

MISSIONTM FRONTIERS

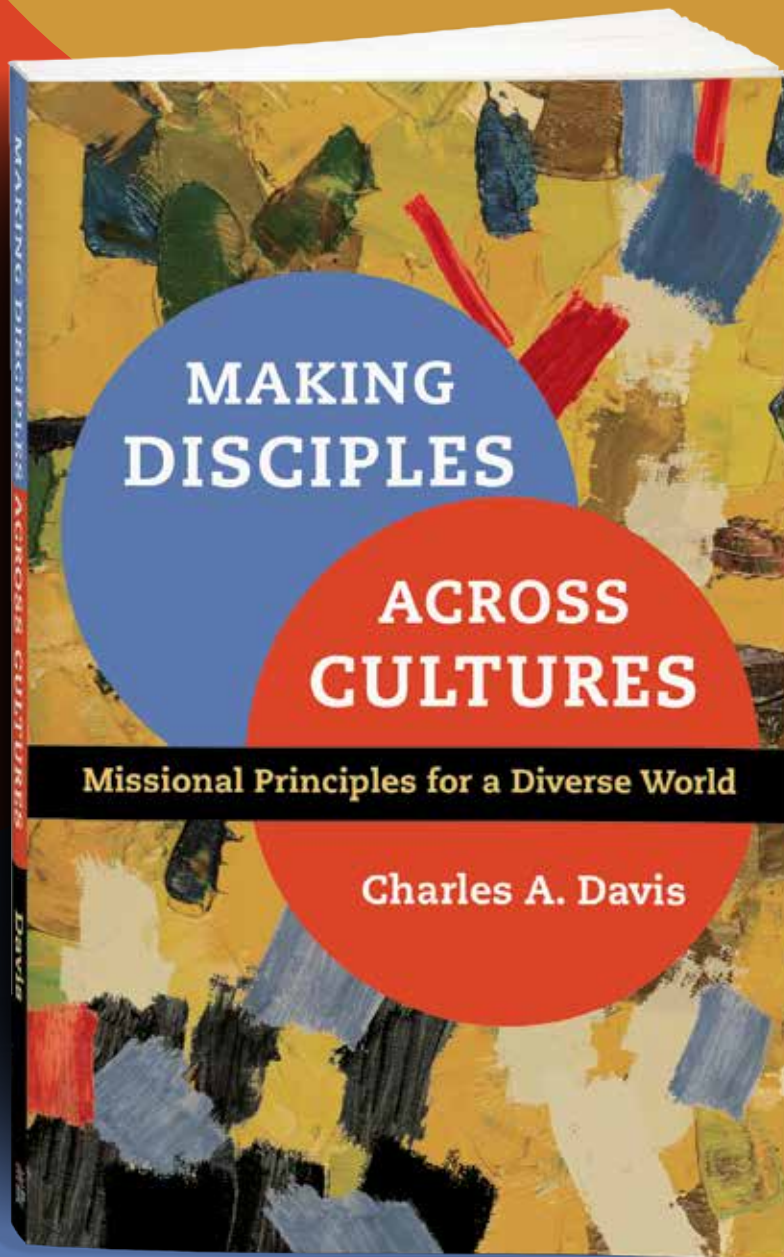
ISSUE 37:4 | JUL/AUG 2015

A MAGAZINE OF FRONTIER VENTURES

THE MIDDLE EAST IN CRISIS

HOPE EMERGES FROM THE DARKNESS

Authentic Disciple-Making in Any Context



Culture affects how we make disciples. In this insightful road map, Charles Davis, former director of TEAM, provides a framework for missional discipling across diverse cultural contexts. With on-the-ground stories from a lifetime of mission experience, Davis navigates cultural tensions to help Christian workers minister more effectively at home or overseas.

"In this book, longtime mission leader Charles Davis applies a distinctively missionary analysis to the worn-out ecclesiologies of our time. But it's not all critique and analysis: built on narrative and experience, he lovingly provides the church with a very useful diagnostic tool that gives us viable pathways toward renewal of church life and mission."

ALAN HIRSCH

founding director of Forge Missional Training Network
and author of *The Forgotten Ways*



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**MISSION
FRONTIERS**

VOL. 37, NO. 4 / JULY/AUG 2015
ISSN 0889-9436

Mission Frontiers is published six times a year.
Call 866-406-9487 for address changes, donations.
Editorial Office: rick.wood@frontierventures.org
Advertising: advertising@missionfrontiers.org
Website: www.missionfrontiers.org
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Brooke Carvalho & Matthew Anderson, Graphic Design
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Frontier Ventures is a member of
MissioNexus and EPA (Evangelical Press Association).

Remaining Faithful in the Midst of the Growing Darkness



by Rick Wood
Editor of MF

Can you feel it? Can you see it spreading across the globe like a deadly plague? The hatred for and intolerance of Jesus followers and their biblical beliefs and values is growing. The barbarians of ISIS are but the most extreme example of this growing intolerance that is enveloping the world. Open Doors reports, “While the year 2014 will go down in history for having the highest level of global persecution of Christians in the modern era, current conditions suggest the worst is yet to come.”¹

For those in the Middle East, on whom this issue is focused, the genocidal destruction of antient Christian, Arab, Kurd and Yazidi communities by ISIS points to the worst persecution ever experienced in this area. Many of these communities—their churches, monasteries and homes, as well as their culture—survived the Mongol invasion of 1258, when Baghdad was destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Muslims were killed. But today, ISIS seeks to eliminate every vestige of Christianity and these ethnic minorities in the Middle East.

We’ve all seen the pictures and heard the stories of murder and abuse. The suffering of these Christians is beyond our comprehension. It breaks my heart to see such precious people that God loves be so brutally abused or viciously murdered. But God is marvelously at work in the midst of this tremendous suffering.

In this issue we tell the stories of how God is bringing hope in the midst of great darkness and the gospel is going forth with power to reach the broken-hearted. This issue of *MF* provides some important lessons for us as well, both in terms of how to do ministry in the midst of crisis.

SUFFERING WILL NOT PASS US BY EITHER

Even if ISIS does not attack or affect the U.S. or Europe in significant ways any time soon, we still need to prepare ourselves for a changing spiritual climate. The western church is facing cultural hostility unlike anything we have experienced before. From government to academia, from the military to businesses large and small, the stories of anti-Christian bias abound. George Yancey in his recently released book, *Hostile Environment*, refers to this growing intolerance as “Christianophobia.”²

The days of culturally approved biblical Christianity are over. From now on there will be an increasing

price to pay for Jesus followers who remain true to their convictions and are not ashamed of the Word of God or the gospel.

This growing cultural hostility to biblical faith is reflected in the results of the Pew Research Center’s just released study, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape.” It got great publicity with dramatic headlines like, “Christianity is Dying in America,” but the real truth is much more nuanced than this. While those who call themselves Christians dropped from 78% to 70% over a seven-year period, this was largely due to nominal Christians moving from the Catholic and Mainline church categories to the “nothing in particular” category. With cultural hostility to Christianity growing, those who are not true believers are deciding to make it official that they don’t really believe. This trend will continue to accelerate. *The true church is being refined.* It is actually a spiritually-healthy thing for the church when it costs us something to follow Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer referred to this as “costly grace.”

The question for all of us is, “What price is too high to follow Jesus?” At what point does the pain get to be too much? When we start to lose our jobs, promotions, perks, savings, homes, and our freedom the temptation to compromise both as a

church and as individuals will grow. There are already voices out there that say we must modify our doctrines and practices in order to attract the unsaved. Such compromise would be disastrous. We must never be ashamed of the Bible or the gospel. Rather we must boldly proclaim the truth, no matter what opposition we face.

