

Missions Movements

The man was quiet, unassuming. His most remarkable feature was his...utter unremarkability. I had been observing him for several days, along with other church leaders gathered for training in church planting. And while others were more vocal, charismatic, or witty, there was something about him which spoke volumes to depth of thought and life. Finally, almost at the end of our time together, I got a chance to get close to him, and listen to his heart. Here's his story.

His church is 7 years old, among a people group where there have been believers in Christ for only about 15 years total. There are only sections of the Bible translated into their language. There is not one Christian training program in the entire people group, which numbers nearly 10,000,000, in several nations. Unemployment is almost 50% in his country, and the mean income for the nation is under \$1,000 annually. There is persecution from both other religious groups, and from the government, independently of each other. In the global context, it is considered one of the five most repressive regimes in the world toward Christians. The percentage of believers in their country is less than .05% of the total population.

Sounds pretty bleak, huh? Yet as he spoke, there was a fire in his eyes and a calm, steely nerve in his voice which told a far different story. When he spoke, people listened. He had calm assurance, forged in the fires of persecution and a walk with God which yielded fruit in unusually godly character.

His church today has just over 50 members, making it one of the largest in this people group. They have sent out members to plant another 4 churches in other regions of their country. Additionally, they have sent two of their own as missionaries to other countries. All this in spite of all the obstacles listed above.

How could they do this? They could do this because missions was part of the DNA of the church from its birth. When something is part of your DNA, it will happen. It's only a matter of time. No matter what the obstacles, no matter how bleak the circumstances, it will happen. Their DNA is to be a Great Commission church based on Mt. 28:18-20.

The Great Commission is a global command in every sense of the term. The Great Commission is given to all disciples, and for all peoples, nations, and people groups. Any church which is doing a great job at reaching its own Jerusalem, and even Judea and Samaria, is ahead of most churches. It is not, however, fulfilling the Great Commission, which is global in both character and scope.

The church above is proactively prosecuting an extreme kingdom agenda, commands, and values. The crucial element is adherence to the complete Great Commission of Mt. 28:18-20, including the global dimensions.

In the final analysis, selective obedience is no obedience. Matthew 28:18-20 makes this clear. Jesus commands the disciples in verse 20 to teach their own disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded them. This must of necessity include the commands in the previous verse, which relate to all ethnic or people groups.

What is a Missions Movement?

But what exactly is a missions movement (in the future MM), you may ask. An MM, for our intents and purposes, is the extension of a CPM across geographical and/or cultural boundaries. Even more succinctly, an MM is a cross-cultural CPM.

Why MMs?

What is the greatest result for which a missionary can hope, pray, and work? Is there anything greater than seeing a church come into being where none existed previously? Seeing the birth of a vision and a living organism is awesome. It's a God thing. You can never quite wrap your brain around it no matter how many times you see it. So once again, is there anything to compare with this? I would say the answer is yes, there is.

The entire life cycle is predicated upon people being born, growing up, and in time passing on the life cycle to the next generation. There is no 'master generation' responsible for repopulating and training the entire world population. Each and every family is charged with the solemn responsibility of raising up the next generation.

Further, no generation can do it for some other generation. It's a frustratingly chronologically challenged assignment. You cannot skip generations, make up for past generational failures, nor 'plan ahead' and get the job done for the next one. We are all part of a life chain, dependent on past generations, and responsible for future ones.

If we change the metaphor from generations to one of the body, all parts of the body are needed to accomplish the task God intended. That's why we have all the bodily parts we do. There is no 'master' body part, nor 'universal' body part, which magically solves all problems. Health is simply all bodily parts and systems working normatively and in harmony with all other parts and systems. That's health. You will never achieve health by having the healthiest heart in the world surrounded by other, unhealthy organs. That simply won't cut it.

You may well have the greatest heart, but health is a function of the entire system, and only appears when all parts and subsystems (nervous system, circulatory system, etc.) are both independently healthy, and also working in sync with all other bodily systems, as designed by the Creator. That's health.

To use yet another metaphor, the church is a symphony orchestra, not a solo, nor a duet, nor even an ensemble. Jesus Christ is the conductor. Beautiful symphony music emerges only as each player performs his part both to the best of his ability, and in concert and sync with everyone else, as dictated by the Master Maestro.

