

# THE JOURNEY AHEAD

## STEVE SMITH

/ Steve Smith oversees the work of the International Mission Board (SBC) for Southeast Asia, and coaches churches and organizations on moving toward biblical Church-Planting Movements. He is the author of the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources 2011). You can follow Steve's musings from his devotional thoughts and kingdom ministry on Twitter @kingreigncome and Kingdom Kernels on Facebook.

In a remote valley in a restricted access nation, I gathered with my Ina partners as we discussed how to reach the 1.4 million Ina people. I had taught them repeatedly that the only way to reach all 5,000 villages was through a kingdom movement in which Ina people were ignited to reach their own people and beyond.

And yet these dear brothers and sisters continued to struggle with how this might happen, until one fateful afternoon.

One of the Ina leaders approached me jumping up and down with excitement.

Brother Steve, you'll never believe what we discovered! [Continued jumping.] As you know, we represent 80 new Ina churches. [Jumping.] We can easily go back and train each of our 80 churches to start a new church in six months or less. In six months, before the harvest season, we'll have 160 churches! [Him jumping. Me feigning ignorance.] That's not all! We can train all 80 new churches to start a new church in six months or less. And before the planting season six months later, we'll have 320 churches! [Jumping higher; me

feigning shock—though real shock is beginning to set in.]

That's not all, every six months we can help the new churches to repeat the pattern so that every six months we double in number from 320 to 640 [pointing to the numbers] to 1,280 to 2,560 and finally to 5,120!

Brother Steve, we are going to be finished in 3 ½ years!

All the Ina in the room were jumping up and down, smiles on their faces. It was beginning to occur to me that the Spirit had finally opened their minds to understand Church-Planting Movements and their part in them. Hope welled up in my heart that the Ina could indeed be reached in my lifetime. They really were grasping the idea that every new believer could be trained and expected to live out a lifestyle of witnessing to and training other new believers.

**The movement came to life.** A couple of years later, my supervisor responded to my monthly report: "Steve, this sounds like the book of Acts!"<sup>1</sup>

I just love Church-Planting Movements (CPMs)! The operative word here is *movements*. Jesus made it clear that **He** would be the

force behind the church growing: *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matt. 16:18 ESV). CPMs are God-engineered movements in one of their purest forms, harking back to the kingdom movements of Acts. They can't be explained from a human-engineered standpoint. *I love CPMs because I love seeing Jesus at work!* Interactions with faith-filled believers in CPMs have radically altered my life to one of increased devotion, faith and effectiveness.

## WHAT IS A CPM?

In their essence, CPMs are Spirit-engineered movements in which disciples and churches multiply generation by generation. Disciples display a value to love Jesus by immediately obeying all that they learn in Scripture and taking responsibility to win and disciple others in a like manner. CPMs emerge when there are consistent fourth-plus generation churches in multiple areas. "Fourth-generation" is defined by believers from a first-generation church (started by an outsider or pre-existing Christian) starting a second-generation church, which starts a third-generation church which then starts a fourth-generation church. If fourth-generation occurs consistently, then it's usually a God-movement.

In CPMs models of discipleship and church are extremely reproducible and life-changing in order to enable each new generation of believers to start new generations as a part of their normal lifestyle. How rapidly are the

new generations emerging? CPMs typically double in size at least every 18 months, though new generations can start every few weeks or months.

## WORD, WORKS, WINESKINS AND WORRIES

Most of us have never lived in such a kingdom movement. When we live in the world of non-movement, we find it hard to believe there is a reality different from our own experience. *The goal of this regular column is to draw lessons from this alternate world of kingdom movements so that we can implement their biblical principles in our own lives.*

If I can get someone to walk in the midst of a CPM, then that person will much more likely know how to cooperate with the Spirit in CPM processes. The ethos of CPMs is more easily caught than taught. The faith of CPM believers is contagious. But since most of us cannot physically walk among these movements, we will learn from CPMs and their practitioners in four areas:

**Word**—biblical principles for CPMs that were foundational for the explosion of the church in the first century A.D. and are foundational for modern CPMs.

**Works**—case studies of modern CPMs. *Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.* (Ps. 111:2) We will study what CPM practitioners are doing on virtually every continent.

**Wineskins**—methods and structures that effectively cooperate with the Spirit in reproducing generation by generation: finding God-prepared people, evangelism, short- and long-term discipleship, church planting/life and leadership development.

We will share practical methods that can help you in pursuing a God-movement.

**Worries**—concerns and questions that are common when CPMs emerge, and biblical answers for those.

## WHAT'S AHEAD IN THIS COLUMN, OR WHY I'M TICKLED TO DEATH ABOUT IT

*Mission Frontiers* will serve as a worldwide forum for lessons from CPMs. Men and women in the midst of CPMs will share their insights with you. Here are some of the top highlights in the issues ahead, or why I'm tickled to death to learn what they are learning.

### CHANGING THE PERCENTAGES

Stan Parks, who works with Mission to Unreached Peoples, says that in CPMs we see real changes in percentages. CPMs are genuinely helping us win people faster than the birth rate so that cities and people groups are actually becoming *Christian*.

