

unsuspecting people as kingdom agents



LARRY GROVES

Over the last five years, Larry Groves has served as a Field Leader for Greater Europe Mission (GEM). Larry and his family are currently on home assignment where Larry is now filling his new role as CPM Trainer and Senior Joshua Strategist for GEM's Immigrant Ministry.

I met Vladimir in October 2010 at a men's spiritual retreat in a central European country. Vladimir is a university professor who came to saving faith through Jesus Christ some 20 years ago with a group of young people shortly after the fall of Communism. Vladimir revealed that he has struggled in his walk with God over the years and was now truly seeking genuine gospel community.

After a retreat, I met weekly with Vladimir spending time in the Word and prayer. We talked a lot about the Father's heart and his end vision for his country. Our discussions led me to introduce him to Training for Trainers (T4T), which is an ongoing disciple-making process that reaches successive generations of believers (2 Tim. 2:2). The goal is to train believers who can train others in a very simple yet effective method of evangelism and discipleship. The foundation of T4T comes directly from the word of God and aims to develop a biblical worldview that leads to a dynamic, life-on-life, loving process of following Jesus and fishing for the lost (Mk. 1:17).

We soon realized that a disciple-making movement reaching generation after generation of new believers would only take place in this country in cooperation with the Spirit and when believers begin to make disciples in the course of everyday life. Unity of purpose comes when we fight for the growth of the gospel in us and around us.

Our team put together a Church-Planting Movement (CPM) plan at the end of 2010. Our God-sized vision is to reach the 7.3 million people in this country who have not heard the gospel or had an opportunity to respond by the end of 2015.

Our plan called for ten discipleship groups and sixty new believers.

The goal was to find where the Spirit is at work in this country and join Him there. Our CPM plan helped us see God's end vision and work backwards. This helped us focus our efforts, generate activity, and keep us accountable. We spent much of our time in the fall sharing that God's heart is for bringing in a harvest and that He is looking for willing workers (Mt. 9:37-38). We also devoted much time in prayer and set up prayer networks outside the country and with national believers inside. Additionally, we had T4T resources translated into the native language to facilitate rapid uptake and multiplication.

Vladimir was one of a handful of believers that God spoke to and called out in late 2010 to be an agent of the kingdom of God, and to carry the mission of God into every area of his life.

FIRST SIX MONTHS

We started in 2011 with four discipleship groups. Vladimir started one group in his hometown and another with his friends in another town. We met bi-weekly with each group, giving each of us time to share our story and Jesus' story with our lost friends and family and cast vision to believers for future training.

Vladimir's hometown group was made up of the friends that all came to faith together many years ago. It was

difficult for them to share their story and Jesus' story in a meaningful way. Most of them shared their testimony but never bridged to the gospel. We

helped them create a one-to-two minute testimony of what they were like before Jesus, how they met Jesus, and what they are like now.

We used Creation to Christ (C2C) to tell Jesus' story.

As a group, we spent time every week practicing our story and Jesus' story. The first lesson you teach a new believer is on Assurance of Salvation. We used the first lesson to share Jesus' story with others. Everyone was convinced that they all needed to share the gospel with their friends and family. I asked them to go back and use the first lesson with the same people. We also discussed how to get into spiritual conversations and invite others to go through the first lesson together. We set weekly goals and prayed for those divine appointments and opportunities.

The breakthrough came by our fourth meeting. Using lesson one, Yordan led his wife's mother and brother-in-law to the Lord. Yordan now had a small group to train. Vladimir and two others also led their friends to the Lord telling their story and using lesson one. Two weeks earlier, the group was very skeptical and did not believe people would come to faith using lesson one. They no longer had any doubt. They experienced the presence and power of God. They went from not only "saying yes" to Jesus but also "doing yes."

