the work, how does this influence our activity? First, I try to, as much as possible, make decisions jointly with other elders on our team rather than alone. As groups come to faith, I want them to see that I am not an episcopal bishop making decisions but submit to a plurality of leadership. Second, even in early-stage groups, I aim to release them to organize, to facilitate discussions, and even start new groups. Through this, I want to identify who may become informal leaders, with the prayer that some will be established later as elders.

## Questions for Conversation

1. What have your experiences been with hierarchical and/or movement ecclesiologies? How have they shaped your current ecclesiology?
2. What do you find most helpful about the author's comparison of Presbyterian ecclesiology and Larsen's DMM ecclesiology? Do you agree with the author that both groups have something to learn through constructive (rather than conflictual) dialogue?
3. In your view, what are the non-negotiable, transcultural biblical principles related to church (and elder) leadership? What are the aspects of leadership which Scripture gives freedom for diverse expressions and applications of its teaching?

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# Movements 2.0: Stewarding the Pain and Promise of Movements to Christ in the Next Generations

By Patrick Brittenden and Soroush Sadeghzadeh

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## Introduction: Living in the Tension of Promise and Pain

We live in remarkable times. Across the Muslim world, in regions that for centuries seemed impervious to the gospel, new communities of Christ-followers are taking root. What once looked like isolated conversions has become a discernible pattern of multiplication. North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian world, Central Asia, South Asia, and Europe's diasporas all tell the same story in different accents: men and women from Muslim backgrounds are finding Christ, forming

communities, and embodying the gospel in ways that are creative, courageous, and costly.

For many of us, this moment feels like stepping into the book of Acts. There is so much joy in seeing movements spread through kinship networks, through digital connections, through refugee camps, and through prison walls. We are astonished at the speed with which small fellowships reproduce, and we are grateful that the church's prayers, sown over decades, are bearing visible fruit. But there is also pain. First-generation believers often pay a terrible price. They lose family, livelihood, social honour, and sometimes their lives. And as these movements mature, the questions they face are no longer those of conversion but of continuity.

What happens when the children of these first believers grow up? How does faith take root in a family, in a marriage, and in a community under pressure? What does pastoral care look like when your elders have been scattered by persecution? How do we form leaders who can sustain communities for the long haul, rather than simply respond to crisis? These are the questions of what we are calling "Movements 2.0"—the second chapter of the story that began with extraordinary awakenings and is now pressing toward maturity.

These questions occupy our prayers and work. Our partnership exists to amplify the wisdom of believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs), curating their experience so that the global church might learn from their insights. Our distinct vocation is to make BMB voices and perspectives a theological resource for the whole church. We are convinced that the story of God's work among Muslims will only be told truthfully when told with the voices of those who live it.

Hikma's partnership in the Motus Dei network, and our participation (Pat and Soroush) in its recent "MQ Symposium" (May 2025),<sup>1</sup> sharpened this conviction. At that gathering, leaders from every continent reflected

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1. "MQ" for the conference organizers refers to "movemental intelligence," comparable to "IQ", or "EQ" ("emotional quotient") with respect to emotional intelligence.

on the maturing of movements. Scholars, missionaries, and BMBs spoke candidly about the promise and pain of this moment. We listened as movement leaders described the challenges of leadership transition, of pastoral care for those suffering trauma, of family life under persecution, and of the haunting reality that some believers fall away. One breakout group at MQ wrestled with the painful and perplexing topic of “reversion”—BMBs returning to Islam—and in that room we encountered a vital corrective to careless statistics and alarmist narratives. Those conversations pushed us to be both more honest and more hopeful. The room felt lighter when one BMB leader said quietly, “We are not statistics. We are sons and daughters who stumble, who fall, and who are raised again.”

This article is written from a space between honesty and hope. We write in the first-person plural because the concerns we raise are communal—shared by many leaders, and best answered, we believe, together. Our aim is not to present an exhaustive programmatic manual but to contribute to a reflective and practical conversation: to describe the Movement 2.0 challenges, to highlight what Hikma brings to the table, to present preliminary research on discipling journeys among BMBs, to interrogate the popular reversion narrative, and to offer concrete reasons for the global church to invest deeply in the second generation. We will weave in voices and findings from our research and from the MQ Symposium breakout discussions, especially where those conversations correct widely repeated but largely unsupported claims.

We do not pretend to have all the answers. What we do have is testimony from those who have paid a price for their faith and who, through suffering and perseverance, have gathered spiritual and practical wisdom. If the church will take this wisdom seriously — bringing it into conversation with practitioners, scholars, and pastors from other contexts — we may move more confidently from initial conversion to enduring, generational discipleship.

## The Meaning and Importance of Movements 2.0

When David Garrison first published *A Wind in the House of Islam* (2014), the world of mission was electrified. Here was evidence that entire networks of Muslims were coming to faith—something that had seemed impossible a century earlier. Garrison chronicled dozens of Church-Planting Movements (CPMs) characterised by rapid multiplication, indigenous leadership, and evangelistic fervour. His tone was not triumphalist but awestruck. God was doing something new, and few had eyes to see it.

Yet even in that early optimism, Garrison foresaw the next challenge. If the first task was to recognise the movement, the second would be to shepherd it toward maturity. In the session that we co-presented with him at the MQ Symposium, David Garrison spoke of Movements 2.0—the reality that initial growth must be followed by deep formation. Movements do not simply need to start; they need to endure.

Garrison's reflections form a crucial backdrop to the challenges of Movements 2.0. Indeed, our (Pat) first engagement with the Motus Dei network in its inaugural conference (1-3 October 2020) and our contribution—alongside another mature In BMB leader, Rania Mostofi—resulted in the co-authoring of the chapter entitled "Movements in Iran and Algeria: The Second-Generation Challenge" in, *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations* (2021). So, in a very real sense, these Movements 2.0 challenges shape our ministry and are our particular contribution to the Motus Dei network.

At the recent MQ Symposium, David Garrison described our moment as "New Testament times," echoing Paul's description of yeast working its way through dough. There is ferment and vitality, but also the heat of persecution and the danger of distortion. For Garrison, the most pressing question is not only whether God is moving, but whether the church is learning. His warning was clear: the church can celebrate numbers while neglecting the souls behind them. If movements are to

become mature expressions of the body of Christ, they require patient discipleship, robust theology, and resilient community life.

Garrison also exhorted those present at MQ about the importance of this knowledge circulating *within* the global church. “The body of Christ must learn from the body of Christ,” he said—a statement that cuts across the old hierarchies of sending and receiving. The experience of believers under persecution, their theology of suffering and perseverance, and their creative expressions of community are treasures for the wider church. If we ignore them, we impoverish ourselves.

Movements 2.0, then, is not merely a phase or strategy but a call to deeper ecclesiology. It asks how movements become more ecclesially traditioned, how converts become disciples, how disciples become elders and leaders, and how communities become families of faith. It asks how the Spirit’s fire can be stewarded into lasting light.

## **Amplifying BMB Voices and Sharing Wisdom: BMB Voices on Marriage**

Converts from Islam are often seen as case studies instead of valued members of Christ’s body. Their testimonies are frequently filtered through Western mission strategies rather than acknowledged as contributions to understanding God and his Word. To reshape this dynamic, our aim has been to create spaces for BMB leaders to share their insight. We have learned that real contextualisation does not mean trimming sound doctrine but discovering what biblical truth sounds like in a new key. A concrete example is our partnership’s work on BMB marriages, where theology and culture intersect. We launched online forums in April 2023, followed by an expert panel in February 2024. This led to a course-writing team developing a BMB marriage course, expected to be completed by 2026, and an edited book reflecting on challenges in BMB marriages, to be published in 2026. What we discovered in this research about marriage in BMB contexts is instructive for Movements 2.0 more broadly.

Firstly, marriage touches simultaneously on legal, pastoral, and theological questions. For example, how do we understand covenant versus contract in contexts where civil registration, tribal identity, and Islamic family law complicate Christian marital norms? In some contexts, polygamy reappears among early converts, raising urgent pastoral questions about justice, conversion, and witness. We found BMB leaders wrestling with the theology of singleness and celibacy in contexts where marriage is inseparable from social survival.

Secondly, pastoral issues are acute. Leaders reported cases of coercive behaviour, domestic abuse, and the trans-generational transfer of trauma. Many BMBs carry the scars of war, displacement, or prior abusive family systems. Discipleship that ignores such embodied pain will be brittle. Thirdly, legal status creates structural vulnerability. In Egypt, a BMB woman's choice to marry a Christian can entail legal and social impossibility. In Iran, registration ambiguities make custody, inheritance, and civil recognition fraught. Practical ministry in these environments requires legal literacy as much as theological formation.

The marriage project showed us the shape of Movement 2.0 ministry: multidisciplinary, long-haul, and deeply incarnational. This method highlighted the value of bringing BMB leaders around the table, developing local materials (rather than defaulting to translated templates), and producing outputs that are both academic and pastoral. This project has taught us what Movement 2.0 work looks like in practice. It is slow, dialogical, and embodied. It requires lawyers and pastors, sociologists and theologians, men and women sitting together to discern how to live faithfully under pressure. Above all, it requires trust—the courage to share pain and to believe that God can turn it into wisdom for others.

Through initiatives like this, Hikma has become a bridge between lived experience and missiological reflection. We are discovering, alongside BMB leaders, what sustainable discipleship looks like when the church is young, scattered, and under scrutiny.

## Amplifying BMB Voices and Sharing Wisdom: Listening to Discipling Journeys

Another window into Movement 2.0 issues comes from some preliminary research we embarked on regarding discipling journeys among BMBs in Tunisia, Egypt, Indonesia, and Afghanistan, which we (Soroush) shared at the MQ Symposium. The purpose of this preliminary research project was to investigate some of the ways that are proving useful in equipping BMBs in discipleship towards maturity and ministry within BMB church contexts. Each of these majority-Muslim contexts has its own texture, yet the interviews revealed striking commonalities. We interviewed seven participants (five male, two female) from five different nations, working in five different contexts. Five were BMBs, one Christian from a majority-Muslim nation, and one believer from the Global North working among BMBs in majority nations for several decades.

Every respondent described discipleship as relational rather than programmatic. It is “life-on-life” formation—a shared walk rather than a syllabus. One Tunisian leader explained, “We start discipling from the first day, not after conversion. The journey of faith and the journey of learning are the same.” This echoes Jesus’ invitation, not to a class but to a road: “Come, follow me” (Matt. 4:19 and Mark 1:17). The leaders also emphasised the power of contextual authenticity. Locally written materials—whether a catechism in Tunisian dialect or a Bible study framed through local proverbs—connect more deeply than imported ones. Language, humour, and imagery all shape how truth is received. What outsiders sometimes perceive as syncretism is often simply the gospel translated into the cultural idiom of hospitality, family, and honour.

Security realities have also formed the character of discipleship. Small groups are not only safer but spiritually fertile. In one Indonesian fellowship, house groups gather secretly in different locations each week, combining worship with mutual accountability. The pattern has produced strong bonds and, in many places—though not all—spontaneous multiplication. Interestingly, persecution seems to have

reintroduced the early church's rhythm of home fellowship and itinerant teaching. Across a range of contexts, leaders highlighted the need for integration between spiritual and practical life. Discipleship that does not address marriage, work, and social pressure remains fragile. A leader in Egypt told us, "We need materials that teach how to live under pressure—how to forgive, how to endure, how to hope." In other words, discipleship is not an escape from reality but a deeper immersion into it with Christ.

Perhaps the most profound finding was how maturity is measured. Success, in these communities, does not appear to be counted in numbers but in continuity and resilience. The marks of growth are perseverance under pressure, leadership that reproduces itself, and the emergence of second and third generations of believers. The very existence of BMB Christian families—parents raising children who have never known Islam—is a sign of theological revolution.

These findings are preliminary but revealing. They suggest that movements are healthiest when discipleship is holistic, contextual, and relational. They also underscore the importance of long-term accompaniment: the kind of mentorship that outlasts crises and cultivates depth.

## Rethinking the Reversion Narrative

During a breakout discussion facilitated by one of the Motus Dei MQ Symposium core leadership team, Dave Coles, some fascinating and somewhat surprising insights arose on the topic of reversion. In almost every training course on evangelism or church planting among Muslims, someone repeats the same grim statistic: that 80 or 90 percent of Muslim-background believers eventually revert to Islam. The figure, often attributed to the "Camel Method" popularised by Kevin Greeson, has gained the status of fact. Yet when it was examined more closely, during our discussion, BMB leaders and mission practitioners robustly challenged this "myth" with both evidence and experience.