The only hope for the church in the West is to: 1. Remain committed to Scriptural fidelity and biblical values; 2. Get serious about obeying Jesus' command to go and make disciples who disciple others in all nations and equip God's people to do so; 3. Abide closely in Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit as the only sure source for the comfort and strength we will need. The Christian victims of ISIS have shown us the way. They have been faithful to Jesus, even unto death. We must do the same as we live on mission with God, carrying out his purposes in establishing his kingdom in every people on earth.

We must never be ashamed of the Bible or the gospel. Rather we must boldly proclaim the truth, no matter what opposition we face.

“REMEMBER WE ARE AT WAR”

Ralph Winter was once asked, “What is the one thing you would like to say to the Church?” He replied, “Remember that we are at war.” While ISIS is bringing very real physical and spiritual warfare to our world, we

must develop a “wartime lifestyle and mindset” that reflects the seriousness of the mission Jesus has given to us, and an understanding of the satanic opposition we face. Every pastor needs to communicate the vision of proclaiming God's glory among all of the unreached peoples to all who will listen. They need to give people something to live for, beyond their own self-improvement and blessing, that will capture their hearts and imagination for how God can use them in this cosmic struggle.


One blogger responding to the Pew Survey results describes well the spiritual battle we face.

“If the faith is to regain lost ground in this country, it will only happen when Christianity is presented and understood as what it is: a warrior's religion. A faith for fighters and soldiers. C.S. Lewis said it best (as usual):

‘Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.’

There.... This is frightening, militant language, but it's exciting, it's exhilarating, and it is, most importantly, accurate. As Christians, we are fighting a war against the Devil himself. We are advancing against the darkest forces of the universe, and we march with God by our side. And all the while, all around us, on a dimension invisible to mortal eyes, angels and demons and supernatural forces, both good and evil, work to defend or destroy us. The stakes are

infinite...It's the truth that should be shouted from the rooftops of every church and proclaimed from the mouths of every Christian. That's how you stop the “decline” of Christianity in America. Tell people the truth. The truth, that's all.”³

We fight this battle with all the spiritual weapons that Jesus has given to us: love, prayer, service and sacrifice—not the weapons of this world. Many of our fellow Jesus followers in the Middle East have already paid the ultimate price for their faithfulness in this war. Some of us may also be called to make similar sacrifices in the future. But no matter when or how we die, we are to faithfully carry out the mission Jesus gave us to disciple the nations with passion and perseverance. I pray that all of us will join this titanic struggle for the souls of every person in every people. 

¹ Open Doors USA, January 7, 2015 “Persecution Of Christians Reaches Historic Levels, Conditions Suggest Worst Is Yet To Come”

² Yancey, George. 2015 *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias*. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

³ Walsh, Matt, “Maybe Christianity In America Is Dying Because It's Boring Everyone To Death,” May. 13, 2015 11:47am. http://www.theblaze.com/contributions/maybe-christianity-in-america-is-dying-because-its-boring-everyone-to-death/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=story&utm_campaign=ShareButtons

RICK WOOD

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How is ISIS Spreading the Gospel?

BY **DR. DAVE CASHIN**, PROFESSOR,
COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

“I have been a Muslim for 41 years, and in all that time have never questioned Islam. But now, I have decided to leave it.”

A few weeks ago I received an email from one of my students. She’s working among Muslim women and had just gotten off the phone with one of her friends who was weeping uncontrollably. My student initially assumed someone in her family had died. However, once my student’s friend regained her composure she made a startling statement: “I have been a Muslim for 41 years and in all that time have

never questioned Islam. But now I have decided to leave it.” When my student asked her, “Why?” she related that she had been watching ISIS videos, and, because of the brutality that they justified as being the “methods of the Prophet,” she decided to leave Islam.

I have often referred Islamic radicals as “proto-evangelists” for the Christian faith. The first there was the Ayatollah Khomeini. His brutal

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regime in Iran, whose atrocities and policies have led many Iranians to leave Iran, has also led to an exodus of Iranians out of Islam. Estimates are difficult, but the numbers are significant. Outside Iran the numbers are firmer but no less astonishing. In Sweden, fully ten percent of the Iranian immigrant population has converted to the Christian faith. That is approximately 8,000 out of a total of 80,000 in the entire country. Some Iranian believers have called the Ayatollah the greatest missionary because he showed us what Islam is really like.

The next great figure in this progression was Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden defined the rulers of the Muslim world as apostates for cooperating with the West. Though best known for the September 11, 2001 attacks, his group, al-Qaeda, quickly morphed from killing westerners to killing Muslims. Their brutality has particularly been harsh in Iraq and Syria, as have been actions by the Taliban in Pakistan.

And the latest is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of ISIS. His declaration of a new caliphate has alarmed the Muslim world. His group's clever—and successful—propaganda films glory in violence, hostage taking, beheadings, sex-slavery, and the slaughter of Muslim and non-Muslims. The recent burning to death of a Jordanian Muslim pilot seems to

have stepped well beyond even the brutality of Islamic law and it is likely that ISIS followers may shortly be defined as “apostates” from Islam justifying a new *Jihad* against them.

This propaganda and terror war is being fought on the internet. Most westerners do not watch these films. But it was astonishing to see how quickly the film of the Jordanian pilot's death spread throughout the Muslim world. The man's father watched it on his cell phone in a public meeting.

As Islamic law, and the groups that espouse it, fails, where will people turn? When I met a group of Iranian church leaders in Sweden their fear was that Muslims would turn to secularism, even to atheism. Many have come to the church, but this requires the church to be a “safe space” for Muslims. The tragedy is that many churches are not welcoming for Muslims. They regard them as the enemy. Recently, in a shameful display in Texas, a group of Christians heckled a Muslim meeting and called on them to leave the country. The harvest in Sweden is partly a result of the church taking a stand for Muslim immigrants and against local nationalist parties. The church in Sweden is a “safe space” for Muslims. Is the evangelical church in America a “safe space” for Muslims? The proto-evangelists are doing their job. Are we doing ours? 

EKBALLO

THE HARVEST IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY TYLER CONNELL

All eyes are on the desert-lands. Pressure, pressure, pressure. It's mounting, it's rising. A quagmire of conflict has developed with nations rising against nations, and enemies rising against enemies of enemies. The lines seem to be blurred in the battle for this historic and sacred land. There's been countless murders and rapes and entire cities have been pillaged all in the name of "God." One of the primary targets that these extremist groups have in mind for extermination is Christians. In fact persecution and martyrdom among Christians in 2014 was the most unprecedented, historic statistics in the life-span of the Christian faith. According to Open Doors,

While the year 2014 will go down in history for having the highest level of global persecution of Christians in

the modern era, current conditions suggest the worst is yet to come....This year, the threshold was higher for a country to make the list, indicating that worldwide levels of persecution have increased.¹

Thankfully there are great promises in Scripture for hours of disaster and crisis like we're seeing today. 1 Peter 4:12-14 and Acts 8:1-8 reveal two obvious lessons. One is that we're to expect persecution and are commanded to rejoice in the midst of it! We rejoice because the Holy Spirit is upon us. The next is that crisis and persecution are sometimes the greatest factors that lead to the multiplication of the gospel. In the midst of death and tragedy, could this be the Church's finest hour in the Middle East? Could there be hope rising in the midst of evil? Yes, in fact, and I've seen it with my own eyes.

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Tyler Connell is a long-term missionary with YWAM (Youth With a Mission). He is the producer and campaign director of the Ekballo Project, a multimedia

mobilization campaign creating films with the express purpose of mobilizing young people to go to the unreached parts of the world.