Not everyone in the group shared his or her faith immediately. In fact, Georgi took over seven months to share his story and Jesus' story and lead his father and

uncle to Christ. He sent us an email to describe what took place:

Clearly this is not about a model or magic formula, but for God's action in the hearts of these people and in my heart, calmly and clearly, to set out the plan of salvation. I'm so glad for the T4T training and lesson one. Until this training I thought it was enough to tell them—I now know I need to ask them to commit to Jesus Christ. Before T4T, I was worried to share all the details because I did not know what to say or do,—especially if they say 'yes.' But now I was confident what to do based on our training and time together. If they are lost, I share my story and Jesus' story. If they come to faith in Jesus Christ, I teach lesson one immediately. Praise the Lord for saving my father and uncle.

IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO SHARE THEIR STORY AND JESUS' STORY IN A MEANINGFUL WAY...

In our first six months, we started eight groups in which group members led 20 people to Christ. Throughout this time, we continued casting vision to

current believers and church leaders asking the Lord for more workers for and from the harvest. The heart of our activity was constant, fervent prayer as well as networking among believers in order to train everyone.

SECOND SIX MONTHS

I met Nikolai and Galya through work in my non-profit organization. We hosted a US team for three weeks to do agricultural research. Through a mutual contact, Nikolai and Galya helped us meet and survey small farmers in the southern part of the country. Nikolai and Galya are artists and have pastored a church in this area for 20 years. The Lord had already given them the vision to share the gospel with the 250,000 people in their region.

It didn't take long to see that Nikolai was not only a pastor/missionary but an evangelist too. During our first meeting together, Nikolai shared with me that there is a ready harvest among Muslims in his region:

A Muslim family brought their very sick daughter to us at the church and asked us to pray for her. We prayed together and then asked the family to read the Bible (the gospels) regularly, to pray daily for the healing of their daughter, and to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They repented and confessed Jesus as their Lord. After two months, they returned to tell us their daughter is better but not completely healed. We told them to continue to pray, sing songs to worship God and continue reading the Bible together as a family.

After six months the father called me and said, praise the Lord, our daughter is totally healed. When others in the village witnessed God's healing of the girl, a family came to them and asked if God could heal their daughter of epilepsy. The father told them, ' It's very simple: repent, and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord.' They prayed together and he gave them a Bible and told them to go home and read it together and pray everyday. From that initial meeting, his daughter never had epileptic seizures again.

THE BREAKTHROUGH CAME BY OUR FOURTH MEETING. USING LESSON ONE, YORDAN LED HIS WIFE'S MOTHER AND BROTHER-IN-LAW TO THE LORD. YORDAN NOW HAD A SMALL GROUP TO TRAIN... TWO WEEKS EARLIER, THE GROUP WAS VERY SKEPTICAL AND DID NOT BELIEVE PEOPLE WOULD COME TO FAITH USING LESSON ONE. THEY NO LONGER HAD ANY DOUBT.

I believe that if God sends you somewhere, people will wait for you. Most of the time, I don't even know where I'm going, but God knows. I pray for the Spirit to lead me to those people God is preparing to be saved. If I don't go, no one will hear from the Lord.

Nikolai was very receptive to T4T. He understood that T4T is a process and not a set of lessons. Thus, T4T is very different from approaches that focus more on sowing and developing relationships so the gospel can be eventually shared and received. In contrast, T4T has the potential to fuel a much more rapid rate of evangelism and church planting. In the end, both sowing and reaping are necessary, but T4T is especially designed for rapid reaping and multiplication.

I remember the first day we launched T4T together. Nikolai wanted to spiritually map some villages in his region. Spiritual mapping has been likened to taking a walk with God to catch a glimpse of how He sees

the area around us. The purpose is, in a small way, to advance the Kingdom of God in an area through prayer, observation, conversation, and service. The goals are to gain a better understanding of the flow of life in an area and hopefully identify some of the spiritual open doors.

We prayed together in the van, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and show us where to go. We prayed that our hearts would be aligned with the Father's heart, and that our words for the day would be His words. We also prayed that we could be a blessing to the people we would encounter today.

After our time of prayer, we went to our first village and stopped at the local spring. We asked for a drink of water and struck up a normal conversation with a farm owner. It didn't take long to share our stories and bridge to Jesus' story. The Spirit was truly at work (Jn. 16:8). After Nikolai shared his story and Jesus' story, this man's demeanor changed. He turned red and got very serious. He then told us that he had an extramarital affair only thirty minutes ago.