Firstly, no reliable research appears to support the claim. It rests on anecdote and hearsay, not any kind of longitudinal study. In fact, many of us who have walked with BMBs for decades can testify that the majority persevere. Yes, some drift or recant under duress, but others return quietly to faith when circumstances change. One Iranian leader described how believers who were forced to sign public renunciations later rejoined the church in secret: “We think they are lost, but God keeps them in his hand.”

Secondly, the statistic misreads the problem. Where attrition occurs, it usually points to inadequate discipleship structures rather than defective faith. If converts are isolated, unsupported, or shamed for weakness, they are left vulnerable. The issue might therefore be more pastoral than statistical.

Third, in our discussion, some pointed out that the narrative itself causes harm. When outsiders assume most will fall away, they invest in speed rather than depth, celebrating conversions but neglecting care. It creates a culture of cynicism where believers are treated as disposable. One participant in the MQ discussion said, “If you expect failure, you build failure.”

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the reversion narrative forgets grace. In Scripture, even Peter denied Christ publicly, yet was restored and became a pillar of the church. Why should modern believers be treated differently? BMB leaders at the symposium called for a theology of restoration: a church culture that welcomes back the wounded and walks with them until faith is rekindled.

In Hikma we have resolved to challenge the careless use of statistics and to advocate for longitudinal, contextual research that tells the fuller story. We also want to normalise restoration as part of discipleship, not its failure. Falling and rising again is part of following Jesus.

An experienced North African BMB brother and colleague has carried out a piece of research titled “Closing the Back Doors.” The research

investigates the question of reversion, seeking to draw on the experience of BMBs. The preliminary observations of the research revealed that although not all the 56 participants (from 14 nationalities of origin, based in 15 countries) are currently part of a worshipping community, they would all consider themselves as followers of Christ. Seventy percent of participants have been followers of Jesus for five years or more. We are personally aware of some individuals who declined to complete the questionnaire due to the very painful nature of their experiences of trying to connect with churches. They did not want to revisit this pain, although they continue to be followers of Christ.

## Stories That Teach

That MQ Symposium's breakout discussion overflowed with stories—some painful, others enlightening. Each one, in its own way, illuminated what Movements 2.0 entails. We heard of a young North African woman thrust into leadership before she was ready. Her zeal was mistaken for maturity, and when persecution came, she buckled under the weight. Without mentorship or community support, she withdrew, convinced she had failed God. Yet years later, with pastoral accompaniment, she returned, stronger and gentler. Her story reminds us that leadership must grow slowly, like roots before fruit. We heard of a man who publicly recanted under pressure while his fellowship looked on in silence. They did not know how to respond. The shame of his denial became a mirror for their own fear. Later, through tears, they realised they had abandoned him when he most needed love. Out of that repentance came a ministry of restoration for others who had fallen.

Another story came from Southeast Asia. Conversions there often begin with dreams of Jesus or miraculous healings. These encounters ignite faith but can leave believers vulnerable to disillusionment when suffering returns. "The fire burns bright," one pastor said, "but it needs the oil of Scripture and community to keep burning." Perhaps the most poignant moment came when an Iranian believer described feeling "orphaned twice"—rejected by his Muslim family, then never fully

accepted by Christians who viewed him as exotic. His words silenced the room. They exposed how cultural barriers within the church can wound as deeply as persecution from outside.

Yet amid the pain came also glimpses of resurrection. One house church in North Africa began hosting weekly “restoration nights,” inviting those who had drifted away. Through prayer and patient friendship, several returned. “We stopped seeing them as failures,” a leader said, “and started seeing them as our story.”

These vignettes reveal the texture of Movement 2.0: fragile beginnings, costly perseverance, and the slow miracle of restoration. They teach us that discipleship is never linear, and that the church’s greatest witness may lie not in perfection but in grace.

## The Way Forward

If the first chapter of the movement story was about breakthrough, the second must be about building. The need now is for depth, stability, and family. Movements will endure not by refining strategy but by embodying love. This means apprenticing new believers through years of mentoring, forming communities that care for marriages and children, training leaders to handle Scripture wisely, and creating churches that are hospitable to those who have failed.

It also means rethinking how we measure success. Numbers of baptisms or fellowships tell only part of the story. The true test is whether communities can sustain faith under pressure, raise the next generation, and contribute to the wider body of Christ. For international partners, this requires patience and funding long-term formation rather than quick reports. For seminaries and training institutions, it means welcoming BMB theologians as peers and allowing their insights on suffering, family, and community to reshape the curriculum.

## Conclusion: Hope for the Long Road

The phenomenon of Muslim movements to Christ is one of the great chapters of our story—a story of God’s mercy at work. Yet his mercy also brings responsibility. The ferment we witness today could, without care, dissipate into disappointment. Or, if stewarded with wisdom and patience, it could become one of the church’s most enduring gifts to the world.

We have attempted in this article to speak both frankly and constructively. We have acknowledged that movements to Christ among Muslims are real and remarkable—that is the promise. We have also insisted that movements’ endurance will not be automatic; it requires careful theological reflection, hard pastoral work, and long-term investment—that is the pain and the challenge.

Movements 2.0 is not a crisis to be managed but a calling to maturity. It invites us to trade triumphalism for faithfulness, statistics for stories, speed for depth. It calls the global church to humility—to learn from BMB brothers and sisters whose theology has been forged in fire. The task ahead is long. It will require churches that know how to be family, leaders who know how to mentor, and partners who know how to wait. It will require us to normalise restoration, to reject the myth of mass failure or of silver bullet strategy that can solve all the problems movements face. It will also move us to see every conversion and even re-conversion, every reconciliation, as another chapter in God’s patient story of grace.

To those who have laboured among Muslims for years: we want to say thank you. Your experience is a treasure—full of pain and glory, of failures and resurrection. To those newer in this field: welcome. Be prepared to be both exhilarated and humbled. And to the broader church and funding partners: please do not treat Movement 2.0 as a problem to be solved with a three-point plan. It is kingdom development requiring decades of faithful stewardship.

If we choose to respond in humility—listening to BMB leaders, supporting long-term formation, normalising restoration, and rejecting sensational statistics — the future is hopeful indeed. The “new wing” of God’s household, which we are privileged to witness, need not be fragile (Brittenden and Ghulam 2024, 249–250). With wise, patient investment in discipleship, leadership, family life, and community care, it can become a robust, dynamic part of the global body—the church that both suffers and rejoices, that perseveres and multiplies, that is formed by the cross and fuelled by resurrection hope.

At Hikma, we remain convinced that the future is hopeful. The same Spirit who began this work is faithful to complete it. The new wing being built in God’s household is not temporary scaffolding or a quaint temporary annex; it is part of the dwelling where all his people belong. If we will walk together in humility and endurance—BMBs and non-BMBs, scholars and practitioners, sending and receiving churches—we may yet see what the Master Builder had in mind all along: a global church more beautiful for its diversity, more resilient for its suffering, and more radiant in its witness.

In our commitment to walk this long road with our BMB brothers and sisters, we will continue to curate their wisdom, host conversations, and resource the formation of disciples who can stand. Our hope and prayer is that the global church would increasingly join in to listen, to learn, and to labour for a future in which movements to Christ are not fleeting flames but permanent lamps lighting the world.

The pain is real, but so is the promise. The question is whether we, together, are willing to stay long enough for the yeast to finish its work.

## Questions for Conversation

1. The authors begin their article speaking about “living the tension of promise and pain.” How does this phrase resonate with you?

2. What were your understanding and opinions about church-planting movements before reading this article? How did the article influence your perspective about church-planting movements going forward?
3. The authors advocate listening to the wisdom of local believers (e.g., of Muslim background) in understanding and addressing the discipleship and ecclesiological challenges they face. What are some practical ways to amplify the voices of believers of Muslim (or other) backgrounds to shape your approach to ministry?

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The background image shows a group of people, likely women, in a rural setting. They are wearing traditional head coverings and carrying large bundles on their heads. The scene is set in a field with trees in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange-red filter and a repeating pattern of white, slanted rectangular dashes.

# Continuing Conversations

# Money Matters: Perspectives from Africa and India

By Seedbed (with David Yebuah and A.K. Mehta)

*David Yebuah is an area leader in Africa with a global Christian organization. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication from Regent University, Virginia, and a Master's degree in NGOs, Social Policy, and Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science. With over two decades of ministry experience, Dr. Yebuah integrates theological reflection, cross-cultural engagement, creativity, and strategic leadership in missions across Africa. He is passionate about equipping the next generation of leaders and advancing the gospel through innovative media and values-driven partnerships such as the Koinonia Economy and Kingdom-inspired resource sharing.*

*A.K. Mehta (pseudonym) is a follower of Jesus from a Hindu background. He and his wife serve underserved communities across North India, focusing on developing local leaders and helping them build organizations and callings rooted in their own cultural and community contexts. Having spent nearly half of his adult life in the United States, including graduate studies there, A.K. brings a cross-cultural perspective to his work. He is involved in house-fellowship and disciple-making movements among the least reached and is passionate about fostering financial sustainability and entrepreneurship as integral to long-term local transformation.*



In the **September 2025** issue of *Seedbed*, two practitioners from Africa & India highlighted the complex challenges involved in "money matters" in **The Koinonia Economy: Reimagining Resource Sharing for Frontline Missions** (David Yebuah), and **Financial, Biblical, and Cultural Formation of Indigenous Leaders: An Interview with a Hindu-Heritage Follower of Jesus** (A.K. Mehta).

In December 2025, *Seedbed* hosted an online conversation with these two leaders, going deeper into their stories and honing in their different

proposals for how to wisely steward the resources of Caesar for the kingdom of Christ in least reached communities.

Click below to listen in on this illuminating conversation engaging a sensitive, difficult topic from diverse approaches and cultural perspectives.

## **Money Matters: Perspectives from Africa and India (Part 1 of 2) (50 min)**

- Tell us how your upbringing in your country, and your later education in the West, shaped you into the people you are today.
- What does it look like to train leaders to be culturally relevant and respectful in their Indian families and cultures?
- What is the tension between "the promise and the pain of how we share resources" which drove you to write your article?
- What is the "Koinonia Economy" and how does it differ from current economic realities?
- How does local sustainability and learning one's own living help local leaders cultivate respect and credibility in their witness for Jesus in their community?
- What is the difference between "dependency" and "interdependency" within the global body of Christ?

## **Money Matters: Perspectives from Africa and India (Part 2 of 2) (42 min)**

- What was the most helpful insight you gained from the other person's article? What is one question you have for the other person?
- What role does the caste system play in an emphasis on self-sustainability in India?
- What does "Koinonia Economy" look like practically in a context in which receiving outside financial support might jeopardise community credibility?

- What does it look like to pursue a vision both for local indigenous generosity (Acts 2) and healthy participation in the global family of God (2 Corinthians 8-9)?
- Are there local churches and resources in Africa and India with the capacity and generosity to sustain national churches?
- How do you navigate power dynamics within interdependent relationships?
- What is the role of discipling both givers and receivers in kingdom finance?



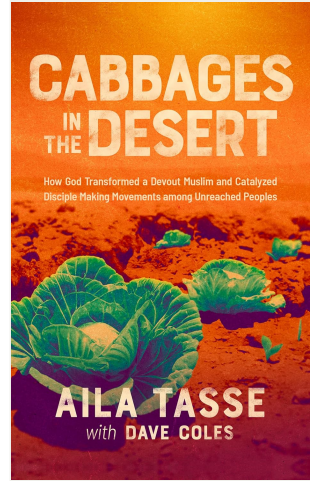
# Book Reviews

# Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements among Unreached Peoples

Aila Tasse with Dave Coles. Beyond. 2024. 320 pages.

Reviewed by Frank Preston

*Frank Preston (pseudonym) earned his PhD from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin. His research interest is in the confluence of media and cell group formation in social movements. He is part of the Media to Movements team (teams that have launched a media strategy). He and his wife Linda have served with Pioneers for over 30 years.*



*Cabbages in the Desert* is a testimonial case study of how God used the author in launching a church planting movement<sup>1</sup> among Muslims and traditional religions in East Africa. The book serves dual purposes: it chronicles Tasse's personal journey and provides practical lessons that readers can apply to their own ministry contexts. This combination of

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1. Tasse defined Church Planting Movements as, a Disciple Making Movement, with a rapid multi-generational self-replication of disciples, leaders, churches, and networks in a region or population segment that continues to multiply itself into a movement, until the whole world is reached and discipled for Jesus.

personal narrative and practical application makes it particularly valuable for those engaged in cross-cultural ministry work.