The church has been charged with making disciples of all peoples (Mt. 28:19). Have you ever considered the entire global church in terms of the body? For the entire global church to function as God intended, all parts must be functioning as they were intended by God. It's not enough to have healthy pockets here and there. Healthy pockets here and there are a start, but the rich mosaic will never be attained until the all the pieces are put into place.

True maturity is a disciple, or better, bodies of disciples, intentionally pursuing yet other disciples of all nations. We could rephrase Mt. 28:19 this way - Make disciples of all peoples, who in turn continue the process, also making disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:20 makes this clear. If a disciple is one who obeys all that Jesus commanded, then it follows that said obedient disciple is likewise involved in making disciples of all peoples as is his or her discipler. To disassociate 'all people' from the

Great Commission, for ALL disciples, is to emasculate the gospel of its inherent power, intent, and scope.

Not only will the Great Commission never be accomplished by any one group of people (for example, North Americans), that was never God's intent. The mark of true maturity is carrying out your designed function in the face of incredibly daunting obstacles. The ultimate example of that in history is the cross. We all know, to some degree (though in reality we don't have a clue to the depth of this process) the agony Christ endured on the cross - the shame, the suffering, the abandonment of almost all his closest friends.

Yet have you considered God the Father's role in that most glorious event in history? Why associate the word 'glorious' with the most shameful event in history, using them in the same sentence? Simply because that is what Jesus did. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you," (Jn. 17:1). This is what Jesus prayed in the garden immediately preceding the cross.

But what about the Father's role in this event? One might blurt out, "But the Father didn't do anything. He just watched as that event unfurled. He didn't lift a finger to do anything." Bingo! That's exactly right. Well, almost. Actually, he didn't even watch, since Jesus was made sin, and God cannot look on sin. Thus we have the most anguished cry in history, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46).

What does all that have to do with the Great Commission today? Simply this - in order for the cross to do its work, and for Christ to gain the ultimate victory, God the Father had to sit and not intervene in that most twisted and hellish moment in history. If God the Father had jumped in to 'fix things,' he would have inevitably destroyed the very things he had foreordained.

If he had attempted to do that which was not his to do, everything would have been lost. Even as Christ could have destroyed the plan by calling ten thousand angels to his rescue, the Father could likewise (and would) have caused failure by intervening personally.

I cannot even imagine the restraint the Father showed in that moment. Only a parent who has undergone the loss of a child and knows the absolute anguish and despair of not being able to save a child from death can begin to understand this. I say begin, because God the Father not only sat as His Son was brutally and totally unjustly murdered in the most heinous sin in history, but He could have stopped it in a heartbeat. Unbelievable! If He had intervened, you and I would not be here today as children of the King.

We read in Heb. 5:8 that Jesus learned obedience by what He suffered. How could Jesus, who was 100% God, learn something? Jesus was also 100% man, and what He suffered on the cross had never been experienced by either Him or His Father. It was a new step in His development. If He had not gone through that step of learning the obedience of the cross, you and I would not be here today.

The point is this. If Jesus could learn and grow, you and I can and are expected to as well. Part of that learning process includes learning our limits - what God does not expect of us, and what is not within our power or authority to do. Neither Jesus nor the Father lifted a finger to stop nor to alter the excruciating events of the crucifixion. Only because of the unbelievable restraint they showed at the cross does the church exist today.

How does all that relate to us today? Number one, North Americans cannot fulfill the Great Commission ourselves. We have limits given us by God Himself. We don't have the physical resources to complete the Great Commission.

Number two, God does not expect us to anyway. His plan for world evangelization includes the entire world, as not mere recipients of His grace, but as channels of that grace as well. Part of the global church achieving maturity is the entire church being involved in global mission.

In 3 Jn. 4, John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." There truly is something great than bearing children. That is seeing those children walk in truth. Walking in truth includes the Great Commission of Mt. 28:18-20, that they are also making disciples of all nations, peoples, or ethnic groups, and that they are teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded His disciples.

People talk of 360 degree feedback, or 360 degree learning. You might call this the 360 degree Great Commission. It's the Great Commission come full circle.

