
Church Planting Movements

from One Indian Perspective

Reported by *Robby Butler*

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Mission Frontiers, on the theme: **Jesus Movements***

Why don't most ministries produce the kind of fruit evident in the book of Acts? How is it that "all of Asia" heard the word of the Lord in just two years (Acts 19:8–12)? How can the house church movement in the West complement effective congregational models like that of Real Life Ministries (featured in the Jan/Feb 2011 issue of Mission Frontiers)?

A network of leaders in India offers fresh insight through their integration of knowledge and power.

As in the West, "post-harvest loss" is still a major issue, and some controversy surrounds these movements. But we can still learn a great deal from the fruit our Indian brothers and sisters are seeing as they seek to multiply NT churches with spiritual power, rescuing Christ's *Ekklesia*¹ from the barrenness and impotence common in today's "church."

While the Mar/Apr 2011 *MF* on Church Planting Movements (CPMs) was being finished, Gene Davis² invited me to join him in meeting CPM leaders in India. Thus I was privileged to spend four weeks interviewing and learning directly from leaders of rapidly growing CPMs. These leaders, along with their expatriate colleagues, provided invaluable feedback throughout the development of this article.

One highlight of my trip was the *Global Summit on Market/Workplace Ministries*³ in Bangalore, where 160 leaders from 21 countries met to learn how to develop self-funding CPMs in their own lands.

Field Insights into Luke 10

(This analysis of this chapter isn't uniquely Indian. Rick Warren recently offered similar observations on this passage⁴)

Send with Power (v. 1, 9)

Empower all disciples to do all that we are to do: proclaim the Kingdom, perform miracles, baptize new believers, and serve the Lord's table. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21).

Work with Others (v. 1)

George Patterson and Galen Currah list ten reasons to work in pairs.⁵ Here are three:

- Traveling in groups is NT practice.
- Prayer power comes with agreement.
- Groups bring a variety of giftings.

Prepare by Prayerwalking⁶ (v. 1–2)

Summit testimonies particularly emphasized prayerwalking—claiming the land, listening together to God's Spirit, and agreeing on-site with Jesus' plans.

In one instance, prayer was focused on just one of two adjacent, identical apartment buildings. In subsequent outreach, 75% of the residents in this building welcomed visitors offering to tell them about Jesus, compared with only 25% in the other building.

Beg God to Thrust Out Workers (v. 2)

Jesus highlighted the vast need and commanded his disciples to *beg* for more workers. Then He sent them to look for "persons of peace" (v. 5–6). As many have noted, "the resources [laborers] are in the harvest."

Be Wise Amidst Opposition (v. 3)

Those going to new villages to preach and hand out tracts used to frequently be beaten up and rejected. Since learning to prayerwalk until the "person of peace" is revealed, they seldom have this experience.

Go Empty-Handed (v. 3–4)

The resources we bring may attract a crowd, but they can also inhibit local ownership and multiplication. God's power is most evident when ours is absent. Our testimony is strengthened when God works ahead of us and provides through those who receive us.

Seek out the Person of Peace (v. 5–6)

The hospitable homeowner will generally be a person of local credibility, whose acceptance will encourage others to respond positively as well.

Establish Relationships (v. 7–8)

First enjoy fellowship with the person of peace, staying in one place and relaxing over food, eating and drinking "whatever is set before you."

Show God's Care and Power (v. 8)

My Indian friends have great insight into the essential components of effectual prayer for healing—holiness, faith, the Spirit's leading, laying on hands, etc. (God began answering my own prayers for others' healing in India in a way I had not previously experienced.)

Proclaim God's Kingdom (v. 9)

Once the person of peace has experienced God's Kingdom through relationship with someone who demonstrates God's power, they will want to learn more and be trained to reproduce.

Continue Mentoring (v. 17–24)

When the 72 reported back, Jesus redirected their priorities. Church reproduction stalls without ongoing mentoring which generates plans, and teaching to support those plans.

Rapidly Multiplying Churches commonly ...

- cultivate *scattering* to family, friends and workplace (for multiplication), as well as gathering (for edification). *Scattering* maximizes the church's *local engagement*.
- equip *reproductive disciplers* rather than entertaining passive church audiences. This leads the church to *rapid multiplication*.
- focus on the *Great Commission*, and not just local needs. This makes the church *obedient*.
- emphasize both *Word* and *power* (instead of just right doctrine), so that disciples proclaim God's Kingdom effectively. *Power* confirms the *truth* of God's *Word*.
- prioritize *going* where Christ is not yet named. This leads the church to disciple *all peoples* in *every place*.