Cabbages is part of a series of books influenced by New Generations, an international Christian ministry, with earlier works being *Miraculous Movements* by Jerry Trousdale (2012), *The Father Glorified* (2013) by Pat Robertson, *Contagious Disciple Making* (2014) by David & Paul Watson, and *The Kingdom Unleashed* (2018) by Jerry Trousdale, to name a few. While these earlier books primarily focused on inspiration and theoretical frameworks, *Cabbages* distinguishes itself by providing more personal, hands-on guidance yet without becoming an overly prescriptive manual. Tasse enriches the theological debate on Church Planting Movements by examining their scriptural basis alongside African historical records and insights from his personal spiritual journey.

The author's background provides crucial context for understanding his unique perspective. Tasse grew up in a deeply religious Muslim family in northern Kenya where his early spiritual journey was marked by a deep desire to understand, "Who is Allah?" When religious leaders discouraged such questionings, insisting that a devout Muslim need only obey the teachings of Islam, it highlighted a tension that would later inform his ministry approach. A pivotal moment occurred in Tasse's mid-teens when he became quite ill and was not expected to live. As he was in the throes of death, a Christian teacher explained the gospel and prayed for Tasse's healing, which occurred. This put Tasse on a journey to know who Isa al Masih (Jesus' name in the Quran) was and to grow in the gospel message.

Tasse's journey included being ostracized by his family and then being disciplined by missionaries in Kenya. During his discipleship phase, which included Christian theological college, he received a vision where God's voice posed the question that would become the book's central metaphor "Can cabbages grow in a desert that is dry and barren?" (22). This metaphor captures both the seeming impossibility of the task and the potential for miraculous growth in hostile environments. The narrative then traces Tasse's missionary training, initial attempts to share

the gospel using traditional Christian methods among Muslims, and the transformative process of unlearning conventional approaches to embrace disciple-making movements. Tasse's dual background as both a former Muslim and trained Christian missionary provides him with unique insights into effectively engaging in disciple-making ministry among Muslim communities.

## Content

The theme of unlearning Christian assumptions and relearning disciple making movement (DMM) principles runs throughout the book. This process of deconstruction and reconstruction forms the backbone of Tasse's methodology and provides valuable insights for practitioners in similar contexts.

After background information, such as his conversion, early chapters focus on Tasse's efforts in ministry. He tried tract distribution, open air preaching, food distribution, and seminars to create a platform for reaching unreached people groups (UPGs) in Northern Kenya, most of whom were Muslims and oral learners. One poignant story describes Tasse using an orality format to share with a village. Suddenly the village chief challenged everyone to accept Tasse's message. Then a woman in the village said to Tasse, "Now who among you will remain behind to teach us about this God you've told us about?" Tasse states, "I froze, my heartbeat suddenly moving to my throat and my body beginning to sweat all over. I was shocked. We hadn't anticipated such a profound and soul-searching question." This led Tasse to shift his ministry focus from decision-making to disciple-making (28).

This paradigm shift led Tasse to reevaluate the ministry methods he had learned in seminary. Finding the traditional approach too slow for reaching Kenya's UPGs effectively, Tasse sought inspiration in missionary biographies, including Hudson Taylor's, and works by George Patterson and David Garrison. Garrison's book on Church Planting Movements particularly resonated with him, leading to Tasse's introduction to New Generations' Disciple Making Movements approach. Despite receiving

mentorship from David Watson and African leaders Younoussa Djao and Shodankeh Johnson, Tasse found it challenging to release deeply ingrained assumptions and embrace DMM principles, a struggle that many readers may find familiar.

The subsequent chapters are lessons learned, with each chapter followed with testimonies by nationals exemplifying how the lessons were applied. One example is the use of Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). These groups employ a simple question-based format that enables facilitators to guide members in understanding the gospel and learning to apply Scripture to their lives. This starts a pattern of the teacher being Scripture rather than a person who has a degree. This pattern becomes part of what Cabbages identifies as the DNA of the movement.

The author then transitions to examining biblical foundations for movements and practical disciple-making applications. This section provides an in-depth exploration of DMM ministry's DNA, examining the characteristics of disciple-making and addressing common obstacles that practitioners must overcome. Tasse's treatment of these obstacles is particularly valuable, as he connects them directly to assumptions and practices that must be unlearned for effective ministry.

One section of note is on leadership development. The author states, "A Disciple Making Movement is a Leadership Development Movement because a movement can only proceed as leaders are identified, nurtured, trained, and mentored. Many movements have collapsed for lack of sufficient leaders. From the beginning, as a new simple church takes root, the movement leader must give careful attention to helping the church identify and develop Indigenous leaders" (227). The author notes the training is not so much content oriented as it is relational. Leadership training begins with the initial connection with the person of peace and then deepens when the person of peace facilitates a DBS group. The DBS serves seekers learning Scripture but also becomes a vehicle to mentor group facilitators to become leaders.

## Evaluation

From my perspective as a member of the Media to Movements team, having interacted with numerous movement leaders and conducted extensive research on disciple-making movements, this book successfully bridges the gap between inspirational and technical literature in the field. The author demonstrates awareness of non-Western readers through an accessible, non-academic writing style. The book provides practical content without becoming overly prescriptive, maintaining a spiritually pragmatic approach that practitioners will find valuable. For those seeking deeper practical insights, Trevor Larson's materials provide excellent complementary reading.<sup>2</sup> My personal encounter with the author and many of the testimony-givers during a recent trip to Kenya has confirmed the authenticity and practical application of the principles described in the book.

A strength of the book lies in its accessible illustrations, including the leadership pyramid (242) and the CPM cycle (187), which effectively communicate complex concepts. While the Biblical Foundations section provides useful insights, readers should approach it with appropriate hermeneutical awareness, recognizing that while Scripture can support movement ideas, the texts noted are not specifically written to teach DMM concepts.

## Practitioner's Angle

In my work with the Media to Movements team, where we leverage social media to identify seekers among UPGs and support local follow-up teams, Tasse's insights prove particularly relevant. We frequently encounter challenges in teaching persons of peace to become group facilitators, especially in areas lacking field workers. The western tendency to prioritize theological correctness before allowing people to teach others often conflicts with movement principles, inadvertently creating dependency rather than empowerment.

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2. See the "Focus on Fruit" website (<https://www.focusonfruit.org>).

As a researcher studying the spiritual journeys of Muslims and Hindus from seekers to becoming a multiplier of disciples, I have observed in-depth psychological and sociological discipleship processes beyond the divine element. I have documented these observations extensively in this journal and other missional publications. One crucial insight stands out: when mentors require converts to reach a predetermined knowledge threshold before mentoring others, disciples become hindered in their kingdom work. Tasse champions empowering disciples to immediately apply what they learn through obedient practice. This approach creates steppingstones where new learning directly translates to kingdom work. While mistakes may occur, close relationships minimize their impact. Tasse's commitment to relational mentoring is evident, with well-documented results demonstrating its effectiveness.

Tasse's early lessons on developing disciple-making ministries provide foundational insights for addressing these challenges. His concept of movement DNA emphasizes that seekers can learn directly from scripture without extensive outside intervention. This principle challenges practitioners to examine their assumptions and consider alternative approaches, shifting from direct teaching to facilitating discovery.

Once this cornerstone is laid, other principles can be considered. It was encouraging to read Tasse's story that described how he worked through other challenges that are unique to East Africa.

The leadership pyramid helps readers grasp that simple lessons learned at one stage will impact leadership development at later stages. The author notes that the training content of leaders is less of a factor in leadership development than mentoring and "life on life" relationships. Many times, when I have engaged in conversations about leadership development, the topic shifts to leadership development content. Tasse makes the point that the relationship between the emerging leader and the mentor is crucial. The author emphasizes what should be forefront of the mentors' mind is not so much that there is a problem to be solved (through teaching) as how to help the protégé grow in his relationship with Christ as the living Word through a discovery process.

## Recommendation

Scholars teach that adoption of anything new typically follows three patterns reflected in key questions: “What is it?” “What does it mean for me?” and “How can I obtain it?” This book primarily addresses the second question, making it an excellent resource for practitioners already familiar with the concepts of DMM. Those seeking introductory understanding of DMM should start with the earlier New Generations books mentioned above.

My experience with this book spans three distinct readings as I relate to “what does it mean for me?” The first read was an initial slow read for concept orientation, a second concentrated reading to grasp the complete picture, and a third analytical read in preparation for this review. This multiple-reading approach mirrors Tasse's own journey of gradually internalizing DMM concepts.

I encourage readers to approach this book with patience and openness to multiple readings. The process of unlearning deeply ingrained practices and assumptions takes time and often benefits from coaching support, whether from national peers or external mentors. Tasse's own experience with multiple coaches from various contexts demonstrates the value of diverse perspectives in this transformative journey.

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Appendix B – DMM Training Levels

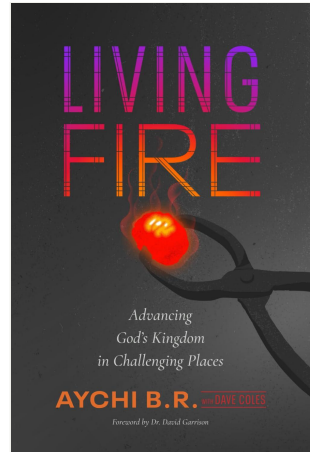
Appendix C – Sample Discovery Bible Study Lessons: Creation to Christ (27 DBS Meetings)

# Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Difficult Places

Aychi B.R. and Dave Coles. *Beyond & Experience Life*. 2025. 242 pages.

Reviewed by Nora Parks

*Nora Parks (pseudonym) has been serving in the Middle East for two decades through evangelism, discipleship, and training locals in cross-cultural ministry. Currently she is also co-directing a community center for refugees.*



## Introduction

As a practitioner, this book drew me in because I wanted to read detailed first-hand accounts from indigenous believers of church planting movements. I wanted the details to see how they compared with my context. The insights and nuances in this book were different than in previous books I've read, which were written by Western mission leaders. Do you want a fresh perspective on church planting movements from a national believer who turned into a movement leader? This book provides such an opportunity.

Aychi, the author, is an indigenous African, overseeing twenty-five movements in a region of Africa. About twenty years ago, Aychi was serving in missions work and became gripped by God's command to reach the nations (Matt. 28:19–20). Then, he attended a movement training that gave him the tools and practicalities to reach the masses. Now, after a couple decades of movement practice and seeing tens of thousands of churches planted, he shares key factors in church-planting multiplication. The co-author, Dave Coles, describes himself as an

encourager and resourcer for church-planting movements; he worked together with Aychi to write this book.

## Summary of Content

Living Fire is a guidebook for movement practitioners and a personal testimony of how an indigenous African missionary practices to catalyze and oversee twenty-five church planting movements. Behind Aychi and other practitioners' good missions practices, God was the one working in this region to raise up thousands of new disciples, new churches and new leaders.

In a narrative style, Aychi describes twenty-two factors of the movements and seven dynamics specific to his context. A simple, brief explanation is offered for each factor, mostly illustrated through personal stories. His personal convictions, thoughts, actions and realizations are weaved in throughout the book.

The book is divided into three sections: (1) igniting, (2) accelerating and (3) sustaining the movements. Aychi describes how each of the twenty-two factors contributed to one of the three aspects.

Some of those factors are:

- Person of Peace
- Discovery Bible Study
- obedience-based discipleship
- "hot coal strategy"
- "Saul to Paul strategy"
- planning for sustainability
- financial sustainability

The traditional church planting strategy led to some new churches and new believers in the area where Aychi works, but Aychi advocates for

multi-generational multiplication in order to see the masses reached and, reached faster.

Persecution and enculturation are two sub-themes weaved throughout the chapters. Persecution can become an opportunity for the gospel and growth for believers, depending on the courage of the persecuted, how God is working in that specific situation, and consequently, how persecutors react to the courage, love and miracles displayed in the face of hostility. Aychi teaches his African church planters to enculturate to different tribal languages, oral/aural or written biblical text and different religious backgrounds (such as fundamentalists or folk religions).

