

Discovering the Fruitful of

FEATURE ARTICLE

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In 1978, God called Doug Lucas, a student in Bible college, to bring together a prayer meeting in a dorm room — and that prayer meeting became the genesis of Team Expansion. Since that time, Doug has served as both missionary (in Uruguay and later in the USSR/Ukraine) and Founder/President of this global organization, now consisting of 282 full-time missionaries serving on 70 different teams among unreached people groups in over 40 countries. By the end of 2016, weekly attendance in churches and groups established by Team Expansion workers and their partners was close to 24,000 people. (Learn more at www.TeamExpansion.org.) Based in Louisville, Kentucky, Doug has a Bachelors Degree in Bible, a Masters degree in Missions, an MBA, and a doctoral degree in Business Administration. He is a husband to Penny, and a father to Chris and Caleb (both currently working full-time on their own respective doctorates). In his own local church, he has served as an elder, Missions Committee Chairman, and is still active on the worship team (piano and synth). In 1995, in an effort to provide resources, motivation, and trends in global missions, he created an email/web newsletter called Brigada. He and a colleague have published that newsletter nearly every week ever since. (See all of them at www.Brigada.org.) He longs to see more people come to Jesus, and he's passionate about multiplying disciples. Toward that end, he and a colleague have launched training websites at www.MoreDisciples.com and www.MissionsU.com

Practices Movements

OUR MISSION ORGANIZATION LAUNCHED in 1978 with a noble goal: **Send lots of missionaries** to work among the unreached. In the 1990s, thanks to careful thinkers like Dr. Ralph Winter, we sharpened our focus toward unreached people groups. Our goals no longer counted workers alone, but in addition, number of unreached people groups engaged. We carefully trained all our workers in language learning and identification with locals. We emphasized **church planting**. We hoped and prayed that, once each team of workers was engaged with the people, those workers would only need a year or so to plant each new congregation. We fully expected that it would take longer, of course, to train up a nucleus of new leaders.

Sometime after the year 2000, thanks to researchers like Dr. David Garrison, we began setting goals for **Church-Planting Movements (CPMs)**. In this “third version” of our organization, we had noticed that our “beachhead churches” sometimes stayed beachheads. By contrast, in the book of Acts, the disciples did more than establish a single new church in each region or country. God “added to their numbers.” Accordingly, we began urging our workers to plant churches that would plant churches. Our goalsetting process began measuring not only churches planted, but also churches that were planting new churches.

By 2010, we were engaged in a bit of a revolution. I'm not even sure what to call it but, for lack of a better term, we'll call it **Disciple Making Movement (DMM)** thinking. The difference might seem subtle at first. In fact, it was very fuzzy to me at first as well. But once understood, the outcome was rather profound.

The Fruitful Practices

Regardless of your opinion of DMM practices, the electricity and sheer energy generated by DMM-thinking is hard to miss. While earlier trainings focused on tactics and strategy, DMM was, at first, too simple for my mind to grasp. One of the central tenets, as articulated by DMM trainer Curtis Sergeant, is simply to “**be a disciple worth multiplying**” (BADWM). (Isn't it just like Jesus to bless a system of practices that focuses on changing from the inside-out?)

David Garrison had identified **extraordinary prayer** as being the first of several critical factors in launching Church-Planting Movements. But for some reason, it took us a decade or more to understand that this extraordinary prayer had to begin inside of us as workers

rather than in some infrastructure or campaign. In other words, to change the world, we had to change ourselves.

Our early efforts at launching movements had been heavily influenced by American business practices such as strategic planning. Now, it almost seemed too simple to tell a new worker that he or she needs to acquire a kind of “**passion for telling God's story.**” I guess we all want our jobs to be tactical and strategic. Somehow, we must think it makes us look more intelligent maybe. Training workers to do prayer-walking and facilitate Discovery Bible Studies (DBS — or, as Curtis Sergeant calls them, three-thirds groups) just seems too... easy.

Another practice first described by Garrison in his landmark book, *Church Planting Movements*, was even harder to grasp. Our temptation when new believers begin encountering **persecution** is to remove them from the context. Some have referred to this practice as extraction. No matter what it's called, it's the first response of the human heart. The trouble is — once we remove a practicing believer from his or her context, the momentum stops. Not only can this new believer no longer reach his or her household (“oikos”), but in addition, the fire... the energy... the electricity is gone. Somehow, God seems to bless those who are persecuted in a way that we don't understand. And the outcome is amazing.