There is a movement in China today called the 'Back to Jerusalem' movement. It is the vision of Chinese believers to bring the gospel from China to Jerusalem, from where it was birthed. Historically, most of the evangelical mission thrust focused on westward expansion, ever since Paul's Macedonian vision turned attention westward rather than eastward. Europe, Africa, North and South America have all seen significant mission gospel thrusts, particularly over the last several hundred years.

The majority of the 10/40 window lies in Asia, to the east of the cradle of Christianity. Chinese believers today increasingly see their God-given call to complete that circle of world evangelization, westward across some of the most spiritually desolate regions of the world.

They are not alone in that. God is raising up believers from every tribe, kindred, and people to bear His name in places foreign to them. It is happening in Ukraine, India, Uzbekistan, and Romania, among other places. In a nutshell, we are seeing the birth of MMs in regions all around our world today.

What are common factors in MMs?

- 1) Vision
- 2) Networking
- 3) Broad-based, organized, focused prayer
- 4) Training/development
- 5) Sending/support systems
- 6) Cross-cultural church planting

Vision is directly tied to both understanding God and His purposes in our world, and to commitment to following that understanding. Where those two are poorly or inadequately understood or pursued, lack of vision, or inappropriate vision are sure to follow. To the same degree, where both understanding of God and commitment to obeying that are high, vision will likewise be high.

God's overarching purposes flow through Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. In Ge. 12:3 God promised Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. In Re. 5:9 & 7:9 people from every tribe, language, people, and nation

surround the throne in heaven. The fourfold repetition emphasizes the extreme global character and scope of those present.

Vision must be not only embraced, but also constantly refreshed. Most people, including missionaries, have a tendency to focus on what's right before their eyes, and forget what's not. It is very easy to practically forget the rest of the world even when I am philosophically committed to reaching the entire world. Additionally, missionaries are often in settings where the needs can be overwhelming, leading to passion and vision burnout. A fresh vision of God is the universal antidote to all these challenges, and more.

Networking is a practical outworking of both a commitment to God's design that we need each other, as evidenced by both marriage and the body, the church, and a realization that the Great Commission is simply way beyond me or us. It's a God thing. Networking goes beyond intellectual assent to the above, and asks what the job is to be done, what our resources are, what your resources are, what our values are, and where we can work in synergy to accomplish something greater than any of us could do on our own.

Networking requires humility, clear, open, and frequent communication, common goals, and a clear path to attainment of those goals.

Broad-based, organized, focused prayer refers to grassroots prayer movements dedicated to world mission and MMs. This would include some common requests both updated and widely distributed, quite possibly periodic corporate events to raise the vision of both mission and prayer, and both private and public praying for world mission. While this may take a multitude of forms, such prayer has been a constant throughout history when God has poured out His special blessing on world mission. Such prayer only happens when people and groups are more into God's agenda than their own.

Training/development refers to called, equipped leaders to carry the torch into the future. Jesus both called and trained His disciples, and His work was not done until they were prepared for the global task in front of them. There are many ways this can be implemented, including formal, nonformal, and informal approaches. The emphasis is not on the mechanism used, but the results effected. These people are ready for what lies ahead, and move forward by faith. This is an area which cannot be left to chance or happenstance if long-term results and blessing are expected. While the design may take many forms, its intentionality is constant.

Sending/support systems covers the entire process from someone considering missions to the point when he/she/they is/are no longer serving as missionaries. This is often one of the most problematic areas for fledgling MMs, since this area often has no real parallel in the host culture. Many of the other factors have some commonality with similar enterprises in the church culture, but this one is a brand new ball game.

This is one area where outside assistance is most often needed and desired. Assistance in this context refers primarily to the wealth of experience North American churches and agencies have in facilitating cross-cultural missions. Some cross-cultural issues vary from culture to culture, but others are nearly universal.

This is not to say that any structures designed should necessarily look like North American models. Models may look quite different, but the experience shared can be a big added value in avoiding very common mistakes.