Key Principles

Obedience Begins with Listening

Tarry daily with God as before the king of highest authority—until He releases you. Wait for guidance and power, then obey in faith. Resist the urge to rush into self-assigned activity, or to ask God to bless plans made solely on the basis of available resources.

Goals Multiply Fruit

Prayerfully develop increasing annual goals for baptisms, disciples baptizing others, self-funding, giving, etc. Measurable goals fuel multiplication, and deliver us from “bump into” guidance.

Baptism Initiates Laborers

Emphasize obedience to all of Christ's seven basic commands, starting with baptism as the first step toward teaching others to obey.

Swift Obedience Fuels Rapid Growth

Baptize new believers immediately (even if with just a bucket until immersion is practical), then urge immediate obedience in witnessing to and baptizing others.

Multiplication Involves Everyone

Teach everyone, including women and children, to reproduce, and give them the same authority to make disciples which Christ has given you—to go, to baptize, and to teach others to obey.

Ministry Should Happen Everywhere

Coach believers to start discipling others wherever they gather—in their own home and workplace, and in the homes of family, friends and co-workers.

Local Witness Deepens Consecration

Witness first to family and friends, even when it seems easier to witness to strangers who don't know your faults. Witnessing to family and friends deepens God's work in your own life. You are also usually the best person to win and disciple those closest to you.

Surprises

No Buildings, Payrolls, or Labels

Gary Edmonds⁷ observes “The naive manner in which US funds are deployed globally is not helping the global church. We have created an international welfare system that undermines the faith and interdependence of the people of God.” These bivocational leaders have broken this cycle by recognizing labels, buildings and salaries as an impediment to church multiplication. The financial assistance they accept is for travel, training and literature to accelerate the spread of these movements throughout India, and to other lands.

Surprises (cont.)

Christ Only Has One Body

The NT refers only to one “church” in each locality (believers meeting in homes *and* more public venues), with traveling elders sharing responsibility for both the saved and the unsaved in their locality. God’s Kingdom suffers when “church” buildings come to represent divisions between believers. All who seek together to obey Jesus are *His Church*.

Buildings May Slow Multiplication

Jesus’ Church is found wherever a few believers gather in His name to obey all that the NT specifies (especially commands that cannot be fulfilled by a lone individual). Multiplication stalls when “church” comes to revolve around a building or a person, to which we go and bring others. Jesus didn’t tell us to build buildings, but He did command us to disciple all nations. When we focus on going and making obedient disciples (our job), Jesus builds His *Ekklesia* (His job).

These Movements reduce Persecution

As God is bringing large numbers of Hindus and Muslims to Himself in these movements, obedience to all of Christ’s seven basic commands is encouraged in ways that respect the birth communities of the new believers.⁷ This reduces the frequency with which “conversions to Christianity” trigger intense persecution which hinders others from responding.

Jesus’ Presence Rests on Obedience

Reminiscent of William Carey’s *Enquiry*, one rapid movement among Muslims holds that Jesus’ promise to be with us depends on our obedience to Mt 28:19–20.

The Whole Church Must Be Engaged

The recognition and valuation of women—in anything and everything that is done by the men, from apostolic leadership to the baptism of new believers—is vital to the rapid spread of Jesus’ Kingdom in India and many other nations around the world.

Americans Often Aren’t Learners

Many Americans visiting India are so eager to teach that they miss the opportunity to learn from leaders who are seeing greater fruit than they are. These humble Indian leaders generally defer to the Americans’ agenda until invited to share what God has taught them.

Rapid Growth Generates Suspicion

The faster these movements grow, the more difficult they become to track—especially if they lack buildings and other obvious Christian trappings. And David Garrison tells me the leaders I met are leading “some of the biggest harvests in the world today.”⁸ Professional researchers I met in India are developing new methods of verifying and correcting the growth estimates. Yet any reporting of big numbers, especially from India, prompts some to simply dismiss these movements as wild exaggeration. Until research can verify the numbers involved, let us test and learn from these movements, and rejoice in growth that outpaces our ability to measure it!