Three years ago a friend and I began a journey to capture what God was doing in the 10/40 window on film. This is one of the most unreached regions of the earth where the giants of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam linger. We decided to call the project Ekballo Project.

The Greek word “*Ekballo* means: to eject (literally or figuratively); bring forth, cast (forth, out), drive (out), expel, leave, pluck (pull, take, thrust) out, put forth (out), send away (forth, out).”² In Matthew 9:38, Jesus says “Ask the lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (ESV) *Ekballo* is the Greek word translated as “send” in this verse.

The aim of the Ekballo Project is to awaken people to the love of God and the need for his name to be spread on this earth. Through film, media, and direct interaction, we desire to see a multitude thrust forth into the ripe harvest fields of the earth, proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and living lives of surrender, fearlessness, and love. We desire to see God’s children living courageously—unconfined by the cages of societal norms, insecurity, fear, and lifeless religion; to see children of God from every corner of the earth sent into the unreached, unengaged regions of the world, compelled by the love of Christ and the gladness of saying “yes” to him. So we started in the Himalayas and produced three short films on the lives of three different missionaries. After completing these films and a subsequent tour, we began to feel the leading of the Lord to do a new series of films in the Middle East. It just so happens this was at the same time ISIS began to make headline news and rampage their

Through film, media, and direct interaction, we desire to see a multitude thrust forth into the ripe harvest fields

way across the Middle East. The media enhanced the enemy’s deeds by furthering seeds of intimidation, fear and hatred. We know our battle isn’t against flesh and blood, but against the kingdom of darkness. We decided we were to go and tell a different story, a story of hope, a story that the media wasn’t reporting, that Jesus was encountering hearts in some of the most evil places. So we did a scouting trip last October and met three incredible Jesus-centered communities of “workers” or

missionaries in the land. Now, months later, we are here on assignment filming our *Life In the Desert* series and have seen and heard the most miraculous stories of what God is doing among Muslims.

In a small city on the border of Syria, a region ravaged by ISIS and other extremist factions, thousands of Syrians have fled and are now refugees. Many fill the camps, partaking of the rations and benefits the United Nations provides. But even there, stories of injustice, racism and violence prevail over some of the families. As a result many families have left the camp and moved

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to the outskirts of town where they’re living in extreme poverty, unable to work legally. Many walked for miles upon miles fleeing from the horrors of Aleppo and other Syrian cities, towns and villages.

They’re desperate, broken, hungry, angry and confused. So our “worker” friends go and visit these families and demonstrate the love of Jesus in a tangible way on every visit. One family in particular has the most shockingly incredible story. The father had a background in an extremist group and was known as an angry and violent man. The children were dysfunctional and in need of help. They arrived in this border town after fleeing from a bomb that blew up both their house and their car. In a moment everything they owned was literally in flames.

They fled, crossed the border, and began life again—at least to the best of their ability. Their youngest daughter was so impacted by the blast that she went permanently cross-eyed, deaf in her right ear, and whenever she saw the color red, whether it be a coke can or a red-sweater she would slip into a fit of rage, violently thrashing and biting anyone in her path. The hysterics were a result of her witnessing many killed in the war. What could cure such a terrible situation? No drug, no psychiatrist, only Jesus. And he did.

This devout Muslim family, the father, with his background in terrorism and acts of evil, was sitting one evening in their living room when suddenly Jesus

appeared, bright light, shining, clothed in white. He told the family who he was and disappeared. Weeks later it happened again, this time with one of the older sisters, and he spoke with her. The family, together, decided to surrender everything to Jesus. The older sister was so moved by “her Beloved” (her name for Jesus) that she began using up all the family’s cell data by texting all of her Muslim relatives in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Dubai and telling them about her new found faith in Jesus, and how they needed to follow him. The youngest daughter, after two years of visits from the “worker” team, has calmed considerably, wears red, laughs and sings.

The team here lives and believes the truth—that perfect love casts out fear. The father has become a prominent “underground” church planter, and has seen many families come to the Lord because of his testimony.

The family, together, decided to surrender everything to Jesus.

A man once filled with anger and violence is now a peaceful, joyful church-planter. Only Jesus! Sounds a bit like Saul, the “terrorist” of his day, who became the Apostle Paul. God is moving among Syrian refugees!


There’s an open window in time for the Syrian people—refugees scattered throughout the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Europe are soft and open to the gospel. Now is the time for their salvation.

This next story is one that occurred just days ago, so it’s rather fresh in my heart and mind. I was perusing the streets with one of my “worker” friends, when suddenly we saw a security guard outside a school with one shoe on and one shoe off. His right foot was terribly swollen and he told us he was in excruciating pain. So our “worker” friend asked him, “Sir could we pray for you?” The man groaned as he moved his foot towards us and said “YES PLEASE!” So we prayed in the name of Jesus, and then had him test it out by smacking his foot against the concrete. He proceeded, and the man’s eyes enlarged and he stared deep into mine and shouted in Arabic, “I SWEAR TO GOD, I SWEAR TO GOD, IT DOESN’T HURT! ALL THE PAIN, GONE! THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!” We laughed and rejoiced with him and then my “worker” friend began to share with him about Jesus and the Bible. The man



listened intently and was still in shock by the miracle that had just occurred. He began to yell across the street and to other security guards telling them that he had just been healed. An evangelist in his own right!

When the goodness of Jesus encounters you, you cannot help but tell everyone around you. John 12:32 says that, “*when I (Jesus) am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.*” As Jesus is exalted in the Middle East, and reveals himself in these places, people are being drawn to him! Through signs, wonders, visitations, healing and simple acts of love from the church, a better report is being served here in the desertland. Pray for the Middle East with hope in your mind, faith in your prayers and joy in your heart. He’s here, moving, drawing all men to himself. There are so many young people here waiting to be loved, waiting to see Jesus through his Bride. Ask God what your part is in the story he’s writing in the Middle East. His answer might surprise you!

—To watch our first three films for free visit our website at ekballoproject.com, and follow our journey as we hope to release our *Life In the Desert* series near the end of 2015. 

¹ Open Doors USA, January 7, 2015 “Persecution Of Christians Reaches Historic Levels, Conditions Suggest Worst Is Yet To Come”

² Bible Study Tools: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/ekballo.html>

³ Ephesians 6:12 *The Holy Bible*

⁴ 1 John 4:18 *The Holy Bible*



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James has lived in the Middle East for 8 years and now resides in Northern Iraq with his wife and four children.

In the midst of the most extreme trials,
God is transforming lives and bringing His kingdom.
It is always darkest just before the dawn.

On August 3, 2014 at 2:30 a.m., Ibrahim awoke to a nightmare. ISIS was attacking Sinjar and slaughtering his Yazidi people. Being responsible for his six siblings after his father's death, this 22-year-old prepared his family to leave. By 7:30 am, Ibrahim and his family joined the mass exodus walking over 14 kilometers from his village to Mount Sinjar by foot.

There was no time to pack; they simply left with the clothes on their backs. Stranded on the mountain for nine days with no food and minimal water, his family fought to survive. On the 7th day, Ibrahim's mother severely hurt her leg through a fall on the rugged mountain terrain and was unable to walk. Ibrahim couldn't leave his mother; he was staring death in the face.


As a devoted Yazidi from the priestly cast, Ibrahim only knew of one thing to do: cry out to God for mercy to heal his mother. The next morning, his prayers had been heard and his mother could walk. Over the next two days they walked to a refugee camp in Syria, where they ate, drank and were seen by medical professionals.

After this, Ibrahim's family moved to the city of Duhok in Northern Iraq, where they lived in a primary school. There he met Salam, another Yazidi who was serving fellow refugees while boldly sharing about the love of Jesus for the Yazidi people. Truly, Ibrahim felt that God had protected his family and his people on the mountain when they should have died. He had seen God miraculously heal his mother. Was this all so he could encounter Jesus? Ibrahim's heart was stirred as he heard that Jesus died and rose to take the sin and shame of the whole world.