## Evaluation & Practitioner's Angle

As a practitioner in the Middle East, I am always looking for wiser ways to handle situations, understand dynamics and overcome barriers. This book gave me practical insights on many topics. I reflected on questions such as, "How is God working on this issue in other areas?" "How are wise nationals dealing with similar issues?" I will briefly discuss nine significant themes below.

### ***"Challenging" Groups***

"Challenging" groups are those who are antagonistic to the gospel, such as Muslim fundamentalists and those who are violently persecuting Christians. They are the least likely to be open to the gospel, but in Aychi's area, many of these "challenging" people have come to faith through movements. A former "difficult" person said, "Even though we look scary on the outside, our inside is empty. My people need this message. But they will never come and knock on your door... go and knock on their door; they need this gospel." (6).

I have found this to be true. In my region, people are born into Muslim fundamentalist families, they did not choose to live by fundamentalist principles. But some of these people harbor an emptiness and are

searching for something else. I agree, they will not knock on our church doors. We need to go into their neighborhoods and social networks.

Helpful questions practitioners might ask themselves include: Who are the challenging groups in our area? Has their dangerous exterior clouded our hearts from seeing how they, too, are empty and searching? How can we reach these difficult people? Who would be the best people to reach them?

### ***More Prescriptive vs. More Descriptive***

Some of the factors that Aychi describes tend to be more prescriptive and some are more descriptive. Prescriptive factors are factors that the author is telling us we should practice. Descriptive factors are factors that are describing what happened, not necessarily telling us how to practice.

For example, multiplication is a prescriptive factor. Aychi refers to 2 Tim. 2:2 to advocate or prescribe generational multiplication by churches planting churches, which in turn plant churches, and those churches continue the growth of planting more churches. According to Aychi, addition by the attractational model, associated with traditional churches, can be slow and not reach as many.

On the other hand, a supernatural miracle is a descriptive factor. A “significant percentage of churches in these movements started as a result of a healing, deliverance, dream, or vision” (107), but a practitioner cannot actually make miracles happen. This factor is a descriptive factor because they are the direct work of God.

This raises a number of questions: are some factors dependent on me? Which ones are only in the hands of God? I wish it were that simple! Multiplication can be prescriptive because I can practice it—teaching my disciples to disciple others, who disciple others—but if God does not move them to obedience or others don’t want to be disciplined, multiplication cannot happen. Also, although descriptive factors like

miracles are in God's hands, I can also affect it by praying for miracles. Behind both factors is God's empowerment.

The title of chapter twenty is a good way to consider these factors —"Aiming for Multiplication." We can aim for generational growth in our disciples through our practice. We can aim to reach families. We can aim for supernatural miracles by prayer.

### ***Insights on Persecution***

One topic that is relevant in my context is persecution. I found four helpful principles in the book that speak to this topic.

#### **Expect Persecution**

Aychi says, "We expect persecution and train our people how to respond to it" (30). In our hope that persecution never happens, we may be ill-prepared to equip our friends if and when it happens. But indeed, Jesus warns us to expect persecution (John 15:20, 2 Tim. 3:12). It is a part of following Christ, godly living and reaching the "hard-to-reach" communities. How can we prepare our friends to handle persecution at its various levels?

#### **"Persecution doesn't last forever" (73)**

This is true in my Muslim context. Persecution tends to be strong in the beginning, but the believers' perseverance and love seems to melt and wear out persecutors. Aychi shares stories of boldness winning the respect of persecutors (31, 70) and of miracles of God's protection of the believers that prompted persecutors to beg for forgiveness and come to faith (107). This perspective requires endurance from both the believers under persecution and those outsiders supporting those persecuted believers.

#### **Opportunity for the Gospel**

In the midst of social persecution, sometimes new believers grow weary and want to leave their persecuting family and cleave to their new

believing community. Missionaries and local believers may facilitate their exit and relocation, but we have also realized that this means the extraction of the only believer in that family. Therefore, many of us have made great effort to provide support (such as fellowship and Christian teaching) so that the single believer can remain with the family and continue being a witness of God's light to their social network that is still in darkness. In the book, a church planter was sent with a new believer to soften the blow and decrease hard-heartedness in the family (104). Radical love is shown through persecution when believers love and forgive those who hurt them and their families. This is powerful and in one particular situation, this kind of love touched persecutors' hearts to openness, curiosity and faith (70).

### **Growth for the Persecuted**

Believers who endure persecution experience spiritual growth as they witness their Father strengthen them, embolden them and empower them with radical love.

There are also stories of safe houses in the book, indicating wisdom is needed for each situation. How can we be sensitive to the situation and still give ample space for God to empower the believer and not rob the believers nor the persecutors from blessing?

### **Partnerships with Traditional Churches**

Relationships with traditional churches can be tricky. In my region, traditional church members leave their churches and join movement ministries which can upset traditional churches. Also, church planters (who were practicing towards movement) may leave fledging movements to join traditional churches. This can be frustrating at the beginning stages when there are a small numbers of believers. When there are many new believers, partnership towards movement may be easier because traditional churches see the fruit of movements and become more apt to adopt a different way of doing church planting.

Aychi acknowledges the ministry that is happening in traditional churches and seeks partnerships with organizations and traditional churches. When entering a new UPG (unreached people group), the movement seeks partnership with nearby churches to train and partner with them. After some trainings, churches want to reach those they have not been able to reach before and some have even become movement leaders. In trainings, they aim to have 10% leaders and 90% members to help promote leadership support for church members interested in apostolic ministry.

When a movement has not taken off yet and God has not yet sparked an awakening in the area, I have found that the believers can struggle because other family members and neighbors are not joining them in group Bible studies. The few believers study on their own month by month, and they begin to crave the types of church services they see online—with praise leaders, Sunday school programs for their children and a pastor who preaches to them. Soon, they may leave movement ministry to join traditional churches. This happened in my context and in the beginning, it was very frustrating for my team. But we have realized that to some extent, believers can divide their time between both ministries. Those who have a heart for reaching the unreached come back and have ministered with us.

### **Health of the Movement**

There are two key groups or meetings that keep the movements healthy: Strategic Coordinators Leadership Training (SCLT) and Mobile Equipping Centers. Both promote accountability and biblical accuracy and content. SCLTs are practitioner-focused and function as field-outcome-based learning labs (150). As a practitioner, I can lean too much on theoretical books and concepts, but these examples inspire me to grow in gathering more field-based solutions from local servants.

In regard to discipleship and church health, I was left wanting more real-life stories about the challenges of discipleship and how they were dealt with.

## Money

The book strongly advocates against dependency on outside funding—both foreign support and funding from other churches in the movement. I agree with Aychi that the local church should learn to be financially independent. When people are sent to new areas to reach UPGs, church leaders are expected to find the funds to support them for a year or two, decreasing support as the beginning period passes. For leadership trainings, the local churches are expected to provide what they can and then movement leaders also contribute. The movements apply the principles of sharing costs and of weaning financial support. Financial independence of the local churches is key for a movement to continue.

## Cross-Cultural Worker Roles

From Aychi's perspective, cross-cultural workers can, "fan the flames to spread further" (208) by joining and supporting a movement, rather than starting something new in a completely unreached area. Nearby movements are usually closer in culture and or language to a UPG, which makes for better communication and relatability. Support roles could be mentoring, coaching, Bible translation, and digitalization of Scripture texts.

Some questions for the reader to ponder in response might be: What is your reaction to this advice? Is this how missions work is progressing? Is this a better partnership? Are there contexts this would not be appropriate? Where are the movements closest to your people group?

## Not Only Saved *From* but Saved *For*

Every believer should be equipped for ministry because, "they were not only saved *from* something but saved *for* something—living for God's glory and making disciples" (159). This is a powerful statement and I think one that is lacking in some of our churches today. I think we tend to emphasize the former much more than the latter.

## Nuances

God does not want anyone to perish. He wants the masses to be saved, and there are examples like Acts 2 and 4 where multiplication may have likely been the way that thousands were saved at once, but I cannot say that God always desires the method of multiplication. He has used preaching to thousands in stadiums and online resources to save thousands. I think movements can be an effective way to obey the Great Commission, but we must be careful in using biblical examples and concluding that they are God's direct desire.

The urgency to save souls is admirable, but we must also balance that with a deeper grounding in the truth, "Be still, and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations" (Ps. 46:10). He is ultimately the fulfiller of the Great Commission. Our urgency must be rooted in this wider truth, otherwise, the burden can become too heavy and inappropriately carried by human shoulders.

## Recommendations

This book can guide foreign and indigenous leaders wanting to practice church-planting movements and those working amongst antagonistic people groups. This book would also be helpful for church-planting practitioners in the early stages who are seeing some fruit and want to set a good pattern for growth into a movement. This book also guides practitioners who are seeing multiplying groups so that the movement can continue to grow in healthy patterns.

In the end, I saw a man fueled by Matthew 28 to reach the nations, overcoming barrier after barrier for the sake of the gospel. I work in a difficult area where we have not yet seen the kind of explosion that Aychi has seen, but this book has re-fueled my heart to pray and to labor towards that end. I am encouraged.

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## A Brighter Vision: Rethinking the Way We See Missions, Movements, and Making Disciples

Jackson Strider. Self-published.  
2025. 177 pages.

Reviewed by Freya Feirsin

*Freya Feirsin (pen name), having lived, served, and pursued multiplication in the Middle East for 12 years, is now continuing to pursue church multiplication in southern Spain among creatives from diverse backgrounds. Her delight is living in a place with a high percentage of Arabs—and therefore, good Arabic food.*



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This book could be summarized as the journey of one man from “drinking the Kool-Aid” of fast multiplication results (often tied to being seen as effective in ministry) to becoming a man possessed by a desire to see the bride of Christ grow in strength and beauty among the nations.

It is no easy feat to question the powerhouse that is the voice of multiplication practitioners (Discipleship-Making Movements, T4T, Four Fields, etc.), but this writer has chosen to take the plunge in a thoughtful and honorable way, asking our community to reflect on why and how we do what we do. He presents the possibility that our mission culture may be influenced by the Western corporate world of numbers, productivity, and measurable results. The author suggests a different path of practice, one that emerged when he realized what the current path was doing to him: “I was under the yoke of fast, big results, and it was draining me” (4).

The questions posed by the author are timely and relevant, and our community would be wise to ask them as we think through our strategies and methodologies. Although the author does pronounce a need for a “paradigm revolution” (106), his content does not attempt to convince readers that DMM and other multiplication strategies should be totally abandoned; rather, he invites us to examine our hearts and our practice of listening to and walking with the Holy Spirit and to make incremental changes based on our discoveries. Is it acceptable that the center of our vision might be to see a movement? Or could we adjust our vision to be more aligned with what we say is at the heart of our discovery Bible studies—listen and obey? *“Looking at ministry this way helpfully brings out the fact that, for many of us, the way forward will not involve dropping certain practices altogether, but rather recalibrating how much attention, effort, time, discussion, and priority we give them”* (51).

For those who have questions or doubts about DMM, CPM, Four Fields, and other multiplication strategies, this book may help you identify what has been bothering you. Although the book does not offer specific solutions, it provides valuable discussion points, personal reflections, and suggestions on how to proceed.

Over the ten years the author has spent in the field, he has seen much—from the Middle East to South Asia—coming face to face with movements and movement leaders. He saw and worked in active church-planting movements alongside movement leaders. Yet the reality of being up close to the action was not what he expected. Instead, he was left with the very questions he now presents to us in this book.

## Summary of Content

Because the style of the book weaves together personal stories and reflections, it is a quick read, requiring time mainly for reflection on the questions raised. As the author begins, he provides a brief overview of DMM/CPM, which helps readers understand how he interprets multiplication principles. What follows are his key transformative questions, the ones that led him to rethink his multiplication strategies.

As he explores these questions, he suggests “recalibrating” or “adjusting the dial” in six areas:

- Dial 1: Reliance on Strategy, Method, and Technique
- Dial 2: Trust in and Reliance on Numbers
- Dial 3: Focus on Rapid, Visible Ministry Fruit
- Dial 4: Emphasis on Abiding in Christ and Overflowing with His Spirit
- Dial 5: Emphasis on Holiness
- Dial 6: Emphasis on Knowledge and the Word

Before concluding, the author touches on the ethos of the multiplication culture that indirectly influences our work. These areas—money, decision-making, and discipleship—are often discussed among groups of practitioners.