Pentecost Celebrations Fuel Growth

This network of CPMs has seen tremendous growth as individual leaders disciple throughout the year toward a goal of 3,000 or more immersions on or by Pentecost.⁹ This vision is now spreading into the 10/40 Window.

Adoption is Better than Orphanages

These leaders are increasingly opening their homes to needy children, and their example could lead toward the placement of all needy children in families. David Platt's church (see the Nov/Dec 2000 *MF*) has modeled a similar dynamic in providing homes for all the foster children in their county.¹⁰ May God do something new in our day for neglected children!

From Driven to Disciplemaker

The effective Indian leaders I met have abandoned the "driven-ness" common among Christian workers to become relaxed, relational disciplinarians. Instead of living to "prove" their worthiness and need for a building and a salary, these leaders are becoming bivocational and disciplining just a few, who disciple others, in more generations than they can track. The result is a more effective testimony to the abundant life Christ offers now:

- One man has a disciple in each of twelve districts of his state. Each month they all meet in a different district for five days of prayer and planning, learning from and supporting one another in their oversight of rapidly multiplying house churches. Together they estimate that 100,000 people have been baptized through this network, and they expect to see half of their state baptized over the next few years!
- Another pastored seven small churches for 14 years; each day of the week spent serving a different church. A year ago he quit pastoring to focus on making reproducing

disciplers through house churches. Now he estimates 40,000 baptisms in one year through the generations of disciplers within his network.

- A third once worked 16 hour days overseeing a region for his denomination. After learning to multiply disciples through house churches, he encouraged 100 fellow pastors to start house churches; 619 were started in three months' time! Now he estimates that more than 100,000 have been baptized through his generations of disciples, while he also enjoys fruitful work with his wife and children among their high-caste, land-owning Hindu neighbors.

Major Influences

Dr. Victor Choudhrie, a Senior Fellow of both the American and British *College of Surgeons*, resigned in 1992 as Director of *Christian Medical College* to take up full-time training of house church leaders.

Choudhrie's parents were baptized by Dr. Donald McGavran, who later founded the *School of World Mission* at *Fuller Theological Seminary*.

However where the *growth* McGavran promoted became inaccurately associated with increasing the size and number of churches dependent on buildings and salaried pastors (and producing mostly "spectator" Christians), Choudhrie pursued *multiplication* of more reproducible churches, with bivocational pastors and in which everyone is equipped and expected to engage in ministry.

Gene Davis, the American with whom I traveled India, has assisted Indian leaders for decades in applying George Patterson's

principles of *Obedience Oriented Discipleship*. (This is central to *Perspectives* lesson 13—*Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches*.¹¹)

Neil Gamble¹² is another American who spent more than half his time over nine years training house church leaders in India, and has worked closely with Choudhrie.

Choudhrie's *Starfish Alliance*¹³ parallels the *Starfish Vision* and *Starfish Manifesto*¹⁴ of Wolfgang Simson, who had previously worked with Jim Montgomery in *DAWN Ministries*.¹⁵ In isolation from one another, God led Choudhrie and Simson simultaneously and independently to very similar conclusions and appreciation for the prophetic biology of the starfish.

Next Steps

In light of unfolding world events, Dr. Choudhrie has scheduled another *Summit* this October specifically for those working among Muslims. Practitioners from any country are welcome, but help is needed to underwrite travel costs for those coming from Asia and the Middle East. One Campus Crusade worker in Kazakhstan, who brought a Kazakh leader to the Summit in Bangalore, wants to bring to this next training friends and mission workers from “Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and maybe Turkmenistan too.”

Interested in attending, praying or assisting? Contact me: <RobbyQButler@gmail.com>.

Digging Deeper

Throughout this article I have footnoted links for further study and exploration.

George Patterson and Galen Currah's materials are helpful for learning to multiply.¹⁶ To address concerns, study Currah's *Five Fears of Pastors*.¹⁷ To learn spiritual power, work alongside those who demonstrate it. Here is one suggestion from the field:

- Help each believer plan and make five “gospel contacts” with each family member, even at the risk of persecution. Pray and practice with them their message, first approach, and appeal for faith.
- Expect God to work as you lay on hands and pray together in Jesus' name for healing and other needs of those with whom you share.
- Aggressively promote “persons of peace” to become disciplers, baptizers and equippers.