It seems odd to highlight **obedience** and **accountability** as core practices of launching movements. Haven't we believed in obedience all along? Yes — but somehow, we began to equate obedience with (mostly) learning about Jesus... instead of focusing on doing what He told us to do. It's good to measure church attendance. But it's even better to figure out how to measure whether or not those attenders actually do anything about their faith. Again, pointing back to a core teaching of Curtis Sergeant, “It is a blessing to follow Jesus. It is a great blessing to bring others into a relationship with Jesus. It is a greater blessing to start a new spiritual community. It is the greatest blessing to equip others to start new spiritual communities.”

For a couple of decades, our organization focused on bringing others into a relationship with Jesus, then we focused on teaching them the concepts of the Bible, almost equating spirituality with knowing concepts. But Jesus didn't want people who merely knew things. He told them that if they loved Him, they would do His commands.



One of the toughest practices to grasp is **discovery-based learning**. Perhaps it's so difficult because it's so easy. Critics are quick to accuse DMM-practitioners of dumbing-down the gospel. After all, shouldn't new believers have to endure extreme and in-depth training before they're entrusted with the job of telling the Jesus story? But the truth has been staring us right in the face for centuries. How long had Jesus known the man possessed by an impure spirit (Mark 5:1-20) before he sent him back to his household of faith ("oikos") to tell them how much the Lord had done for him?

Maybe a half-day at the most. Whoa. We've seriously been overthinking this. And this guy in Mark 5 was about to change history for his home region of Decapolis.

Those are pretty much the core of the core. BADWM, passion for telling God's story, praying for those in persecution (but not extracting them), obedience, and discovery-based learning. The truth of the matter is, it now can take as little as 20 hours or so to train a disciple to start multiplying. Twenty hours.

The Fruit

Exactly how does this DMM process play out and what are we asking our team members to do daily? We're teaching them how to move into a new area, learn the language and culture, pray a lot, and live in such a way that he or she is "conspicuously spiritual" while meeting felt needs in the community.

Our workers practice the art of becoming a disciple worth multiplying, anticipating that someone will notice (seekers). We introduce these "open people" to stories about Jesus and His life. We might mention a passage in which Jesus teaches about honesty and explain that, for this reason, we're returning a small amount of money that many would consider petty.

Then we ask if the individual likes that idea. If he or she responds positively, we ask if they'd like to hear more teachings of Jesus. The people who say "yes" to these kinds of questions are of the utmost importance to us. They are what some trainers call "persons of peace," harkening back to Jesus' words in Luke 10, when sending out the 72 disciples.

Our workers start three-thirds groups with these interested parties. In those studies, our workers simply introduce a new story from Scripture, then ask questions such as, "What did you like about this passage? What seemed difficult? What does this passage teach us about God? What does this passage teach us about people? If we believe this passage is from God, how must we change? Who are you going to share this passage with before we meet again? With whom will you tell God's story?"

Those who are seeking will want to meet again. Those are the people in which we want/need to invest our time. We repeat these processes until our new "people of peace" become believers, then disciples, then group leaders on their own. Using this simple approach, our workers expect to start groups which multiply. It works overseas — but it also works right here in the USA.

In one field, the team worked for some 15 years to establish the first beachhead church. But by introducing DMM principles, they multiplied into seven groups within the next 12 months. In another field (a Muslim land), the group struggled for 10 years with almost no fruit. Upon beginning DMM principles, they had five new groups launched (and multiple baptisms) within

the first year. In yet another field, our workers weren't even sure how to begin for the first 5 years. Upon implementing simple DMM practices, in the next 17 months, they were able to see 112 groups come into being with more than 750 individuals in attendance on a weekly basis. Particularly significant is the fact that, during those 17 months, 481 of those new followers were baptized and many of those are already discipling others. Now, some years later, as this article goes to press, that field has seen groups multiply over 16 generations (the original group has had great-, great-, great-, great-[to the 16th generation] spiritual grandchildren).

The movement saw 165 baptisms in July (2017), and has had 845 baptisms and 143 new groups formed so far this year.