In the conclusion, the author speaks directly to two audiences: those resistant to his observations and those open to rethinking their multiplication strategies. He offers both groups suggestions for next steps.

## Evaluation

I find this book useful for those who feel unable to voice their doubts about the “industry standard” methodologies. Reading it felt like having a conversation with a trusted colleague. This is not a theological analysis of movement principles, though it does include scriptural reflection.

Strider’s suggestions for adjusting our focus were practical and could easily be adapted into team discussions. Such discussions might not lead to the same conclusions the author reached but would still foster open dialogue among practitioners.

Because the book felt personal, I wished the author had gone deeper into the heart of the church planter—an area often neglected in DMM/CPM training and practice. As practitioners, we can easily separate our

methodology and strategy from our own hearts as followers of Jesus. This book highlighted that concept, though it was not its central focus.

Similarly, leaving out the influence of supporting churches created a notable gap in the dialogue. The pressure for results in the field does not arise solely from methodology or personal ambition but also from supporters who expect a return on their financial investment. (Is that biblical?)

## Diving into the Dials

If I am honest, I would say I have been waiting for a book like this. I am one of those who moved from blind trust in the method to listening to the doubts of others and wondering what we truly are producing by being so method-focused. Yet, like many, I cannot deny the reality of results—but it is some of those very results that have raised deep questions.

As a multiplication practitioner, trainer, and coach, reading this book gave useful conversation starters to initiate constructive dialogue with colleagues who have felt slighted by multiplication practitioners in the past or who have outright rejected multiplication principles because of how they have been presented and perhaps misunderstood. The focus of any church-planting strategy must be on the king of our eternal kingdom. It is for Christ's glory, not our own—not even partially our own. I think we would do well to remember this:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing ... (Phil.2:3–7a, NIV)

Because of this, I agree with many of the author's observations and reflections regarding the dials. Let's not discard the good or the best practices; rather, let's adapt them by asking pointed questions with openness to see where they lead. These are valuable conversations to have with our teams and colleagues.

The first dial, "Reliance on Strategy, Method, and Technique," is an excellent example of finding balance by questioning priorities. This may well have been what the original DMM/CPM trainers intended: to hold on to the principles that lead to multiplying, independent, and indigenous churches, while keeping the tactics flexible—rooted in genuine love and led by the Spirit. This means there are many ways to build the kingdom. It is not a numbers game, about how many people you meet in a week, but about how you approach and engage in the work of the kingdom every day. As practitioners, are we truly seeing, knowing, and being with people—or are we simply ticking boxes, seeking entry points, and ending the week with a sense of accomplishment that should instead come from being dearly loved children of God?

Dial 2, "Trust in and Reliance on Numbers," reminds us that statistics never tell the whole story. A key DMM principle is that making followers of Jesus—not just converts—is central. Yet discussions often revolve around conversion and baptism numbers. As the author notes, that emphasis is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Church growth is about depth as well as width. Discipleship—knowing people and their stories—matters deeply. Quantitative data alone cannot measure discipleship quality, which lies at the heart of our mission. The author rightly notes that rapid numerical growth should not be our measure of success; faithfulness to the Word and the body of Christ should be.

Although Dial 3 might seem to be a continuation of this theme, it adds a vital twist. How do we, individually and communally, value the voice of God? Do we prioritize obedience or results? If God sends us out of a growing church to a desert road with no promise of meeting an Ethiopian official, do we go? If obedience leads us to slow or invisible outcomes, do

we question whether God was in it? These are profound questions for practitioners to ponder.

In the remaining three dials, the author calls us to “turn up” our focus on abiding, holiness, and knowledge of the Word—elements so foundational they are often taken for granted. Looking at these three dials together, they are all about the practitioner’s personal alignment and connection to the Holy Spirit. They are foundational in maintaining our first love and therefore our proper focus, Jesus the King. As he writes, “It (abiding) is actually the central battle that we fight day in and day out” (80).

I could not agree more. Our words often affirm this, but our behaviors do not. Our overreliance on strategy and the stress of “doing DMM right” reveal where we fail to abide. Abiding is not only the time spent with our Beloved in stillness but also our posture during team meetings, planning, and dreaming. The battle is to remain fully devoted to, in love with, and passionate about our king and his kingdom—not as a means, but as the goal itself.

This naturally connects to holiness, spiritual development, and a deeper love for Scripture. Holiness is what we desire for both our disciples and ourselves—a transformation of the heart. It is not merely behavioral discipline but a heart longing to be like Jesus out of love for Him. The kingdom of light is not just another religious system with different rules; it is a realm of internal freedom where we are loved as we are. As we disciple others, we must remember that it is not about visible results or the number of disciples made—it is about the growing love for Jesus in both us and those we walk alongside. The result of this growing love is compassion for others and a desire for them to have the gift we have, that pearl of great price, that treasure we found and gave everything for; this is our vision.

In summary, I recommend reading this book even if you have no plans to change your use of DMM/CPM. It is healthy to be challenged about what we may take for granted. It is also a helpful read if you feel

dissatisfied with your current church-planting strategy and are unsure how to move forward. As someone who would still put themselves firmly in the multiplication strategy camp, my caution in reading this book is to, like the author, not assume that all parts of multiplication strategies are unuseful, or bad, but rather to embrace the good parts of multiplication strategy and keep the focus on our king. Had I read this book 10 years ago when I was fully in awe of DMM/CPM's promises, I would likely have understood this book differently—but even now, its questions remain valuable for reflection and discussion amongst our peers.

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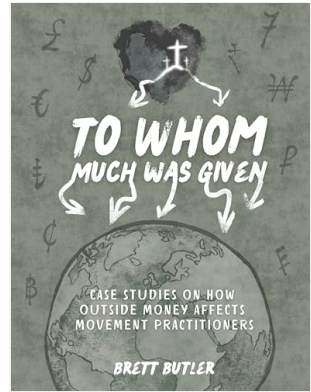
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## To Whom Much Was Given: Case Studies on How Outside Money Affects Movement Practitioners

Brett Butler. Self-published. 2025. 133 pages.

Reviewed by Frank Preston



*Frank Preston (pseudonym) earned his PhD from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin, with research focusing on the confluence of media and cell group formation in radical Islamic movements—expertise that informs his work in media strategies for church planting movements. Frank and his wife Linda have served with Pioneers for 34 years and lived in Indonesia for twelve of those years.*



After 25 years of working in corporate roles, Brett Butler and his wife Patti joined a church-planting team in San Francisco. It was there that they were introduced to and trained in a movement-oriented approach to growing the kingdom, which they pursued for the next seven years. In 2022 they returned home, and Butler continues to engage in making disciples in his church and international relationships. His website is [movementsandmoney.org](http://movementsandmoney.org) (116).

This book undertakes an emotionally charged issue in Disciple-Making Movements (DMM) that arises when outside money from wealthier entities flows into poorer mission contexts. While the tension between

rich and poor is historical and frequently addressed in scripture, Butler contends that modern technology and easy international travel has dramatically accelerated the speed, volume, and visibility of these financial disparities (1).

The author argues that money “tends to steal our joy and poison our fellowship” (1). Financial disparities foster comparison, envy, and covetousness among believers. They also create power imbalances and accusations of favoritism within mission partnerships. These dynamics generate unhelpful accountability systems that breed dishonesty rather than transparency. Perhaps most damaging, money inflicts psychological harm on both sides; savior complexes and guilt for the wealthy, and victimhood and dependence for those who receive funds (1).

Butler posits that despite being an issue everyone recognizes, cultural differences and deep awkwardness prevent honest dialogue, allowing these problems to fester and divide. The author frames this as spiritual warfare, contending that Satan strategically exploits financial inequality to undermine Christian unity, inspire doubt about God's provision, and pit believers against one another (2). Because this issue is inescapable in our interconnected world, the author argues that Christians must confront this by seeking God's wisdom for how to steward resources in ways that glorify Him, advance His kingdom, and preserve the unity that Christ prayed for His followers to maintain (4).

The author has gathered information from conversations he had with both nationals and Western practitioners who expressed struggles they have experienced related to money and ministry. For Butler, these conversations have resulted in concerns and conclusions he has related to money and ministry. These became his case studies which he describes as being in short story format. Each case story is followed by suggested questions for discussion as well as relevant scriptures. In addition, he devotes a section of the book to “Thoughts and Recommendations” (79) in the form of “Nine suggestions and a Story” (81).

I agree with the need for teams to discuss the issue of outside money in cross-cultural settings. However, having been personally involved with many Western and national practitioners, movement leaders, and Western and national donors I was disappointed in who was represented in these case studies. Most of the case studies Butler presents were not about intercultural teams engaged with funding issues, but individuals who did or did not appropriately handle financial matters. Of those who made poor choices on how to handle money, most (60%) were short termers whose mistakes could have been avoided if they understood local language and cultural contexts of ministry. Intercultural teams reading the case study would quickly pick up on that observation.

Most case studies focus on financial mismanagement or poor decisions by movement leaders and national partners. While these cautionary examples offer important lessons, the book lacks many positive cases demonstrating healthy resource stewardship. "Would Motorbikes Really Be Faster?" (32) stands out as an exception, illustrating how a movement coach helped a team avoid resource-related pitfalls. Most movement coaches, in my experience, exhibit similar wisdom in developing leaders' financial management capabilities.

The book's argument rests primarily on evidence from what Butler calls case studies. It is helpful for readers to distinguish how this term is used in various settings. Those involved with formal research use this term differently than Butler does. A case study is a specific research method with established criteria. A case study requires systematic investigation, multiple data sources, and analytical frameworks—distinguishing them from anecdotal evidence or single-source descriptions. Butler has captured some real-life situations, but his conclusions are not gathered from an objective collection of data.

I feel like the message in the book slights the character of donors and movement leaders. He entitles one of his stories, "Everybody Lies," raising the issue that some nationals and Western coaches promote lying to obtain money. In one story he quotes his interviewee as saying, "You made the mistake of telling the truth, Arun ... 'Everybody lies,' replied

Henry [the Western coach]. "That's how it is when it comes to outside money. Everybody knows it. It's only news to you" (23). In another case study, "Easy to Say When you Live in a Mansion," the Westerner noted he was lying on reports (38). The reason for such lying is stated: "Outside money always comes with strings attached, especially the need for reporting and numbers" (38). In my interactions with dozens of donors and having filled out many reports for each donor, at no time have I run across pressure to lie. In fact, the opposite is normal. Each report contains "What went well ... what did not go well?" as standard questions. Having worked closely with many nationals and Western partners, I have not observed the intensity of lack of character represented by the quotes above. This is not to say that everyone is entirely above board in their actions, but leaving the impression stated in these quotes does great discredit to the majority of workers.

In the Indonesian case study "Who Pays for Your Travel?" the description can only represent one particular church-planting movement. I am personally aware of how this same movement handles such matters related to who pays for travel and other expenses incurred as national church planters travel for ministry. The books by Trevor Larsen (2018 and 2020) discuss how travel costs are addressed in this Indonesian movement. These costs are paid by the movement purse—a specialized term used within the movement for their common fund—which is funded by movement members and managed by leaders within the movement. The Western missionary coach does not manage travel funds. The case study's claim that missionaries control these funds misrepresents how this Indonesian movement operates.

A strong concern is the author's understanding of Disciple-Making Movements. While DMM has varying definitions in the literature—with Watson and Watson (2014) frequently cited—most authors clearly define their terms early on. Butler defines "movements" on page 134, but throughout the book he emphasizes short-term trainings conducted by outsiders rather than long-term mentoring relationships. He appears to equate training events with movement formation. This is problematic

because, as scholars like Emanuel Prinz (2022) note, mentors play a crucial role in developing movement leaders' character, including how they handle financial resources. By focusing on trainings rather than mentoring relationships, Butler may misunderstand what constitutes a movement and movement leadership—concepts central to his thesis.

While I have noted concerns, the book's central premise is sound: intercultural mission teams must address financial dynamics openly. Butler's work can facilitate important conversations on this topic. His inclusion of discussion questions and scriptural references at the end of each of his case studies are tools that can stimulate these conversations. The "Nine Suggestions and a Story" section crystalizes Butler's own conclusions, and as suggestions, whether one agrees with all of them or not, lend themselves to profitable discussions.