Nikolai told him not to worry. "God can forgive you. He sent us to you today because He knows what you are doing." We prayed together for God to forgive him and that it is the Holy Spirit convicting him of this sin.

Nikolai let him know that Jesus is knocking at the door and this is the time to respond. He repented and believed on the spot. His wife was working in the adjacent tobacco field while we met at the spring. We praised God for intersecting our paths and prayed for his family and crops. Nikolai set up a time the following week to return to meet with him and his family.

We traveled to the next village stopping at the first tobacco field we saw people working in. We got out of the van and approached them. They were very friendly and willing to take a break to talk. Nikolai always offered up chewing gum to everyone working in the field. It was a great way to break the ice. He quickly told them he is a man of God and asked them if we could pray for them and their field. They said yes and were very happy to let us pray. We did not get to share the gospel but we did get invited back to their house on another visit.

As we traveled from village to village, we prayed continuously. That day the Spirit led us to fifteen adults and children. We learned a lot about each village and their respective inhabitants. We shared our stories (how we became followers of Jesus Christ) and Jesus' story over and over. The Lord led us to three people of peace who responded positively to the gospel and confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior (Lk. 10:5-7). We were invited back to two households and began many new relationships. Our day ended late in the evening.

Over the next six months, we saw substantial fruit working in tandem with the Holy Spirit focusing on disciple making that leads to reproducing groups and churches across relational networks. We ended the year with 25 active discipleship groups, seven second-generation groups, over 160 new believers and over 70 baptisms. Nikolai also cast vision to over 600 hundred believers and church leaders sharing the T4T process and challenging them to follow and fish. The Lord continued to call out new workers for the harvest including Vladimir for future missions in Eurasia.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

In addition to experiencing God's power, presence and substantial fruit in 2011, we also encountered spiritual warfare. We spent most of 2011 on edge, not knowing if or when we would have to suddenly leave the country.

We knew something was wrong when we did not get a response to our visa applications ninety days after our due date. This meant that our personal identification cards had expired. Our lawyers assured us that everything was ok.

After a seven-month delay, the Ministry of Justice rejected our visa applications through our non-profit organization. In disbelief, our lawyers tried an unofficial appeal that was denied as well. Even though we submitted an appeal to the courts, we had to leave the country as soon as possible. In just three weeks, we closed out our office, sold our car, took care of various legal issues, and made temporary arrangements for our apartments.

We left sad, angry and confused. We didn't understand why the Lord would have us leave during these days of substantial fruit. It took a few months in the States for the Lord to show us the ripple effects of 2011. As we followed up with Nikolai and Vladimir, we discovered the Spirit continued to work through people in and out of the country expanding a network of disciplers and new leaders. The movement was still alive!

Nikolai became the Strategy Coordinator (SC) for the country. He put together and trained a small team of like-minded Christ followers focused on reaching the lost and training obedient believers to become a witness and disciple maker of others.

THIRD SIX MONTHS

In the first half of 2012, they started 15 new discipleship groups, helped two additional groups go to second generation, one group go to third generation, one group get to fourth generation disciple making, and three groups become churches. These new groups have led over 190 people to Christ, and baptized 80.

OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, WE SAW SUBSTANTIAL FRUIT WORKING IN TANDEM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT FOCUSING ON DISCIPLE MAKING THAT LEADS TO REPRODUCING GROUPS AND CHURCHES ACROSS RELATIONAL NETWORKS.

Nikolai and his team led six three-day discipleship multiplication seminars to over 400 believers in six cities. They and other trainers are working across six denominations including the national church. They have also contacted others outside of the country making it possible for disciple-making to cross borders and expand the network.

A new day is dawning in Europe. Believers are catching the vision for a multigenerational discipleship and church planting movement which has the potential to transform this entire country because of its focus on making disciples who can make disciples, not just on getting people into church on Sunday. 