Keeping up with population growth is a challenge any church faces. For example, the average annual birth rate in the U.S. is about 6.3%<sup>2</sup> and does not include the growth in population of immigration to the U.S. For churches to actually make gains on the demographics of society, they would probably need to at least beat the birth rate. So a church of 100 people needs to evangelize and baptize at least 6-7 lost people each year just to maintain current Christian demographics and more than that to make net gains. Otherwise, we are losing ground in the kingdom. Is your church beating the birth rate?

In CPMs the percentages are changing drastically. In CPMs a group of 100 believers evangelizes and baptizes a typical range of 30 to

100 persons per year. *In other words, many CPMs are doubling the number of believers every 12 to 24 months.* In one recently-emerged CPM in an unreached people group in South East Asia, every village now has a church.

In the months to come we will discover ways to change the percentages in your community. Let's beat the birthrate and reverse the decline of evangelism!

### DIVERSITY OF EXAMPLES—A MODEL FOR ANY CONTEXT

Fifteen years ago, CPMs were few and mainly occurred in certain regions and demographics. This led to the assumption that CPMs can only occur in limited-access nations among rural populations. Today, however, we are tracking dozens of CPMs—on every continent in virtually every worldview. Places we thought could never experience CPMs are now blossoming. What this means is that there are probably examples that are very similar to the ones you face. Rural and urban. Literate and non-literate. Churched, post-churched and pre-churched. Western and non-Western. Muslim-background, Hindu-background, tribal-background, atheist-background, etc.

### WE CAN NO LONGER SAY: "IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE!"

Within the diversity of contexts are *diverse models* or adaptations of models which all share similar principles. In the months to come, we will explore models that will fit your context.

### MISSION OR MINISTRY? TRUE COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Transformation and justice issues have rightly captured the attention of the church today. Frequently missionaries host short-term teams who say:

“We want to come do hands-on ministry—help the poor, right injustice, set free the captives—not evangelism (or not *just* evangelism).” This is an understandable reaction to evangelism and discipleship that does not result in transformation. The result, however, has been an unfortunate pendulum swing in which churches and organizations attempt to transform communities without first transforming hearts.

An exciting phenomenon is emerging in CPMs: *as churches multiply through a people group and take seriously the transformational commands of Scripture, societies are being transformed.* Research still needs to be gathered in this area. But what are emerging are frequent testimonies of transformation. Women are being freed from prostitution. Crime is waning. Education and literacy are rising. Unemployment and poverty are decreasing. Acts of mercy abound. We are finding that the most effective transformational model is the biblical model of making disciples who have the power by the Spirit and admonitions of the Word to love others as they love themselves. Rather than transform first, we disciple first, then watch transformation emerge as a fruit of discipleship and church life. In the months to come we will learn how to follow a similar path of community transformation.

## IMMEDIACY—A RETURN TO LIFE-CHANGING DISCIPLESHIP AND COMMUNITY

The ethos within these kingdom movements is to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind and strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself—and to do this in life-changing community with others. Many churches around the world display a similar ethos. CPMs don’t

have the edge on this. But it’s really impossible to see a God-movement like a CPM *without* this ethos. In other words, when you find a true CPM you also find life-changing discipleship and community. The emphasis in CPMs is that by God’s grace we obey everything we’ve learned in Scripture. What emerges is an authentic Christianity that feels very New Testament-like.

**While CPMs multiply rapidly, they are not primarily concerned with rapidity. Instead they are concerned with immediacy.**<sup>3</sup> Believers hold a value of *immediately* obeying what they learn. The Gospel of Mark uses the word εὐθὺς —“immediately”—over 30 times.

And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And *immediately* they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:17-18 ESV, emphasis added).

Mark emphasizes that disciples, like their Lord, obey immediately out of their love for God.

Because disciples in CPMs frequently obey the Word without delay or reservations, it results in rapid life transformation and rapid multiplication of believers and churches. But in reality, this is rapid only by Western standards, not by biblical standards. In CPMs such Christianity is the norm; to not live this way is viewed as an aberration.

In the months to come we will learn how to cultivate such discipleship.

## THE JOURNEY AHEAD

CPMs are not a cure-all. They come with their own set of problems. Any model of discipleship and church does. But they are the most concrete expression of God’s kingdom coming on earth as in heaven that I know of.

They beautifully display the growth of the kingdom that Jesus described as the new norm:

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches (Matt. 13:31-32 ESV).

Not only do CPMs expand like this, but the number of CPMs is expanding like this, and our understanding is also expanding like this. At a recent CPM conference we hosted in the U.S. a participant remarked that it was somehow appropriate that America was now learning from Asia, where many of the modern CPMs were originally birthed. In the coming months may we develop a global conversation where the whole Body of Christ is learning from mustard-seed movements on each continent! 

## FOLLOW-UP:

To send examples of what you are learning in CPMs to be featured in future issues, write us at **KingdomKernels@onepost.net**.

*Kingdom Kernels is a regular column featuring lessons from Church-Planting Movements around the world.*

1. [Excerpt adapted from *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* by Steve Smith with Ying Kai. WIGTake Resources. 2011.]
2. The latest statistics from Pew Research record 63.2 births per thousand women in the U.S. in 2011, which is an all-time low for the U.S. *U.S. Birth Rate Falls to a Record Low; Decline Is Greatest Among Immigrants*, Gretchen Livingstone and D’Vera Cohn. Nov. 29, 2012. Washington: Pew Social & Demographic Trends.
3. I’m indebted to Stan Parks for this distinction in terms.