At the end of the book two appendices are offered. One is from movement practitioners on optimizing the use of outside funds. A second appendix is 30 pitfalls of funding coming from outside of the ministry. These are helpful for readers.

The author's reference list is a better resource for intercultural teams to use for discussing money issues, especially Bonk, Schwartz, and Lupton. To put funds in context to movements and training of movement leaders, the works of Larsen are superior. Larsen notes handling of money issues is intertwined in character development of the leader and the movement operational procedures in general.

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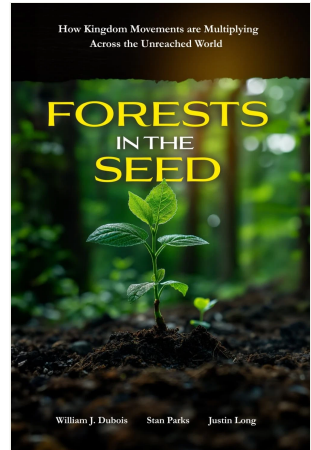
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# Forests in the Seed: How Kingdom Movements are Multiplying Across the Unreached World

William Dubois, Stan Parks, and Justin Long. Patmos Education Group. 2021. 269 pages.

Reviewed by Dave Coles



*Dave Coles is an encourager and resourcer of church-planting movements among unreached groups, serving with [Beyond](#). He worked among Muslims in Southeast Asia for 24 years and is co-author and co-editor of numerous books and articles related to movements. A list of these can be found at [davecoles.freemin.org](http://davecoles.freemin.org).*



A single seed has the potential to become a forest. *Forests in the Seed* opens with this metaphor and then shows, with stories and data, how kingdom movements are transforming lives and communities across the globe.

The three co-authors of *Forests in the Seed* each have over a decade of experience interacting with leaders of kingdom movements. In this book, they describe an unquenchable, uncontrollable fire that has spread the good news of the kingdom into every world region, 198 countries, and over 1,200 languages. Their preface ends with this promise:

We have witnessed this incredible outpouring throughout the world, and we want you to be a part of

it. These pages contain inspiring accounts of remarkable achievements and practical advice that will empower you for the imminent wave of change—touching not only you but also your loved ones and those within your sphere of influence. Most importantly, reading this book will prepare you to help multiply the Kingdom of God. (2)

I believe they make good on this promise. I personally found the book inspiring and encouraging, and I think any open-minded reader will have a similar response. The book will especially appeal to those interested to hear insights and stories of God’s work in and through kingdom movements to Christ.

The book consists of two parts. Part 1 describes “Principles from Kingdom Movements” in which God is multiplying disciples, churches, and leaders. Many of these movements are taking place in areas where Christ has been mostly unknown until very recently. Part 2 describes seven “Accelerators” observed at work in some relationally connected “families of movements” that have experienced very significant fruit. These movement families are typically over 20 years old with over one million disciples and are impacting over 100 Unreached People Groups. Footnotes provide public sources documenting these and other statistics cited.

## Overview

Chapter 1, “For Such a Time as This,” presents statistics showing the ongoing urgency of effectively proclaiming the gospel to groups that have not yet heard and the encouraging growth in the number of disciples in movements over the past 30 years. It also offers a clear definition of the kind of movements being described. The authors clarify that some have described these movements as a “Church-Planting Movement” or “Disciple-Making Movement,” but both these terms can easily be misunderstood. They did not use “Church Planting Movement” because “Many people have preconceptions of church planting that involve

buildings and professional staff. In these movements, churches usually meet in homes (15).” And they did not use “Disciple-Making Movement” because “many people think of discipleship as mainly one Christian discipling a less mature Christian. Many fail to see discipleship leading to new churches (15).”

To avoid those misunderstandings, they chose this framing:

A Kingdom Movement can be defined as a multiplying process of disciples making disciples and leaders developing leaders, resulting in indigenous churches (usually house churches) planting more churches. These new disciples and churches begin spreading rapidly through a people group or population segment, meeting people’s spiritual and physical needs. They begin to transform their communities as the new Body of Christ lives out kingdom values. When consistent, multiple-branch fourth-generation reproduction of churches occurs, church planting has crossed a threshold towards becoming a sustainable movement. (16)

Chapter 2, “Not the First Time,” describes multiple movements through church history, from the time of the apostles through the twentieth century. While those movements do not precisely fit the modern definition of a kingdom movement (“consistent, multiple-branch fourth-generation reproduction of churches”), they reflect numerous essential similarities—cases in which disciples and churches “permeate peoples, families, populations, and languages (19).”

Chapter 3, “Amazing Works of God in our Day,” brings us up to the present with a brief overview of some key books about kingdom movements that have come forth in the past quarter century, adding a few examples of those modern movements. It follows up the overview with 10 “movement markers.” It then clarifies the distinction between church-planting movements (CPMs—describing the visible results) and the disciple-making processes by which Jesus builds His church. While

noting that “every Kingdom Movement is beautifully unique (39),” the authors describe seven common principles (“DNA”) found to be very similar in all the kingdom movements. These principles, each with a descriptive paragraph, include praying, scriptural, obeying, powerful, indigenous, holistic, and exponential. These have been derived from the authors’ multi-year analysis and reflection on interaction with a wide range of movement leaders describing the dynamics observed and applied in the movements with which they are associated.

Chapter 4, “Raising the Sails,” offers the analogy of sailing a sailboat to describe the divine partnership between humans’ active obedience and God’s supernatural working to bring about a movement. Eight vital patterns (sails) are expounded from Scripture and illustrated from current movements. The chapter closes with an encouragement to emulate these patterns: “Current movement efforts have been driven by putting aside human traditions and cherished church forms and examining questions like, ‘What was Jesus’ strategy with His disciples in reaching the lost?’” (60).

Chapter 5, “New DNA Needed,” draws on numerous current examples to illustrate eleven shifts in DNA that have brought movement leaders from a traditional church-planting approach to a much more fruitful movement approach.

Chapter 6, “Not Enough: Accelerators Needed,” begins Part 2 by expounding the theme that “the current rate of kingdom advance is not enough” (91) and expounding five current challenges.

Chapters 7–13 examine seven “accelerators” that God is using to expand his kingdom through these movements:

- Prayer Strategies
- Kingdom Finances
- Heart-language Bible Translations
- Crisis Responses

- Systems for Justice and Mercy
- Surges
- Movements Starting Movements

Each accelerator is illustrated with powerful stories of ways God is using that accelerator to increase the harvest and hasten the advance of God's kingdom.

Chapter 14, "Charge," builds on Jesus' final instructions in Matthew 28:18–20 and proclaims, "Our goal is simple: No more unreached peoples and places: every person with access to the Gospel and the church thriving in every nation, tribe, people, and language" (217). "God will complete His purpose. Will He do it with you or without you? We invite you to join us. (222)."

An epilogue presents a path for readers who want to "Take the Next Step," and a glossary provides helpful definitions of various technical terms used in the book. Eight useful appendices cover these topics:

- 2004 Elements of Church Planting Movements
- Movement Results vs. Movement Processes
- Critical Elements for Catalyzing Movements
- A Prayer Wave Preceded the Current Harvest
- Prayer and Fasting in the Bible
- The Importance of Reaching Cities
- Movement-Led Bible Translation Process
- Kingdom Business Project (KBP) Overview

## Evaluation & Recommendation

This book does a solid job of conveying concepts and principles undergirding kingdom movements. It also offers abundant powerful illustrations of these principles at work in our day. The combination makes for very encouraging reading as well as substantial equipping for

anyone interested in pursuing movements. Any readers inspired in a movement-ward direction also find a warm invitation to connect and explore how they personally might find a role in encouraging, catalyzing, or serving a movement such as those described. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in God's current work in bringing salvation to the unreached.

Of the many books I have read in the past two decades about kingdom movements, I think *Forests in the Seed* wins the prize for the greatest number of amazing stories of God's work. And the stories are presented, not just for their own sake as testimonies of God's power, but as illustrations of specific principles from which readers can learn. While the book contains some overlap with material previously published in other sources, the fresh presentation and excellent illustrations keep any reader from getting bored—even those who may have read, practiced, and/or taught some of these principles before.

I appreciated the framing of these movements within the larger picture of God's work during, and commission for, this church age. Also, numerous illustrations come from a family of movements that until now has published very little information concerning their ministry. As one always eager to know more of "what's really happening," I found this a very welcome addition to the corpus of literature on modern movements.

Field workers and those headed toward cross-cultural ministry will especially discover points of useful insight—sometimes inspiring and sometimes challenging. Ministry teams could find this a useful book to read and discuss together. Inclusion of discussion questions at the end of each chapter would have made a helpful addition for this purpose. I know of one field team planning to study the book together; they may be inventing their own discussion questions—perhaps for inclusion in a second edition? Yet even without questions in the book, I expect a field team reading the book together would easily find much fodder for fruitful discussion.

Some readers, especially those committed to traditional Western church patterns or traditional church-planting methods, may find the book challenging or even, at points, irritating. But I think those readers' interaction with the material presented will be worth facing the challenge, and wrestling with this fresh description of current field realities.

I consider a book of this size, with so much useful content, to carry great value for practitioners. I would expect any reader to be blessed and encouraged by it, and those most invested in reaching the unreached to find in it an abundance of practical ideas and useful principles as well.

*Forests in the Seed* offers a clarion call to action. No matter your current role and interest in kingdom ministry, this book will both stretch and equip you to join God's unstoppable work.

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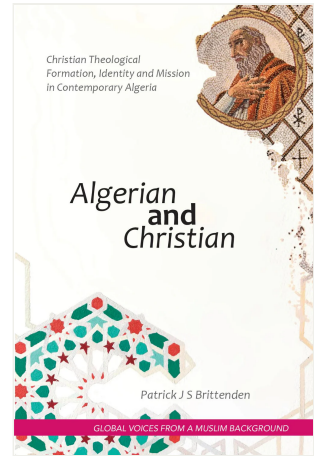
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# Algerian and Christian: Christian Theological Formation, Identity and Mission in Contemporary Algeria

Patrick Brittenden. Regnum Books.  
2025. 188 pages.

Reviewed by Michael Towns

*Michael Towns (pseudonym) is a husband, father and CP team leader. He and his family have lived in North Africa for 17 years. They serve the church through evangelism, discipleship and translation.*



## Introduction

If the West is a pluralistic marketplace of ideas, identities, and loyalties, many countries in the Global South are more like families that uphold a solitary identity based on shared beliefs and practices. That is certainly the case in Algeria, where the state teaches each citizen that “our country is Algeria, our language is Arabic, and our religion is Islam.” How, then, are Algerian Christians, most of whom are not Arab, to understand their place in society? Can they truly be Algerian and Christian?

Pat Brittenden, a TCK who grew up in Algeria and who continues to support theological training programs in Algeria, addresses this issue in his book, *Algerian and Christian*. He writes to Algerian Christians, Algerian Muslims, and foreign Christians who love the Algerian church, and shines a light on the path forward for Algerian Christians. How can Algerian

believers not just be a struggling, persecuted minority group, but also a force for change in their society, a force that resists Islamist hegemony?

## Summary

Brittenden answers this question by pointing to two internal failures of the church: "First, a failure to successfully navigate long-term questions about Christian and Algerian identity. The second failure is the lack of appropriate Christian theological formation to address this challenge" (31). If the Algerian church is to face the threats to its future growth, maturity and very existence, it must come to terms with who it is as both in the world of Algerian Muslim culture, but not of the world of Islam—Algerian people whose greater citizenship is in heaven. And this, Brittenden argues, will be largely accomplished through contextualized theological training.

The bulk of Brittenden's argument is composed of sociological analysis: who Algerian Christians are, their history and context in a Muslim-majority country, and how they have been hampered by the state's oppressive and restrictive pedagogical methods. Brittenden interviewed a considerable number of Algerian church leaders in the course of his research and includes quotes from them in the early chapters of the book. In addition, he provides a general analysis of Algeria's modern history and the state's desire to fit all its citizens into the mold of Arab Muslims.

His analysis relies upon the concept of liminality. The church is on the margins of society and is in a period of change. This liminal, transitional context, in which the church's identity as Algerian and Christian is in flux, puts the church in a position of both vulnerability and opportunity to form its identity and develop a church that is fully Algerian while not formed after the pattern of the world of Algerian Arabism and Algerian Islam.