Cross-cultural church planting may seem like an obvious point, but is in fact both quite critical, and not nearly so obvious in practice. Sometimes when missionaries first

arrive to a new location, they quickly become overwhelmed, and start accepting any apparent opportunity which presents itself, no matter how removed it may be from their originally stated goal.

Then, at some point in the future, they stop for a minute, look up, and wonder, how did we get here, and what is it we're supposed to be doing here anyway? There are all kinds of activities going on in the name of cross-cultural church planting, which bear little resemblance to it, and in fact are doing little to specifically move church planting forward.

Many missionaries and mission agencies fall victim to this trap. There are indeed many ways to plant churches cross-culturally, but when we look at the big picture of our ministry, the question remains, what has been the impact of our efforts on church planting among this people group?

Each one of these factors is key in developing an MM. If one or more of these is missing, it is quite likely an MM will either not emerge period, or will be a mere shell of what it could be, were all factors present. A good question to ask in your own setting is, **which of these six factors is missing, or in need of serious improvement?**

Serious prayer, networking, research, creative thinking, partnering, and a systematic approach to developing MMs can yield substantial kingdom fruit. Spontaneous workings of God are always possible and to be welcomed and celebrated (Ac. 8:4), yet do not take precedence over nor invalidate more intentional and systematic approaches (Ac. 13:1-3), which incidentally are also often God-inspired (see same Ac. 13 passage).

MM Blockers or Deterrents

All those listed for CPMs also apply here, plus the following:

- ✓ Inadequate paradigms
 - In both North Americans and non North Americans
 - It's only for the well-trained in the traditional western educational sense of the term
 - It's only for those fully supported financially
 - Inadequate God concept
 - In North Americans
 - Non-North Americans will not do missions 'the right way,' i.e. the way we do it ☺
 - In non North Americans
 - It's only for North Americans, it's not our job
- ✓ Little or no grass-roots support for missions
- ✓ Giving priorities and practices of churches heavily tilted toward local involvement
- ✓ Lack of a previous generation of experienced missionaries to lead the way
- ✓ Lack of preparation for those sent
- ✓ Lack of leadership training of those reached by national missionaries
- ✓ Lack of financial support
- ✓ Lack of pastoral care on the field
- ✓ Lack of teammates (Two thirds world missionaries often serve alone)
- ✓ Lack of strategic ministry planning

MM Enhancers or Accelerants

All those listed for CPMs also apply here, plus the following:

- ✓ Creativity and flexibility in funding issues (tent-making, students, business as mission/economic development, and reaching and training internationals in your own culture and them returning home are examples)
- ✓ Flexibility in training models (high in-service focus, short, intensive spurts)
- ✓ Short-term vision trips for key prospective players
- ✓ Strategic partnership with an established mission agency to mentor and show the way

Is there a role for North Americans in MMs?

If it is true that MMs are beginning to spring up in various regions of the world, should North Americans have any kind of role in such a God thing? Perhaps North American attempts would only delay or distract others from doing what God has put in their hearts.

This is a legitimate question. The reality, however, is that most MMs require priming and assistance before they become viable. In both Ac. 8 and Ac. 13, the Holy Spirit intervened to prime the pump for global mission. In the first instance the catalyst was persecution, in the second it was a clear command from the Holy Spirit to a church to release a team of two chosen and prepared servants to commence the next phase of the Great Commission.

God is free to use any resources He so chooses to move His kingdom plans forward, but in Acts there was no history nor any contemporary models on which to fall back. If God hadn't intervened, the Jerusalem church might have continued on its merry way, quite content to bask in substantial numeric growth and God's blessing on their fellowship within their church and ethnic/cultural group.

Quite honestly, that tendency still exists today. Where God's blessing is most clearly felt, there often develops a subtle tendency to 'hang around' and enjoy the benefits of said blessing. It's the 'Mount of Transfiguration' syndrome, the desire to petrify, codify, and shrink wrap God's blessing. "Let's just build three tents and smell the flowers," - kind of a Christian Woodstock. Such moments are great, awesome displays of God's power and glory, but Peter rings the warning bell of seeking such miraculous displays, or of relying on them (2 Pe. 1:16-19).

So God uses means to jar people's attention, to remind them of His purposes. North Americans can play a significant role in promoting MMs, if they approach the question in a truly kingdom mindset, and not a regional, territorial, nor sectarian mindset.