In late November 2014, Ibrahim's family was moved from the primary school to a camp for internally displaced Yazidi people. Salam continued to meet with Ibrahim and encouraged him to start a small group to help their community. Following Salam's suggestion, Ibrahim started to lead a small group. This group currently meets three times a week to study the New

Testament and serve the refugee community they live among. Through acts of service while sharing Jesus' love, Salam has helped to start five other groups like this one among his Yazidi people. Two of those groups just started in the past month. Many who are in these new groups have started following Jesus since the tragic events in August 2014.

From an isolated conservative unreached Yazidi community in Northern Iraq, God is bringing his kingdom even in the midst of horrible hardships (Acts 14:22). When there is chaos, there are often *kairos* moments for the kingdom of God to spread. If you desire to see the kingdom tangibly advancing, go to the place where people are suffering. It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick (Mark 2:17). Right now, there is an incredible need for laborers in the Middle East to join God in bringing in his harvest. There are many like Ibrahim who are waiting to hear a different message, one of love and hope.

Right now in Northern Iraq, Duhok province has the largest number of internally displaced people, approximately 444,420,¹ and approximately 100,500 Syrian refugees.² These numbers have overwhelmed the government and the international relief community. When the surge to retake Mosul happens, there will be an estimated 350,000 additional internally displaced people fleeing into the Duhok province. Opportunities abound to serve and love people in Jesus' name. When the darkness of ISIS seems to be closing in on so many, we see the brightness of Jesus shining even brighter! The wars in Iraq and Syria will end, and when they do, there will be millions of people in desperate need looking for hope—may we respond to this opportunity to build and establish God's kingdom. 

¹ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3W%20Operational%20Presence_IRAQ_31%20March%202015.pdf

² <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/region.php?id=63&country=103>

The Presence of God Amidst the Brokenhearted

BY JULIENE SNOW
PHOTOS BY JULIENE SNOW

The Yazidis are an ethnic Kurdish minority and many are calling what ISIS committed against them last year genocide. In Northern Iraq there are hundreds of thousands of Yazidi people who have over the past year had their homes destroyed, have been forced to flee from ISIS, and are now displaced and seeking refuge in their own country. So many families fled their homes in the mountains that aid agencies couldn't put tents up fast enough. Several hundred thousand Yazidis are living in UN Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, but tens of thousands more have found refuge in abandoned, unfinished buildings.

While walking inside a neighborhood of abandoned buildings, my team and I were stopped by a group of

young girls. They insisted we come visit with them and welcomed us into their home with open arms and beautiful smiles. As we entered a very dimly lit room I was instantly surrounded by seven young teen girls who wanted me to play my guitar. They watched very intently as I began to play a worship song. As I did, I watched as their eyes grew wider and wider the more I played. They didn't know what I was singing because I was worshipping in English, but it was very clear they were experiencing the presence of God. After I stopped playing I asked them if they would like to dance or sing for me, like I had done for them. With eyes turned to the dirt, one of the older girls spoke up and said, "I don't sing or dance any more because our hearts are sad."

JULIENE SNOW

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Juliene helps raise up worshipping and praying missionaries to go short and long term to various nations. She has a heart to serve and love the poor and to reach the unreached in nations that have suffered conflict.






Only six months prior to this all of these girls had fled from Mount Sinjar because of the ISIS attacks. They fled with only the clothes on their backs, walked for days, were stranded without food or water for weeks, and saw horrific killings no child should ever see. One girl's father had died in the attacks from IS and many of them lost other family members. Not knowing what to say, not knowing how my words could ever be enough, I began to tell them of a man who takes away sadness, heals broken hearts and has healed my heart time and time again. After I shared my testimony of his love, I told them his name was Jesus. With a look of confusion and curiosity the same girl who shared about her sadness softly spoke, "Who is Jesus?" These girls had never heard who Jesus was! What a privilege to tell them who he is for the very first time. To tell them the story of salvation and the love of a Father who sees them right where they are and sent his son to die for them—a God who has never left them alone, but was with them on the mountain when they fled

Even now in their pain, he wants to be a Father to them. I asked them if I could pray for them that Jesus would fill them with love and take their sadness away. They all said yes. Without any instructions, they bowed their heads and closed their eyes as I laid my hands on them and began to pray. Tears started to flow and one of the girls gently placed her head on my shoulder letting her guard down. After we prayed I asked them if they had felt anything while we prayed and with a stunned look on their faces, one girl piped in, "Can you come and pray for us everyday?" I shared with them that I would be praying for them constantly, but that they could pray to Jesus anytime too, that he loves them. We all hugged as the love of God was so present in that small dark room.



God is near to the brokenhearted and is truly moving among the Yazidi people, showing the unreached that his reach of love is not too short. He really has not left nor abandoned them, but desires that each one would know him and each one would feel his love. We never know who God will put in front of us. On this particular day, in a country that has not known peace in a long time, a group of young girls experienced true love for the first time. The Holy Spirit touched their hearts and will continue to work. We are called to be Jesus' hands and feet to a world that doesn't yet know what he is like. Even in a place like Northern Iraq, the love of God is unstoppable and the Holy Spirit will continue to reveal Jesus to the Yazidis because he is passionate about these people loving and worshiping the one true God. 

IRAQ

A COUNTRY FALLING APART,
OR A TESTIMONY TO THE NATIONS?

BY **FABIAN GRECH**

Fabian Grech graduated from the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry (Pensacola, FL). He has served on the staff of John G. Lake Ministries (Dallas, TX), as an instructor at Fire School of Ministry (Concord, NC), and as a staff member of Freedom Challenge (Bastrop, LA).

Looking back at 2012 when God called my family and a small team to move to Iraq we knew that Iraq was a significant country in regards to what God wanted to do in the Middle East. He sent our team with a vision and blueprints on how to build. The vision was a picture of a wheel, the center hub being a House of Prayer, where the incense of worship and prayer continually rises before God.¹ This place, where the presence of God is experienced, cultivated, and taught would also operate as a School of Ministry to train leaders in both Word and Spirit.

The Lord moved us at just the right time, in order for our team to adjust to life in Iraq, start making disciples, and establish the Mesopotamia House of Prayer (MHOP) one and a half years before the visible invasion of the most demonic and deadliest terrorist group the world has witnessed in years.

In Iraq the majority of people in the Christian community have been “traditional or cultural Christians.” At one time there were about 1.5 million people who identified themselves as Christian, but since 2003 that population has dropped to less than 200,000.² After ISIS invaded in 2014 the number has fallen even more significantly. Most of the Iraqis leaving the country are Christian-background. The devil’s plan is clearly to push the salt and light out of Iraq.

When ISIS started rapidly moving into our region last year, God moved strongly in my heart to see a greater prayer movement in Iraq. From a natural perspective I thought, “How can this happen? Believers are leaving! The Christian exodus has intensified, and people are even telling us to leave.” However in September 2014, a joint effort of multiple houses of prayer (HOPs) from various countries gathered to engage in 50 hours of worship and prayer. God’s presence was manifested in powerful ways! Local believers were filled with

his Spirit, many did not want to leave the prayer meeting, the sick were healed, others received fresh vision for their country, and several were eager to give themselves more to worship and prayer.

