

Faith

—With Evaluation and Change—

Yields Much Fruit

BY **C. ANDERSON**

C. Anderson blogs weekly about Disciple Making Movements and church planting among the unreached at dmmsfrontiermissions.com and about general missionary life issues at missionarylif.org. She has also co-authored a 30 day devotional for church planters called *Faith to Move Mountains*.

Some people are addicted to change. They love it! Most of us hate it. We like things to be predictable and stable. A distaste for change, however, blocks the path to seeing a multiplying movement of disciples making disciples.

Let me begin with a confession. I am often in the category of those who dislike change.

My husband has a very annoying habit (to me, not him!) of taking new routes when going somewhere. I get in the car, expecting to relax and serenely ride to the movies on our date night. Soon I notice we are on an unfamiliar road. In panic (okay, not exactly panic – but with some anxiety) I say “Honey, aren’t we going to the movies? Where in the world are we?”

Suddenly the great adventurer, he replies, “I thought we would try a different way to get there.” Arghhhh! No! I just wanted a relaxing and predictable evening.

Change. It isn’t comfortable for most people, myself included. A willingness to evaluate and revise what we do, though, is vital if we want to release a Disciple Making Movement (DMM).

Faith Gets Us Started, But We Can’t Stop There

Hebrews 11:6 says, “It is impossible to please God without faith” (NLT). Faith is the birth place of a movement. Dreaming of seeing thousands upon thousands from your Unreached People Group worshipping Jesus – it’s a foundational first step.

Can you close your eyes and see it? Disciples making disciples? Groups of disciples starting new groups in new neighborhoods in a natural, organic way? This multiplication bringing cultural and community transformation that sweeps through your region? Without that powerful vision of hope strong in your heart, a movement is unlikely.

Faith is the beginning point. It is also this passionate dream that keeps us pressing forward when the going gets tough.

Together with sincere faith and vision, there must also be a genuine willingness to constantly examine what we are doing in relation to the goal of multiplying discipleship groups.

If our current efforts are not creating those results, we must be willing to do some painful work - changing *how* we do ministry. We may even need to change what we *believe* about ministry. If we are experiencing only addition growth rather than multiplication, it means we must take a hard look at our methods and activities. This is not easy. It can, in fact, be deeply distressing. This process is necessary, though, to release a DMM.

Parable of the Barren Fig Tree—Luke 13:6-9

Jesus tells a disturbing story in Luke 13 about a fig tree that didn’t bear fruit. The parable is about a man who planted a fig tree in his garden. Every time he checked on the tree, no fruit was to be found. This disappointed him.

“Finally, he said to his gardener. ‘I’ve waited three years, and there hasn’t been a single fig! Cut it down. It’s just taking up space in the garden.’” (Luke 13:7-NLT).

The gardener who daily tended the plants, asked the owner for time to do a few things differently. He said he would fertilize the tree and give it special attention. If after one more year it still didn’t produce fruit, he would cut it down.

This story is an apt illustration of how unfruitful discipleship activities take up space in our lives. If after adjusting a few elements these tasks and projects still don’t produce fruit, we need to be willing to remove them. We need to make room for new things to grow.

Shifting to Just-In-Time Training

For twenty-eight years I worked in an organization that was very innovative when it began. Like all organizations though, certain patterns of operating became deeply established. One accepted system was how we train. There was a particular formula used to structure training. The vast majority of training programs followed that approach.

We used this established method for many years to train both national and international church planters with the goal of seeing them start DMMs. The problem was, we didn’t see very many movements. We saw some, but they were few and far between.

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Our flagship training program was well known in our organization. It was the accepted and familiar program for those who wanted to do church planting among unreached peoples. An honest examination, however, showed that it wasn't producing the results we dreamed of. Though once fruitful, it now neither attracted many students to attend, nor resulted in numerous rapidly multiplying churches being started.

It was painful to even admit that. Thinking about doing something different was difficult! I felt personally attached to this particular training program. There had initially been some good results. I had fond memories of those early victories. Some significant churches started among unreached peoples! I'd made a heavy personal investment of time, money and prayer—developing this program in our area.

Mediocre or Meaningful

Audrey Malphurs wrote in *Christianity Today's Leadership Journal*, "When you avoid honest, objective assessment, you are opting for comfort over courage and ministry mediocrity over meaningful ministry." When I took a hard, critical and honest look at things, I had to admit that the results we were getting from this training were mediocre.

Passion in my heart to see more lost people know Jesus, and the overwhelming spiritual need of the unreached compelled me to ruthlessly assess what we were doing. I asked further questions.

- How effective was this method of training really?
- Were just a few believers and churches started by the students in our training enough in comparison with the massive need of the lost around us?
- Was it truly worth the huge investment of time and personnel to keep this training running?

Henry Cloud writes in his excellent book, *Necessary Endings*, about the positive power of hopelessness. We must become "hopeless" to the point where we are willing to stop what we are doing. Only then will we have the space and energy to start new and more effective activities. When we finally reach that hopeless point, God has us where He wants us. Instead of doing something He spoke to us about ten or

fifteen years ago, or maybe even just one or two years ago, we are willing to listen to Him speak afresh.

- What is on God's heart to do now?
- What is needed to take things forward?
- Do we have other options?
- Are there any innovative approaches with which we could experiment?

When we are stuck in a particular methodology, strategy or way of operating, we don't ask those questions. We just run the program. We just keep doing what we have been doing, hoping for a different result. Small adjustments are made and we may even fill out evaluation forms. But our mindset is already set. We keep doing what we have always been doing.

Getting to where I was willing to evaluate and experiment with new things created a shift. Our team moved to a Just-in-Time training (<http://dmmsfrontiermissions.com/what-is-just-in-time-training/>) approach using much shorter classroom training periods with application and coaching in between. We began to filter, only inviting those who were applying the material to the next trainings. Other adjustments were also made.

These changes were hard. They made many people uncomfortable—even angry. Passionate commitment to fulfilling the vision God gave us to release movements propelled us forward and through these challenges.

The result? Instead of seeing third generation growth of discipleship groups after twenty years, we began to see it happening within one or two years. Rather than thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of discipleship effort into people who later decided they weren't that interested in seeing a disciple making movement, we invested about 10% of our previous time and money and in some locations we saw thousands become Jesus followers through the trainees. We are still learning and evaluating, but already the results are bearing much fruit.


Be Hopeless Enough To Change

Dan Allender, in his book, *Leading with A Limp*, quotes a man named Stockdale. The context is slightly different, but I love this quote as I think about starting Disciple

Making Movements. He writes, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose, with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality."

The illustration above, how we evaluated and changed the way we trained, is just one example. The principle (faith + evaluation + change = greater fruit) applies to disciple-making efforts on many different levels. Think about it related to how you are doing evangelism, how you mobilize, or how you invite people to make a decision for Christ. It applies to how you are learning language, to friendship evangelism strategies, to contextualization, to leadership development and more.

If you are not yet getting the kind of results that match the dream God has put in your heart for a movement, don't despair. Evaluate. Be courageous. Be "hopeless" enough to do something different. Experiment and try something new. Most of all, go back to God and ask Him what He wants to do now. God is incredibly creative! He is never stuck or out of great ideas for how to bring about His kingdom fruit.

What are you doing right now that is not bearing the fruit you hope for? 

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