Regarding the model of Acts 19:8–12, through which “the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (Acts 19:20), Choudhrie adds this insight:

Paul was in Ephesus for three years, of which he spent a fruitless three months in the synagogue; one year and nine months in the Hall. The NT does not report what he did in the third year, but it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that he visited and strengthened his disciples all over Asia. No wonder he had little post harvest loss.

The hall of Tyrannus was situated in the middle of the fish market. (My wife recently visited the site.) Paul made tents inside the hall, as he taught to an audience who were his clients—itinerant people who needed the tents, such as the shepherds, the fishermen and petty business people who itinerated.

This captive audience not only heard teaching with their ears but also saw mighty miracles with their own eyes. This mix triggered the CPM, simply because his disciples would go and share the radical teachings as well as describe and perform signs wherever they went. (Talk to any one of our grassroots workers and he or she will tell you the latest miracle that has happened to accelerate growth.)

There are more dynamics for the success of this model: In the synagogue Paul was dealing with Jews only, once a week on the Sabbath. In the marketplace, he interacted with both Jews and Gentiles, and on a daily basis.

It does not matter how well crafted your discipleship materials are, the essential ingredients are: 1) supernatural acts that catalyze CPMs, and 2) continuous mentoring and monitoring of disciples to minimize post-harvest loss. Without both components in place, any model will falter.

Endnotes

¹ See *God's Government and the Church in the Modern West* at TellAsia.org/media/resources.php

² Gene Davis is a former board member of the U.S. Center for World Mission who has worked tirelessly to build a movement to reach the Banjara (gypsies) of India. He has spent decades serving Indian leaders in developing CPMs.

³ <GlobalMarketSummit.com>. The title reflects the self-supporting nature of this work, and the recognition of the marketplace as an important place of ministry.

⁴ Blog.GodReports.com/2011/03/rick-warren-issues-call-for-greater-collaboration-partnering-in-missions

⁵ Paul-Timothy.net/mentornet/pdf/mentornet38.pdf

⁶ See *Prayerwalking* by Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick (Creation House, 2003).

⁷ Gary Edmonds is former Secretary-General of the *World Evangelical Alliance*, and now President of *Breakthrough Partners*

⁸ cf the addendum to Kevin Higgin's article in the Jan/Feb *MF* <MissionFrontiers.org/issue/article/discipling-the-nations>.

⁹ David Garrison is the author of *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*, Wigtake Resources (January 2003), and guest editor of the *Mar/Apr 2011 MF* on Church Planting Movements.

¹⁰ Find the web-exclusive *Pentecost as a Global Day to Harvest Souls* at <MissionFrontiers.org>.

¹¹ News.SBTS.edu/2010/02/27/afl-2010-live-blog-david-platt

¹² Paul-Timothy.net/pages/perspectives/lesson_13_rev.pdf

¹³ FathersHand.net

¹⁴ 4shared.com/document/UreR1atk/en.StarfishPortal.net/downloads

¹⁶ DawnMinistries.org

¹⁷ <Paul-Timothy.net>. See also Patrick O'Connor's *Reproducible Pastoral Training: Church Planting Guidelines from the Teachings of George Patterson* (William Carey Library, 2006).

¹⁸ Currah.info/pages/dis744/five_fears_of_pastors.pdf

About the Author

In 1980, Robby earned an engineering degree from *Caltech* (the California Institute of Technology), then served 24 years with the *U.S. Center for World Mission* (USCWM) where he was mentored by and worked closely with the founder, Dr. Ralph Winter. Robby also served the USCWM in information technology and then as personnel director.



The steady stream of global leaders who visit the USCWM enabled Robby to develop an unusually clear grasp of the strategic considerations necessary for completing the missionary task in our day. Continuing relationships with many of these leaders enables Robby to refine insights from effective models through interactions with other leaders who are gaining complementary insights in other contexts.

Robby and his wife Jackie presently live in Washington state with their three children: Joelle ('96), Dana ('98), and Wesley ('01).

In 2004, Robby and Jackie Butler left the USCWH and launched **Mission Network** to:

- study the factors behind the “Mobilization Gap”—the gap between the Church’s capacity and its fruitfulness toward discipling all peoples, and
- work with North American church movements and mission agencies to close this gap.



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