Since that time brothers and sisters from different HOPs have come to serve within MHOP by training Iraqi believers to learn instruments, worship with the Word, sing spontaneous songs, and grow in ways to engage sustained worship and prayer. It has been amazing to hear new songs of worship coming forth in Iraq at the MHOP! We believe the right foundations are being laid. The “new church” of Iraq will be a house of prayer for all nations, a habitation and resting place for God.³

The Iraqi people, especially the Kurds, are very kind and willing to hear our message. However since ISIS’s invasion into Iraq we have begun to see an even greater openness of people’s hearts, both from Muslim and traditional Christian backgrounds, to the message of the gospel. Many have questions about God and life, several want to receive prayer, and the sick specifically ask for Christians to pray for their healing. We are witnessing numerous Muslims questioning Islam and desiring to know more about what Christians believe. In our city there are refugees and internally-displaced peoples (IDPs) everywhere, and we regularly visit refugee camps to minister the gospel. Repeatedly, we encounter women in tears whos’ husbands have been killed by ISIS; people tormented by nightmares; men wounded from terrorist attacks; and children paralyzed by fear, poverty and hopelessness.

Ever since the initial flood of Syrian refugees in 2013 God has been opening doors for us in various refugee camps. One nearby camp is full of hundreds of Muslim families from Mosul who are victims of ISIS. In the first visit to this camp our team had the opportunity to worship Jesus in Arabic. As a crowd



gathered around us, we preached the gospel, many asked for Christian literature, and men lined up waiting to bring us to their tents in order to pray for their sick.


One man we met was suffering from bad eyesight and the inability to sleep at night for many years. We laid hands on him and prayed with him. When I asked if he would like an *Injil* (the New Testament), he answered with excitement on his face that he wanted one. The next time I went to that camp I visited him. He was happy to report that he had begun sleeping at night and his eyesight had improved.

That same day, as we were worshipping in Arabic, a lady asked us for a Bible. A few days later we met again to spend more personal time with her. She was very open and agreeable to the gospel as we shared. She told us, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I do believe that Jesus did die for me, to save me.” Then she said, “I want to have a relationship with God through Jesus.” When we asked her, “Why?” she answered, “Because he’s the only One who knows everything about me and would understand me.” After taking time to explain about what this could cost her we asked, “Are you still willing to follow Jesus?” She replied, “Why would I hold anything back from him, when he gave his life for me?”

As evidenced in this man and this woman, the fields of Muslims are ripe for harvest here in Iraq! This is the time to reach Muslims for Jesus. As terrorist groups

As a crowd gathered around us, we preached the gospel, many asked for Christian literature, and men lined up waiting to bring us to their tents

like ISIS are on the rise many Muslims are becoming disenchanted with Islam.

As the Christian exodus in the Middle East has swelled, the world is watching and questioning if Christianity can survive in the face of persecution and terrorism within the very region of its birth. Not only will it survive, but we anticipate the greatest outpouring of God’s Spirit in church history, producing a new church, primarily of Muslim-background believers that looks so much like Jesus that it will be the bride he is coming back for! Many people see no hope for Iraq. But we know that Assyria (modern-day Iraq) will be a blessing on the earth and testimony to the nations!⁴ 

¹ See Malachi 1:11 and Revelation 5:8

² Erasmus blog (July 2014). Iraqi Christians and the West: A rock and a hard place. Retrieved from economist.com

³ See Isaiah 66:1, NIV

⁴ See Isaiah 19:23-25. We believe this is what will help provoke Israel to jealousy, causing the hearts of the Jewish people to embrace Jesus Christ as the Messiah. See Romans 10:19-21.

Would St. Francis Willingly Be Captured by ISIS?

BY **DR. WARREN LARSON,**
ZWEMER CENTER EDITORIAL DIRECTOR AND PROFESSOR EMERITUS,
COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

During the 5th Crusade St. Francis undertook what most considered a senseless and foolhardy mission: convert the most powerful Muslim in the world.

So radical was the Sultan, he had promised a Byzantine gold piece for anyone who brought the head of a Christian. He was “treacherous, brainless and false hearted,” but where others saw the face of evil, Francis saw a man without the Savior and compassion welled up inside of him.

The date was 1219, and as the purposeless fifth Crusade was dragging on and on, St. Francis and a few chosen friends prayed about what most Christians in that day thought was a senseless and foolhardy mission: convert the most powerful Muslim personage in the world. Attempting to win no less than the Kamil Sultan

of Egypt was incredible to say the least; such faith and holy audacity.

For the last lap of the journey Francis and his trusted friend Illuminato left the Crusader’s camp without looking back. As the friars walked straight into the battlefield, they were caught, beaten and brought to the Sultan, who was happy because he thought they wanted to become Muslims. “On the contrary,” said Francis, “we have a message that you should surrender your soul to God.” With this introduction, he proclaimed the Triune God and Jesus Christ the Savior of all. When the Sultan

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was advised to behead them, he said no, and invited them to stay on as guests. Francis said, “If you are willing to become converts of Christ, you and your people, I shall only be too glad to stay with you.”

Such a response to Arab hospitality was unheard of. Francis then offered to walk through fire if it would help convince the Muslim leader. If he would come out unharmed the Sultan should be prepared to embrace Christ. The Sultan demurred, but was impressed, and offered presents, which Francis declined to accept. The Kamil Sultan became even more amazed and permitted

In these perilous times, when radical Islam is carrying out horrific acts of violence, Christians must reach out to Muslims with courage and compassion.

him to preach the gospel in his house, compound, and upon his departure asked the friar to pray that God would show him the right way.

Evidently, the Sultan did not convert, for it was he who retook Jerusalem, but had it not been for the dismal failure and frustration of such a misguided response to Muslims, Francis would never have set out on his mission. More importantly, Stephen Neil says it was the manifestation of a new era: now by love and good deeds, conversion was to take place, not by force of arms. Soon thereafter, several Franciscan missionaries were sent to the Kingdom of Morocco, where five were martyred for Christ.

In these perilous times, when radical Islam is carrying out horrific acts of violence, Christians must reach out to Muslims with courage and compassion. We must understand their concerns and engage with them in witness. We must remember that attitudes toward Muslims during the Crusades were hostile beyond what we can imagine, yet St. Francis was motivated to share Christ, and so should we. Muslims wake up with no church, no Bible, and no one to tell them about the Way, the Truth and the Life. Five times a day from countless minarets in their midst they hear God is great, but who will tell them God is love? 

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

BY **JOHN RAMEY**

“Do not let your thoughts for this region be hopeless. I have been estranged, but no one has cared to asked me, ‘What’s wrong?’ Is this the end of my dream? I wish we had all died in Syria. We came here and entered hell. In Europe they have animal rights. Here we do not have human rights. I consider everyone’s situation, but I also want people to consider our situation.”

SYRIAN REFUGEE
in Amman, Jordan

JOHN RAMEY | aslanchildrescue.org

John Ramey is a member of Frontiers and is president of Aslan Child Rescue.

One day while visiting a kindergarten for refugee children, I noticed a boy in the corner of the playground putting his hand into the sand and bringing it out, slowly, again and again. I sat down beside him and showed him pictures of my grandchildren who were about his age. I asked him his name. “Mohammed.” I asked him what he was doing with his hand. He said, “I am thinking about what they did to my Baba.” The teacher who was sitting with us said, “John, we think the regime made him watch as they buried his father alive.” The boy read the reaction on my face. I was sad and shocked and was shaking my head in disbelief. Then the boy stood up and looked like a little superhero. He put his little hand on my shoulder and said, “It’s ok Abuna, don’t cry for me. When I grow up I am going to be a jet fighter pilot and I will bomb them all.”

“When I grow up I am going to be a jet fighter pilot and I will bomb them all.”