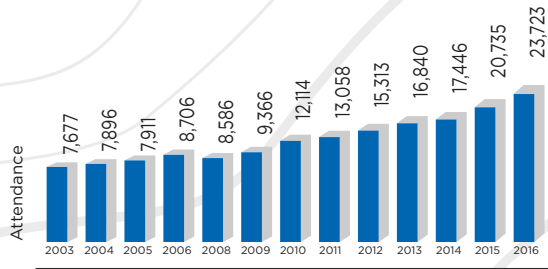
Taken all together, our workers have seen a major uptick in fruit since transitioning to DMM practices (see accompanying graphs on these pages). Last year, there were over 300 groups formed, well over 1,600 baptisms, with a combined attendance in all churches and groups (launched by Team Expansion workers and their partners) of nearly 24,000 souls. God is at work through the 278 Team Expansion missionaries in 42 countries.

The Transition

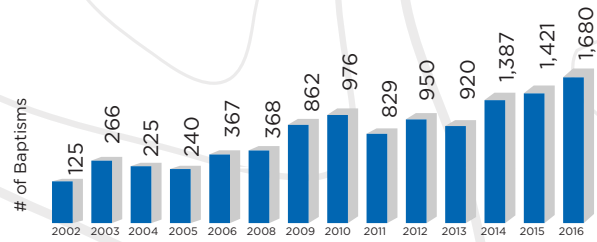
Throughout the past years, we've heard several horror stories about transitioning to DMM models from the traditional, "box church" approach. Some agencies like ours have reported that when they changed to DMM approaches, they lost 30 to 40% of their personnel. Apparently, some people don't like to change. Thanks only to God above, we haven't yet seen that kind of disenfranchisement. Here are some factors that might be helping us— but keep in mind [disclaimer]— these are only guesses AND things could go south at any time.

- From our early roots, our organization has always treasured innovation. One of our Seven Great Passions is, "Creative, strategic perseverance until the results are achieved."
- We had pushed "extraordinary prayer" from the outset as well. Our first publication was a prayer calendar for our first field. Garrison's writing just sealed the deal even further. So when DMM practices came along, they seemed culturally appropriate because they are part of our DNA.

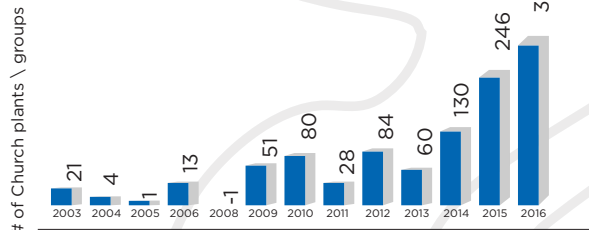
Stats



Church Attendance Growth



Baptism Growth



Church Plant/Groups Growth

• It was hard to deny the fruit. First, we saw it in the lives of the case studies we studied, and in the stories told by trainers. But then, a couple of our early-adopting teams experienced similar harvests and — how could we argue with God's blessing on their ministry?

• DMM practices were embraced early by several of our senior leaders. Interestingly, I wasn't necessarily among them. It was not that I was opposed. I just couldn't get my arms around it initially. The training seemed too "fuzzy." It wasn't until I broke it down into practical, bite-sized steps that it was approachable and doable for me. (See the outcome at www.MoreDisciples.com)

• We purposefully decided not to rush people into this transition. We allowed them time (years, in fact). Once they saw fruit among their peers, it became easier for them to transition.

• Stories helped ease the jump. We changed names of people and places, but told lots of illustrations to convey the reality. We shared reality. Some stories were good news, while some were sobering.

• Senior leaders gently and humbly modeled the behavior for me (their president). But for complete alignment, I had to become personally involved too. I couldn't just preach it.

If your organization or church is considering transitioning to DMM principles, try one or more of these options:

• Listen to the podcasts and read the blog entries at www.MoreDisciples.com.

• Take a "trial balloon" group through the Zume training material at www.ZumeProject.com. (Both services are free.)

• Read *Stubborn Perseverance*, by James Nyman (Author), Robby Butler (Editor), David Watson (Foreword), and Jerry Trousdale (Foreword)

• Read *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, by Steve Smith (Author), Ying Kai (Author), and David Garrison (Foreword),

• Read *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* by Jerry Trousdale.

• Read *The Kingdom Unleashed: How Ordinary People Launch Disciple-Making Movements Around the World*, by Jerry Trousdale and Glenn S. Sunshine. (available March 2018)

Don't hesitate to contact Team Expansion for more updates on their journey—www.teamexpansion.org 