Regional, territorial, and sectarian mindsets show themselves in the following ways: **What will I/we get out of this? Will we get the credit? Will we call the shots? Who will control this thing? Will everything funnel back to our group (be that church group, mission group, or any other group)? Territorialism and controlling agendas and personalities squelch emerging MMs.**

A kingdom mindset asks the following questions: **What is God up to in our world today? What is God calling us to do? How can we be on-line with Him? How can we best serve His interests? Where can we best invest our resources for maximum kingdom benefit? Who is best positioned to move this MM forward (regardless of whether it is our group or not)? What questions do we need to be asking to move forward on the learning**

curve necessary to become more effective kingdom catalysts? Where are we too focused or entrenched to see God's hand at work? What changes do we need to make today to be more effective tomorrow? Who do we need to listen to and learn from that is doing a good job in some areas of global mission? Where can we piggyback and with whom should we be partnering to maximize kingdom resources? Who can we help become more effective in global mission? What are the cultures with which ours (host culture) has the most in common? Where is our Galilee? What would be the best way to go about reaching our Galilee?

The bottom line is **who serves whom**. Do we serve God or does He serve us? In the first scenario, we're willing to 'help' if it serves our own interests. In the second scenario, we seek to serve God's global mission interests, not somehow hijack God's blessing to serve our own purposes and build our pseudo-kingdom.

If there are roles North Americans can fill in MMs, what are they?

What are some potential roles North Americans can fill in an MM? These are listed in no particular order, and are also not unique to North Americans. In actuality, these roles can often be filled by anyone meeting the qualifications, regardless of his or her nation of origin. North Americans have, however, at various times filled the following roles in various MMs:

- ① vision caster: where vision is low, non-existent, or needs to take a new turn
- ② encourager: where someone has caught the vision, but is discouraged by lack of visible or expected results
- ③ strategizer: helps puts feet on vision
- ④ equipper: of those national partners called to serve cross-culturally
- ⑤ builder: helps develop culturally relevant administrative structures to facilitate missions movements
- ⑥ networker: of people, groups, and organizations to facilitate significant global kingdom strides - interestingly, sometimes outsiders have an advantage in this, because they don't bring the baggage of history in that local setting
- ⑦ modeler: North American groups can serve as models for national partners - while the final product in various cultures will often (and should) look significantly different from North American constructs, models are often crucial to even get a preliminary grip on what one of these MM thingies looks and acts like
- ⑧ financial support developer: this is one of most potentially problematic areas, but experience has shown that this can be very productive in two directions, if used wisely - seed funding to assist in getting the movement going, and also in helping national partners develop their own sources of funding
- ⑨ provider of accurate, current information resources on neighboring cultures: such information is vital to making good missiological decisions, and North Americans often have experience in both securing such information, and 'reading' it (making sense of it).

Numbers, 1, 6, and 7 often occupy the vast majority of time and attention in the beginning stages of an MM. Just as when a rocket lifts off, more energy is expended in those first few seconds and feet than in thousands of miles of travel, after the rocket has already attained cruising altitude and speed. If you attempt to either skip or skimp on

these preliminary steps, you'll come back to them anyway, when attempts at numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 or 9 fizzle or fail, because the ground is not prepared.

You must begin at whatever level the national church currently is. Both goals and means are important. Strategy must be based on an accurate understanding of the local church context in your host culture. This requires making contacts, developing relationships, asking probing questions, and showing both interest in others and initiative in the learning process.

The process is as critical as are the results. There will never be an MM until there is widespread national ownership. If it is only 'the missionaries' idea,' it is not a movement, no matter how many good things are happening. Do not run ahead if the ground is not prepared. There may well be a temptation to want to circumvent the process, and just 'cut to the chase.'

Premature fruit is neither delicious nor sometimes even edible. Psalm 1 talks about the righteous man who brings forth his fruit in his season. So it is with MMs. There is a time for plowing, sowing, watering, and reaping. It does no good to shake the fruit tree in the middle of winter. Patience, steadfastness, and persistence in both prayer and action will be rewarded, if you do not grow weary and give up in the process.

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