On another occasion our team packed up our vehicles and drove to a village outside Amman on a distribution for refugee families. Food, hygiene packets, toys, stuffed animals, reading glasses, blankets, stoves, etc. We set up a stage to have a puppet show, tell stories of Jesus, and teach the children praise songs. After listening for some time, a boy in the front raised his hand and said, “You are all lying to us. We don’t feel God’s love. We have all been broken.”

Throughout the Middle East the terrorists are the new superheroes. The narrative is that shame and

humiliation are cleansed through violence. This is the narrative most children are hearing at home and this is the narrative being pushed by the Islamic State through social media. Sadly, this narrative is connecting on an emotional level with tens of thousands of refugee children and teenagers. Only Jesus can interrupt the

The terrorists are the new super-heroes.

cycle of violence. Experiencing his love and forgiveness makes it possible for us to forgive others. When we share the stories of Jesus, combined with practical demonstrations of kindness, supported by persistent, prevailing prayer, Jesus himself, the Savior and Healer of the broken, comes.

A refugee walked by a church and saw a sign that said: “Jesus—the light of the world.” He went inside and told someone, “All around me is darkness. You don’t understand my situation. If you want to understand my situation you must come to see my home.” So Yusuf, the man from the church, went with him. They arrived at an underground room with no windows and a dirt floor. Seven people were in the room including a young man lying on the ground. He had not moved for four months. The Syrian army had beaten him and broken his back. The family had walked three days through the desert to escape Syria, carrying this brother. They spent all their money along the way and arrived at the border with nothing. At that time the church had nothing left

from the supply room to give. “I have nothing left to give you,” Yusuf said, “but I will ask God to help you and to help me help you.” Yusuf prayed and then he left. One hour later the man telephoned Yusuf, “After you prayed,” he said, “for the first time in four months, my brother felt something in his leg—like a fire starting in his foot and going to his fingers.” The pastor went that same day with Yusuf to meet this family. When the pastor saw the young man lying on the floor he asked him what his job had been in Syria. The young man was a mechanic. So the pastor asked him, “If a car has an accident, do they first bring it to you or to the body shop?” “They bring it to me first.” And the pastor said, “This is what God does, too, through Jesus Christ. Do you believe this?” And all the family said, “Yes, we are serious, we want this, we want God to fix our hearts by Jesus Christ and then our bodies, too.” The pastor said, “Jesus Christ is able to heal you because he is God and he has all the power. And he is able to fix your hearts and make you right with him.” So the family prayed to accept Jesus.


Nothing happened at that time to the body of the brother on the floor. But five days later the other brother came to the church. This was unusual; Muslims rarely want to worship with Christians. This man came to the

“Yes, we are serious, we want this, we want God to fix our hearts by Jesus Christ and then our bodies, too.”

church and took a seat in the front. When the pastor asked who had prayer requests, this man stood up and said, “I want to ask you to keep praying for my brother. And I want to thank you for visiting him because this made him smile and now he has hope. Then the pastor asked people to stand and pray for this. While they were praying, the man’s cell phone rang. It was the sick brother. “I feel the fire right now in the other leg. From this moment, we will all follow.” This was five months ago and now the young brother is 90% healed and is walking without the use of a cane. A weekly Discovery Bible Study (DBS) now meets in their home.

A young missionary reports, “We pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to work in their lives, and he touches them. The families come to depend on praying with us each week.



So do we! This is a lot of fun for us! One man gathers his entire family and invites his friends to our prayer times. He says they have an intimacy with God they never had before. He had a vision in which a great light came to him, and a voice said, “A great sign is coming to you. This sign needs to be shared all over the world with every person.” The next day I decided to bring him a Bible. I brought the Bible in a grocery bag. I said, “The great sign is here in this bag. This book tells about our Lord, his sacrifice and his resurrection and why we need it.” He said, “OK, this is it. I believe it. He died for my sins.” His wife became very upset. So we brought a Sheikh who follows Jesus to meet with her. He helped her see from the Qur’an how they need to read the Bible, and that it is not corrupt, and that Jesus is the pinnacle of the Qur’an, and how all the prophets were pointing to Jesus. Now she and the oldest son are reading the Bible. We need more laborers who will consistently go to these homes to help these people and pray with them. This builds trust. We find that 8-10 visits are needed to build this trust. Frankly there are a lot of workers here but not so many that are consistently visiting. We must sow a lot and this takes time and can be discouraging. We see a lot of burnout. Pray for us. We have to give the burdens of this work to God. 

WHAT ARE THE

The Challenges & Opportunities

OF A POST-SYKES-PICOT MIDDLE EAST

BY LUKE MOON

The carnage of the Syrian civil war rarely makes the news anymore. It seems like an intractable conflict where brutality by one faction is only outmatched with greater brutality by another faction. Politicians and even many human rights organizations struggle to pick a group that they hope will lead Syria out of this conflict. It seems impossible to support President Bashar Assad, who gasses and slaughters his own people, but his regime is holding back ISIS, who cuts Christian children in half and gang rapes Yazidi girls.

And then there is the myriad of Al-Qaeda affiliates who have joined in the fray. With such deep fissures between ethnic and religious groups it seems unlikely that Syria, and Iraq for that matter, will hold together as nation-

states. While missiologists often look at ethnic and religious people groups and politicians look at nation-states, perhaps a way forward would be to encourage the establishment of new nations or autonomous provinces along ethnic and religious lines.

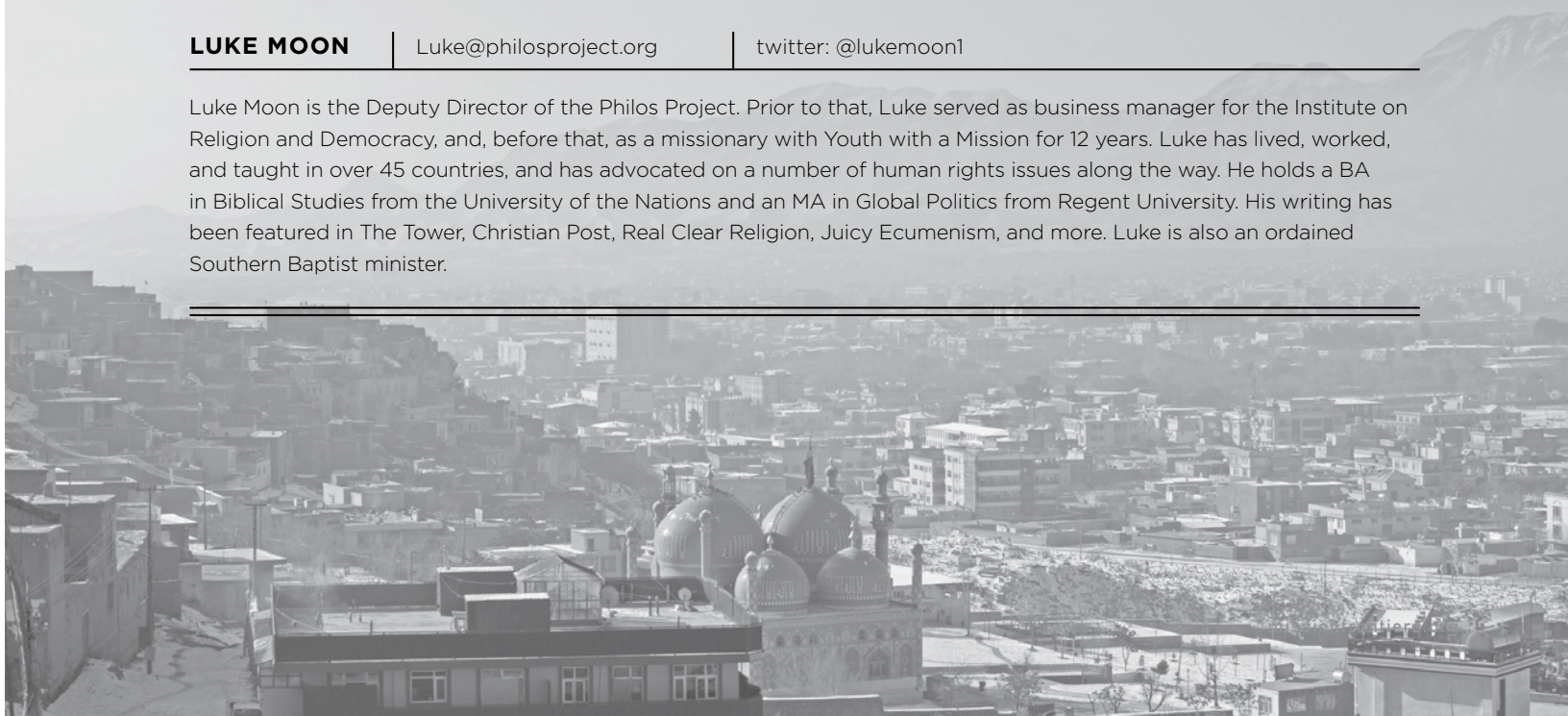
The current borders of Syria and Iraq were drawn by British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot. Following World War I these two diplomats met together to carve up the territory formerly held by the defeated Ottoman Empire. The boundary lines drawn by Sykes and Picot had less to do with the ethnic and religious divisions on the ground and more to do with the geopolitical forces in Europe and the letters on the map at the table. Sir Mark Sykes