Having analyzed the Algerian Christian milieu, Brittenden provides his solution: "a liminal pedagogy for the Algerian church" (130). This

pedagogy should place theological training within the context of Algeria. That is, it should help Algerian believers understand their situation and apply Scripture and theology to life and ministry in their liminal context. Brittenden proposes a “repetitive training cycle of reflection and action” composed of four stages:

- “understanding the theological topic or subject in context,”
- “discussing our identity as believers in dialogue with others,”
- “reflecting on what the Bible has to say about the above,” and
- “obeying what the Bible and the Lord is saying, and doing something about this” (137).

Because this pedagogy should be well-applied to the context, it must be more than just head knowledge. Brittenden identifies three elements in which students must grow: competencies (knowledge), character (spiritual maturity) and competency (ministry skills) (143). These elements are best acquired with the help of a mentor in the context of a church or small group.

Brittenden closes his book by considering the example of Augustine. Due to Augustine’s fervent opposition to the Donatist movement—a North African schismatic group that rejected baptisms administered by lapsed bishops—Brittenden sees Augustine as having suppressed and impoverished the indigenous Berber church, the majority being Donatists (159). Yet Brittenden also recognizes Augustine as “a model liberated liminal” (153), a man of head, heart and hands, and an example of how the modern Algerian church can be both part of the global church and also authentically North African.

## Evaluation and Practitioner’s Response

The greatest strength of *Algerian and Christian* is its insightful cultural analysis. As a TCK who grew up in Algeria, Brittenden is able to perceive aspects of Algerian Christian identity in ways difficult for both cultural insiders and outsiders.

For example, he observes that the lack of critical thinking is a crucial problem in the Algerian church. Because the national curriculum does not teach Algerians to think for themselves, believers and church leaders are often weak in their ability to think critically or to apply the truth to their own context. This has resulted, Brittenden argues, in a “tendency toward pietism in the Church’s spiritual formation practices” (47). While there is great value in rote memorization, the ability to think critically is crucial for faithful apologetics, exegesis, and teaching. Many sermons tend to be restatements of what is found in the Bible without a great deal of reflection or application. I myself have often hit barriers in evangelism or in studying Scripture with believers due to their unwillingness or perceived inability to think critically through an issue or text.

A related issue Brittenden addresses is the fact that most training of Algerians has placed the burden of responsibility for applying the lessons on the students. The lack of mentorship or dialogue about how to live out the truth has meant that much training has remained theoretical head knowledge that does not significantly impact believers’ lives or ministry. Indeed, a colleague of mine often points out that most long-term North African believers have a decent store of information about the Bible and theology, but they typically struggle to apply those truths to their lives.

In addition, Brittenden’s observation that the defining feature of Berber North African history is “resistance to the power of the State” (87) rings true. North Africans, especially those who have held on to their Berber heritage, shrewdly yet fiercely resist outside influence. This is seen in the modern state’s resistance to foreign hands purportedly causing division, or in the Kabyle Berbers’ long-term resistance to Saudi, Islamic hegemony. So a robust, mature Algerian church needs to know how to develop its identity as North African without distancing itself from the global church.

I found the overall pedagogical model Brittenden proposes to be promising. Making application a crucial component of theological training is wise. And it is essential to ensure that not only knowledge, but also

ministry skills and character, are acquired by leaders. The model's emphasis on church, small group, and mentors is also commendable.

Having said that, it does seem that this pedagogical model could tend in an unhelpful direction if not watched carefully. Because the model draws from liberation theology, which highly emphasizes context in the hermeneutic process and encourages believers to begin with their context rather than the Bible, it could encourage separatism or theological liberalism (the modification of Christianity to fit with the norms of modern culture).

Brittenden's desire to see the Algerian church develop a contextualized identity is healthy and good, and his concern about pietistic, theoretical Christianity is entirely legitimate. But an overemphasis on a Berber North African identity could lead to some measure of separation from the global church and could distance the Algerian church from the riches and controlling influence of historical theology, church history and the worldwide body of believers. Beginning with context rather than the Bible will inevitably lead to emphasizing things the Bible minimizes, and minimizing things the Bible emphasizes, in addition to missing many truths and concepts altogether. Private correspondence with Brittenden confirms that this is not at all his intention, but I would be concerned that elements of this approach may encourage believers to focus too heavily on their context and not enough on the Scriptures, thus fostering some degree of isolation or infidelity to the Word.

## Recommendation

That having been said, I absolutely recommend the book, especially to believers in Algeria and North Africa. Brittenden's cultural analysis and especially his quotes from Algerian church leaders are of great value for workers seeking to understand the North African context and faithfully minister in it. I'd especially recommend chapters one, three, four, and five. While the book is clearly an adaptation of a dissertation, and some of the academic discussions (especially in chapter two) feel a bit opaque,

Brittenden has effectively made his research readable and accessible for his target audience. Those who are involved or interested in theological training will want to read chapter six, and those with an interest in the Donatist controversy will find chapter seven helpful.

## Conclusion

I appreciate Brittenden's evident love for the Algerian church and his desire for it to grow and mature. May this book—and the ongoing theological training Brittenden continues to assist—bless the Algerian and broader North African church for years to come.

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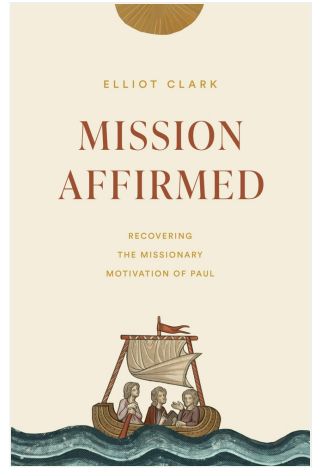
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## Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul

Elliot Clark. Crossway. 2022. 253 pages.

Reviewed by David Riddell

*David Riddell served as international director of World Team for 17 years. He now serves as a coach to young emerging church planters. He and his wife have served as church planters in Europe for the past 35 years. He is a graduate of the College of Wooster and holds MAR & MDiv degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary (USA).*



Paul's Macedonian call (Acts 16:9) has inspired many to prayerfully consider the responsibility to bring the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world. Hearts have been stirred by the urgency of the task. The stated reality that the unreached could be reached "in this generation" thrusts out new workers and pushes them to seize opportunities when doors open to bring the gospel to the unreached.

At Troas, "a door was opened" for the gospel. However, this time, Paul chose not to walk through that door as he did with the Macedonian call (2 Cor. 2:12). *Mission Affirmed* begins by asking a straightforward question: "What could lead Paul, the pioneer missionary with a driving passion to reach the unreached, to walk away from an open door?" (14).

It is that question that *Mission Affirmed* grapples with in a very open and honest way. Elliot Clark resonates with the urgency of the unfinished task but lays forth the challenge that "if we steward Christ's gospel and

the church's resources yet end up with nothing to show for it, God is not honored. Nor will we be" (24).

Elliot Clark is no stranger to the questions surrounding intent and motivation in missionary calling. He and his family served for several years as church planters among an unreached people in Central Asia. He now travels around the world to equip church leaders and support residential missionaries. So, he is well placed to dialogue with the reader about how we bring glory to God in our work while we live and minister in light of his affirmation and approval.

For Clark, the apostle Paul was motivated by more than just the pioneer advance of the gospel (17). His mission was to spread a passion for God's glory for the joy of all peoples. And yet the apostle also ministered for "the surpassing joy of personally receiving glory from God and along with people from all nations" (224, emphasis original).

This book will certainly challenge one's mind and heart about missionary calling. There are no easy answers given, but there are plenty of insights and ideas to chew on. You will likely not agree with everything Clark writes, but you will certainly not finish the book without some impact on your perspective and your outlook on the missionary calling.

## Summary and Evaluation

Using the text of 2 Corinthians as well as historical and personal testimonies, Clark carefully walks his readers through the necessary elements that serve in "recovering the missionary motivation of Paul." Each chapter focuses on one of Paul's ministry locations. That specific location serves as a building block towards discerning the motivation of the apostle to glorify God as well as to seek honor and recognition on the last day (27).

Clark sets five main building blocks in place as he seeks to re-orient our focus on and understanding of the missionary call. Though Clark focuses mainly on cross-cultural workers, there are also many helpful

principles included for any who are grappling with how to work out one's missionary call to the unreached.

First, cross-cultural workers must seek God's approval rather than the acceptance and approval of others. Though this seems like obvious common sense, Elliot uses this thought to demonstrate how we may be oblivious to the trap of wanting to please others so that they will accept us and listen to our message. At times, we may even be "in danger of tweaking the gospel to make it more appealing" (43).

Second, cross-cultural workers need to reflect more deeply on what sharing in the sufferings of Christ entails. The outcome of such sharing serves as a means for pulling our eyes off ourselves and putting them back on Christ. As Western workers, we may not fully understand the persecution that many believers in the world experience. However, we should become more sensitive to the world in which we as believers live: a world where constant upheaval and shifts are the norm; where we can easily feel frustrated and misunderstood in other cultural contexts; and where we can become risk avoiders.

Third, cross-cultural workers are sent by a team and work in a team. Paul knew that his ultimate approval came from God. But he also "well understood that his mission would be severely limited without the fellowship and partnership of other churches and individuals" (86–87). A commitment to team means that the cross-cultural worker, assured of one's approval in God's eyes, seeks the affirmation of the community which desires to send them. At the same time, the cross-cultural worker seeks the well-being of those to whom they are sent. That stance produces a learning posture in the new culture. The "audience of one" stirs workers to have an attitude of humility rather than an attitude of "you need us" to help you.

Fourth, the main way workers keep their eyes on the long-term objective of God's glory and affirmation is through the sealing and sanctifying work of the Spirit. Otherwise, all our efforts will be in vain (113). We are often tempted to judge our work by outward appearances

or statistics. But our focus must be on growth in grace which happens through faith in Jesus and the sanctifying presence of the Spirit (128). This is a long-term process and cannot be reduced to a few simple steps to multiplication. We desire to see followers who walk with Christ in the Spirit and are firmly grounded in his Word.

Fifth, faithful presence must be linked to faithful proclamation. Clark states that we can “never pit our witness against our way of life” (144). Cross-cultural workers must bring together both identity and credibility. In other words, we cannot separate what we say from our lifestyle. Since Paul’s primary focus and activity included “speaking” the gospel, then proclamation must be part and parcel of our being faithfully present in another cultural context (137). Holding in tension these two truths of faithful proclamation and faithful presence, Clark concludes that the apostle’s missionary motivation to speak and live out the gospel enhances “his own joy, praise, and honor before the Father, as well as that of his ministry partners” (144). Paul’s missionary motivation is found in both the fruit of solid communities of believers and the glory that will come to God from this fruit. Together, Paul and the new community of believers in Corinth will mutually rejoice and offer thanksgiving for His work in their lives and community, and all to the glory of God.

This book will challenge one’s thinking in several areas. You cannot come away from reading this book without addressing certain core issues in missionary life or in the support of those called to serve in cross-cultural missions. However, there are several potential shortcomings which hinder the impact of this work.

For example, despite the intent of the book to “recover the missionary motivation of Paul,” it tends to range over a variety of topics which appear unrelated to that main topic. These include: translation difficulties which appear to compromise the Word (149); DMM and other multiplication ministries that emphasize speed over depth (116); and insider movements where contextualization leads to compromise (174).

Next, the tone of the book can feel hard hitting in a good and provocative way, but also in a cutting way. The issue of idolatry (chapter 6) is an area of great struggle for all believers. However, questioning contextual decisions over the application of a command (170) would be better challenged by some powerful questions than by the author's definitive statements.

Finally, adding an appendix of questions to reflect on the theme of giving glory to God and receiving glory from God would have been helpful to focus on the biblical motivation for serving God where He calls.

## Personal Reflections and Implications

As I reflected personally on the impact of this book on my thinking, I came away thinking that if one was truly honest, one would have to say that the primary motivation for serving as a cross-cultural missionary is to glorify God. However, Clark's work made me realize that I have not appreciated the biblical motivation that God is also glorified by the stewardship of the resources that he gives to me. The desire to present a viable community of believers as fruit of our labors before the Lord challenged my thinking. We work to see fruit to God's glory because of his work in our lives. However, we may not always see that tangible fruit in our lifetime. Quoting from John Piper (1996), Clark encourages his readers that you get the courage and motivation to fully live out this missionary calling, even in difficult circumstances where no fruit is immediately seen, by "looking to the prize" (223). Readers will be challenged to find ways to go back and consider Paul's motivation as a means to help us keep our focus on that prize.