LUKE MOON

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Luke Moon is the Deputy Director of the Philos Project. Prior to that, Luke served as business manager for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, and, before that, as a missionary with Youth with a Mission for 12 years. Luke has lived, worked, and taught in over 45 countries, and has advocated on a number of human rights issues along the way. He holds a BA in Biblical Studies from the University of the Nations and an MA in Global Politics from Regent University. His writing has been featured in The Tower, Christian Post, Real Clear Religion, Juicy Ecumenism, and more. Luke is also an ordained Southern Baptist minister.



The carnage of the Syrian civil war rarely makes the news anymore. It seems like an intractable conflict where brutality by one faction is only outmatched with greater brutality by another faction. Politicians and even many human rights organizations struggle to pick a group that they hope will lead Syria out of this conflict. It seems impossible to support President Bashar Assad, who gasses and slaughters his own people, but his regime is holding back ISIS, who cuts Christian children in half and gang rapes Yazidi girls.

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The current borders of Syria and Iraq were drawn by British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot. Following World War I these two diplomats met together to carve up the territory formerly held by the defeated Ottoman Empire. The boundary lines drawn by Sykes and Picot had less to do with the ethnic and religious divisions on the ground and more to do with the geopolitical forces in Europe and the letters on the map at the table. Sir Mark Sykes famously declared, “I should like to draw a line from the e in Acre to the last k in Kirkuk.”

Generally, the Sykes-Picot Agreement has held together for almost 100 years, but it seems unlikely that it will last much longer. While ISIS has largely removed the border separating Syria and Iraq the Kurds have tasted

— perhaps a way forward would be to encourage the establishment of new nations or autonomous provinces along ethnic and religious lines

independence and will not easily go back into a power-sharing agreement with Baghdad. In addition to the Kurds, the Assyrians and Yazidis were also victims to the collapse of the central government in Iraq. Left

unarmed and unprotected these religious minorities suffered brutally at the hands of ISIS when the US trained and equipped Iraqi army ran away. They too, will not likely return to a seat at the table in Baghdad.

The most viable new state in a post-Sykes-Picot Middle East is commonly referred to as Kurdistan. This new state would encompass territory in both Iraq and Syria with potential territory in Turkey. But Kurdistan is not the only potential new state, or at the very least autonomous province. It is not difficult to imagine an Alawite state, a Druze state, and an Assyrian state.

— religious minorities suffered brutally at the hands of ISIS

Even now, David Lazar, President of the American Mesopotamia Organization has secured support from several key members of Congress to have the US officially recognize an autonomous province in the Nineveh Plain. This new province would be for Assyrian Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, and other religious minorities. Former Congressman Frank Wolf, perhaps the most tireless advocate in Congress on behalf of persecuted Christians, issued a report in which he publically advocated for the establishment of the Nineveh Plain province. Following a recent trip to the region, Rep Wolf wrote, “This province should be uniquely designed to ensure the ongoing peace and stability of the ethnic and religious minorities of Iraq. Aside from a direct end to the Islamic State itself, the establishment of this province was the number one request of the Christian and Yazidi communities interviewed by 21 Wilberforce. Policymakers should make the establishment of such a province a central component of the effort to defeat and counter IS, and work with the central government in Baghdad and the KRG toward this end.”

A handful of new nations in the Middle East would provide both challenges and opportunity for Christian missionary activities. The challenges will come more from the structural issues within the new nations. Recently established nations and post-conflict nations often go through difficult transition periods. A recent report by Transparency International placed South Sudan and Afghanistan in the top 5 most corrupt nations




in the world. South Sudan has struggled with inter-tribal conflict recently, which one of South Sudan's Catholic Bishops blamed on inexperienced leadership. Mgr. Rudolf Deng Majak, Bishop of Wau said in an interview with the Catholic News Agency of Africa (CANAA),

"I have to say that the communities [South Sudan] have never had the opportunity to live together as a nation. It is the first time we are beginning to have this sense [of a nation]. Yes, it is true we have suffered together It hasn't gone to the deeper level of formation. That takes time. So, at the level of the community, at the level of leadership, it is the first time in the history of the people of South Sudan that they have a parliament of their own, a sovereign government with an executive, a military. And these are huge responsibilities that take time to mature and to develop in order to have a peaceful, stable, and prosperous community"

Another challenge would potentially come from ethnic and religious cleansing. When Israel was established in 1948, Jews from many of the surrounding Arab nations were forced to leave everything behind and flee to Israel. Similarly, there was a healthy bit of migration following the break up of the Yugoslavia along religious lines.

Yet where there are challenges there are opportunities. In a new Middle East there would be significant opportunities to assist with community, civic, and economic development and many missionaries excel in these areas. Joel Gillman, and expert in frontier

missions, noted, "A balkanized Middle East would create a fertile ground for indigenous church planting movements within several of the ethnic groups."

The immediate needs of Assyrian Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria is acute. The estimated cost of supplying food, shelter, and medicine for the nearly 2.6 million refugees and internal displaced person is expected to exceed well over half a billion dollars. Fortunately, the plight of these victims of ISIS aggression has not ceased from the news like the Syrian civil war has. Unfortunately, there is only a limited amount a time before the tragedy of an individual family and small community becomes a faceless statistic. When the news stories have ceased and people have given their donation, without a long-term plan these Christians and other minorities will still be suffering. Perhaps it is time to redraw the borders of the Middle East. 

¹ Barr, James. 2012 *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 12

² 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative., *Edge Of Extinction: The Eradication Of Religious And Ethnic Minorities In Iraq*. Falls Church: 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, 2015. Print.

³ Onyalla, D. (2015, March 23). Leadership Inexperience to Blame for Protracted South Sudan Conflict, Catholic Bishop Says, Downplays Ethnicity Factor. Retrieved April 15, 2015 from <http://www.canaafrica.org/index.php/home/16-latestnews/231-leadership-inexperience-to-blame-for-protracted-south-sudan-conflict-catholic-bishop-says-downplays-ethnicity-factor>

⁴ Gillman, J. (2015, April 12). [Online interview].