Though some of the content may be hard hitting, there is still truth to be mined from each topic that Clark raises. A friend used to say that in every criticism there is an element of truth, otherwise it would not hurt so badly. Our goal is to sift out the truth from the chaff, so to speak. The goal is to find that nugget of truth and see change by his grace and the work of his Spirit. In order to learn how to work out the interaction of

Scripture and innovative ideas, I found it helpful to ask myself some of the questions I believe are raised by Clark's book:

What principles would help one to embrace a commitment to the Scriptures with innovative ideas in the ministry context in which may find ourselves (31, 126)? And how can we ensure missionaries who are sent are vetted well, trained well and supported well in this kind of ministry strategy and planning (116, 231–235)?

Finally, the book makes you ask the question: What will it take to accomplish the mission to which Christ has called me? There are several standard answers that come to mind, but Elliot made me step back and re-think how much of my ministry is more self-focused than God-focused? And how much of ministry is not centered on God receiving the glory of the fruit that comes from establishing vibrant and sound churches?

*Mission Affirmed* provides food for thought, reflection, and discussion individually as well as collectively as a team. *Mission Affirmed* outlines a series of topics that any team would do well to work through. The time spent would bear fruit in greater alignment with Christ's vision for bringing the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world. *Mission Affirmed* also provides an appendix that would be helpful to churches as they consider sending and supporting workers.

One practical application for a team of church planters would be: Ask each team member to read on their own, one chapter a week over an eight-week period. After reading a chapter, team members jot down two questions they believe are important for the team to discuss. Then, when the team meets, questions are shared. Questions raised by more than one member would be treated first. At the end of each meeting, team members would agree on the one action step the team will take in light of the discussion.

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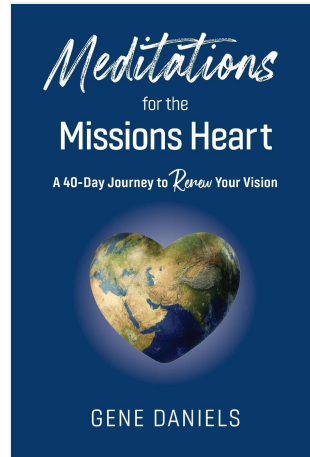
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## Meditations for the Missions Heart: A 40-Day Journey to Renew Your Vision

Gene Daniels. William Carey Publishing and Condeo Press. 2012. 135 pages.

Reviewed by Chad Thomas

*Chad Thomas (pseudonym), M.Div. (Faith Bible Seminary), is an American who has served in Northern Africa for more than 14 years in various roles: English teacher, well driller, discipler, CP-er, team coordinator, team leader, and area leader. He and his wife co-lead as area leaders. They have four children, two of whom were born in Africa.*



*Meditations for the Missions Heart* by Gene Daniels is a 40-day devotional tailored for Christians involved in global mission work—those who go, send, and pray.

As a member of a pioneer team breaking ground in an unreached corner of the globe, I often find myself weary, stretched thin, and fighting the subtle but persistent temptation toward discouragement. Out here, the trials are not just external—the language barrier, the physical discomfort, the lack of visible fruit—they are also internal, a quiet battle against distraction and doubt.

Daniels, with his years of experience serving among unreached people groups, gets *it* and *us*. The author and his family began in the mission field by serving as church planters in Central Asia and then was a researcher in

the Muslim world for more than twenty-five years. This isn't a book written from a cushy office outside the harshness of the field; it was penned by a brother who has walked in the dust and sweat of the field.

## Key Themes

The 40-day structure of the devotional offers a space of spiritual rest and renewal—a pause in the "wilderness"—that aligns with the sometimes demanding rhythm of missionary or team life. It can be digested in bigger chunks or one-off chapters. However, I would suggest that it would be best savored when taken as smaller morsels over a longer period of time.

The primary goal of this devotional is to impassion readers with a renewed vision of God's global purpose (a mission heart) and the glorious calling He has placed on their lives. This happens on two fronts. First, a mission heart is stirred when people in home countries uphold those who are in the field. Second, a mission heart is stirred when those on the field share vision with those holding them up back home. Both fronts are at risk of losing heart without the other.

The author frames the mission heart when he says,

The best way I can describe this passion is to call it a 'mission heart.' It is a heart that has been deeply touched by something so far off in the distance that most others won't ever see it. And this encounter changes our life priorities. This is a soul who has heard the voice of eternity crying out to faraway peoples who have yet to hear the great shepherd's voice. (8)

It is rare to have a book, especially a devotional, that addresses both folks on the field and back home. The author writes to both fronts as mutually important by helping to bring to light for those back home the challenges of the field—poverty, waiting, discouragement, and service. The devotional highlights a shared mission heart, by underscoring the vital interdependence between missionaries (who go) and their home supporters (who send and pray). It stresses that the success of either

group is reliant upon the other by bringing to light those spiritual struggles common to all followers of Jesus, and especially by those striving in the mission field.

Daniels is real and honest about discouragement, distraction, the mundane, and trials. However, he consistently reminds the reader that perseverance and spiritual fruit come from abiding in Christ as the true source of strength and joy. Daniels says that our problem is that "We are not convinced that even our most saintly efforts are only shriveled, dead wood trying to bear sweet, juicy fruit. But as disciples who claim to believe the Master's words, we must tremble at the thought of living apart from our life's source in the vine" (67).

## Strengths for the Pioneer

Every meditation is short yet deeply rooted in the Word. When our surroundings swerve our attention, Daniels gently redirects our gaze back to the unchanging truths of Scripture. Entries like "To See Him Who Is Invisible" and "My Redeemer Lives" can be timely anchors for the soul when facing opposition. These are sources of strength for pioneer laborers serving in the field.

As I have been a pioneer in the field, I have gained so much strength simply from reflecting on who the Lord is to me and how he has met me in the everyday moments or challenges. When I took the time to share God-stories with those who were upholding me regularly in prayer, it fostered greater two-way prayer, fueled all of our hearts for the mission, and turned my eyes to the one who is my ultimate strength in times of need.

Daniels tackles the feelings of the struggle and trials that can tug at those laboring in a foreign land. He tethers the common struggle familiar to almost all laborers in the field with wisdom from above and the power of relationships here below. He speaks not only to the sent but also to the senders, fostering an interconnected mission heart that reminds us we are not alone.

The devotional reflections are gentle yet firm, reminding us of our glorious calling without minimizing the cost of that calling. He invites us to draw near to Christ and His followers who model a way to persevere with joy even when results are slow in coming. In a reflection upon Patrick of Ireland and other giants of missions past, Daniels reminds my colleagues and me, “Many, if not most, of these saints died without seeing the fruit their dreams would someday bear” (100).

I have often needed to tell my heart that fruit isn’t always seen immediately or in my lifetime. There have been moments when I begged God to see some fruit sooner than later. He has given small glimpses in season serving in Northern Africa, but knowing that unseen (or delayed) fruit has been the common path walked by so many before me brings an odd sense of comfort, especially when those in the Scripture were also no different.

## Limitations

What is missing from the devotional is more application paired with the theological and missional reflection. While the book excels at encouraging rich Godward reflection and heart alignment with the mission of God, the chapters leave the reader with a longing for more connection to life amid a high-stress, cross-cultural environment. For example, in the chapter, “Authority Rooted in Love,” there was a valuable rebuke on how many missionaries treat their local relationships like employees who complete their To-Do lists. This could be a good place to press further into our hearts by asking a curious question or sharing a story of what a Paul and Onesimus relationship might look like in the mission field.

The author has an art of writing brief, thought-provoking chapters rather than verbose treatises on any particular topic. He presents a morsel for meditation and invites us to go deeper with God and one another. Yet as it is, one must take the next step on their own. The author of the devotional could have greatly improved chapters and the overall

experience by infusing a focused prayer, action step, or question to reflect upon in a journal, such as:

- How does the truth of God’s sovereignty today impact your approach to language learning frustration?
- What specific ministry stress are you placing under the authority of Christ?

For example, chapters in the devotional could benefit from a specific prayer prompt for a local disciple, a difficult field relationship, or a challenging cultural barrier.

## Conclusion

*Meditations for the Missions Heart* remains a timely and essential devotional for anyone involved in global missions. It is not a manual on strategy, but an anointing oil for the soul—a daily invitation to renew our vision and recalibrate our hearts to God’s global heart. I heartily recommend this book to any brother or sister on the field, any pioneer team wanting to drink from the well together, and anyone who supports them in prayer. It will keep your gaze fixed on the ultimate prize.

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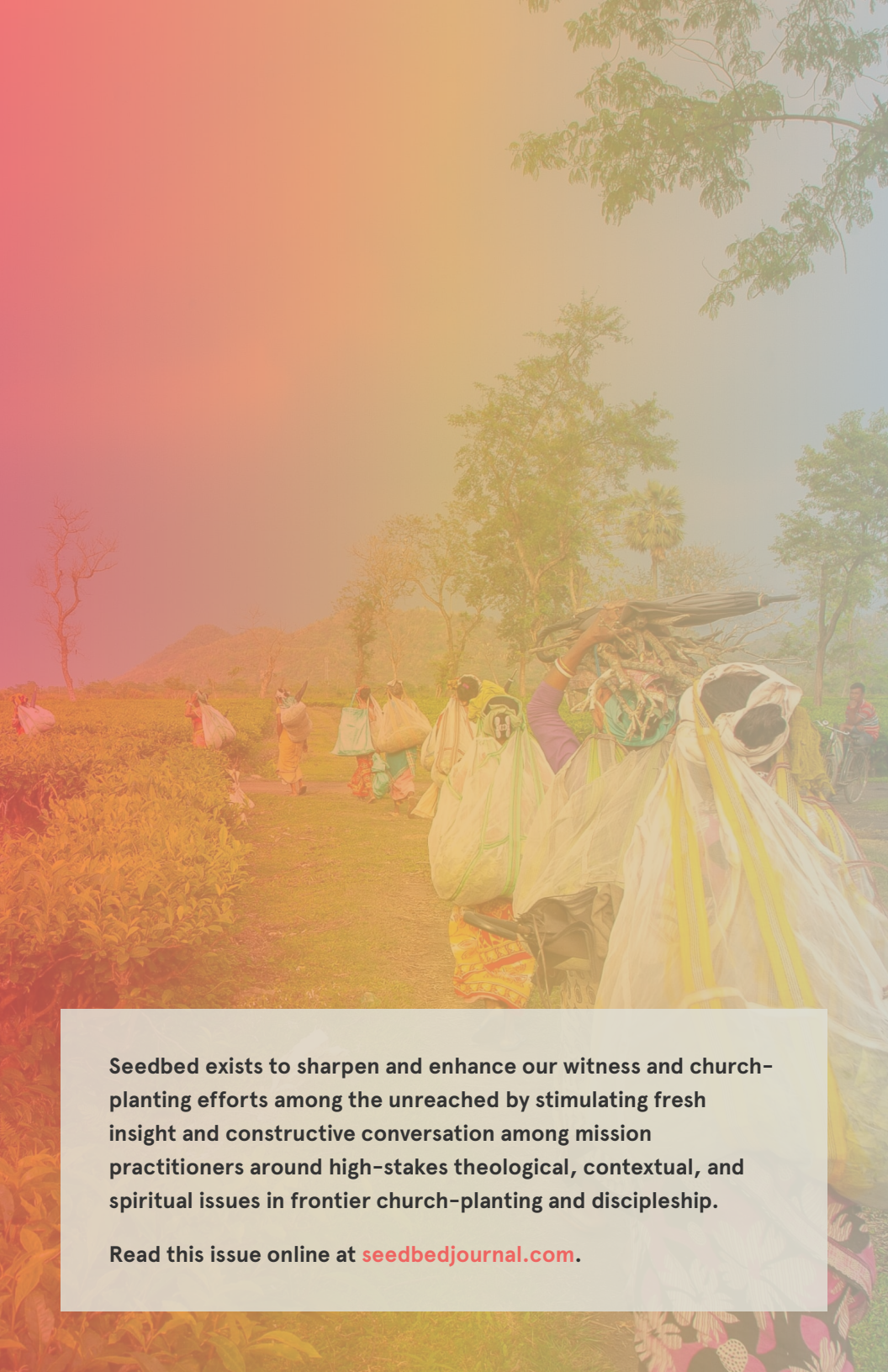
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