⁵ Unhcr.org., 'UNHCR - Iraq'. N.p., 2015. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

THE ISIS CRISIS

THE PLAN TO DEFEAT RADICALISM

BY **MARK SILJANDER**, PRESIDENT,
BRIDGES TO COMMON GROUND

At an interfaith conference in Geneva, the Saudi head of the Muslim World League privately acknowledged that he perceived Christians as *infidels* because they believe that Jesus is the son of God, and believe in the Trinity and in the divinity of Jesus. After a 15-minute presentation summarizing groundbreaking new research—demonstrating that we are actually not so far apart on these historically inflammatory issues—he leapt to his feet and stated,

“If what you say is true, it would change the world!”

In response to this same approach, the President of Sudan reversed his position and deployed UN peacekeepers in war-ravaged Darfur. These are but two of many examples of the impact of powerful new paradigms—rooted in extensive linguistic research—on real-world peacemaking and crisis management.¹

Mark Siljander is a former U.S. congressman and deputy U.S./U.N. ambassador and author of the best-selling and award-winning book, *A Deadly Misunderstanding: A Congressman's Quest to Bridge the Muslim-Christian Divide*

(Harper One). He is President of Bridges to Common Ground, an NGO dedicated to peacemaking, crisis management and discovering common ground among the Abrahamic faiths.

More than 20 years ago, founders of Bridges to Common Ground (“Bridges”) discovered scholarly evidence embedded within the Semitic texts of the three Abrahamic holy books that render impotent the primary religious dogmas used to target the “other” as “*infidel*” and hence, “worthy of death.” Once seeing the true meaning of key words in the “holy books,” many adherents begin to immediately experience a rewiring of their thinking.

How many Christians, for example—or even Muslims—know that Jesus is mentioned in the Qur’an as Messiah, Word of God, Spirit of God, supernaturally conceived, able to heal the sick and raise the dead, and taken up to heaven to be near to God and presiding on Judgment Day? These references do not occur occasionally, but 100 times. This new realm of understanding helps to establish substantial common ground on spiritual issues heretofore considered forbidden, heretical and impossible to bridge. It supplements traditional diplomatic, political, economic and military tracks of conflict resolution with one using spiritual principles that remodel the radical mindset.

Western governments are desperate to find a solution to ISIS. However, governments around the world have failed to develop or employ an effective, comprehensive

A fatal flaw in current strategy is that policy makers have no idea how to deal with the spiritual/religious dimension

strategy against radicalized and militant Islam. A fatal flaw in current strategy is that policy makers have no idea how to deal with the spiritual/religious dimension of these conflicts, and thus tend to leave it unaddressed.

There may be some small measure of recent progress pushing back ISIS, but as CIA Director, John Brennan, affirmed, “We cannot kill our way out” and must, “address underlying factors and conditions

[causing radicalism].” ISIS is currently filling the perceived needs of its recruits: a desire for revenge and significance—using “religion” by distorting it to a violent and merciless end. These atrocities, along with a basic misunderstanding of the nature of Islam, have sparked fear and antipathy in the West.

In desperation, they turn to groups like ISIS who use Islam, offering candidates the illusion of fighting Satan near the “end of days”, and martyrdom as the assurance of eternal life.

No matter how well-trained our armies, how advanced our technology or how massive our budget, no amount of violence alone can bring resolution. Violence on our part—however, we justify it—serves to intensify the long-term crisis, creating yet another generation of willing martyrs avenging the deaths of family, friends, and loved ones.

What option is left but to declare a new kind of war, a war on radicalism itself? The kind of war we outline here offers an alternative path. It too uses “religion,” but does so redemptively and restoratively. For many years,

Bridges has witnessed the effectiveness of this approach around the world, undermining the driving pseudo-Islamic ideology that underpins the radical movement. Truly defeating ISIS and radicalism will require a multifaceted, holistic and long-term approach.

RADICALISM, NEUROSCIENCE, LINGUISTICS AND PROPHETIC HOPE

Defeating ISIS, and radicalism itself, will require a creative blend of science and spirituality. Both yield insights into psychosocial factors often ignored when dealing with these kinds of conflicts. This is especially critical among the youth that constitute over half of the Arab population.

A growing body of data provides the profile of a typical radical.² Recruits are not especially poor, uneducated or mentally unstable. However, many young Muslims are disillusioned that democratization will deliver them from ruthless regimes. They are frustrated with the failure and corruption of institutions. In desperation, they turn to groups like ISIS who use Islam, offering candidates the illusion of fighting Satan near the “end of days,” and martyrdom as the assurance of eternal life.

Believers know the power of the Holy Spirit can rewire the human brain—from hate to mercy and compassion. The science of neuroplasticity refers to the brain’s ability to rewire neuropathways. Parts of the brain responsible for radicalism are not set in stone; these impulses can be weakened.

Christians authentically exemplifying the Greatest Commandment can play a key role in this. By exchanging animosity toward Muslims for Spirit-inspired love, Christians actually become more effective participants in the real battle, which is spiritual.

It took widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo to birth the awakenings that eventually lifted the Christian faith out of barbarism.

Prophecy is a driving factor in shaping the worldview of many Western Christians, who view the establishment of the state of Israel as miraculous history unfolding. Less-understood prophecies such as Isaiah 19:20-25 speak of a spiritual awakening sweeping the Arab world, ushering in a time of renewal for the Abrahamic faiths. Careful analysis of key Hebrew words indicates all three will worship, call on and be a blessing to the same God!³

How could this happen? Isaiah 59:19 describes a move of the “Spirit” that will “put to flight” the evil flood—an apt description of the rising tide of radicalism exemplified by ISIS and Boko Haram. This verse includes a “God revering and awe-inspired West” that should stir hope and prompt courageous action on the part of Christians to figure out how to apply love (friendship), compassion and mercy in place of fear, rather than one-dimensional calls for expanded military solutions.³ Muslims also

resonate with the prophetic “end of days” scenario while radicals distort it to attract recruits. Indeed, God has awakened his spiritual “force.”

THREE AWAKENINGS

Islamist radicalism is at a point similar to where the Christian church was in the 17th century: plagued by a devastating 30-year war; engaged in inquisitions, pogroms, burning witches at the stake; drawing and quartering “heretics” simply for reading the Bible; and martyring Anabaptists for their nonviolent views. It took widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo to birth the awakenings that eventually lifted the Christian faith out of barbarism.

Of the awakenings currently sweeping the globe, three in particular are impacting Islam. Christians would do well to catch up with what God is already doing, and become a vital part of a hope-led solution, not a chronic part of expanding a fear-based problem!

FIRST AWAKENING: CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

The Arab Spring reflects a new willingness to challenge authority in many every contexts, including political and economic. Growing demands for political and social justice reflect a much broader rethinking of the status quo. But the search for political justice remains elusive, predisposing many toward a more profound and effective 2nd awakening.

SECOND AWAKENING: MASS RETHINKING OF ISLAM

The 2nd awakening expresses dissatisfaction with the extraordinary bloodlust of ISIS and other radicals who claim their actions are “Islamic.” The Arabic term for this awakening is *ijtihad*. It involves rethinking and reinterpretation of the Qur’an and its application in the modern context. The disgusting brutality of Islamist radicalism is prompting record numbers of Muslims to search for a fresh and more complete understanding of their faith. Amazingly, disenchanted ISIS fighters are seeking refuge by the hundreds.⁴ They are prime candidates for *ijtihad*, which offers alternative reformist religious constructs.

Since 9/11, Christians have called on Muslims to renounce radical interpretations of the Qur’an, and

related terrorist actions. Similarly, Egyptian President al-Sisi has said: “I see that the religious discourse in the entire Islamic world has cost Islam its humanity...and desperately needs a religious revolution.”⁵ Numerous Muslim leaders now echo President al-Sisi’s call for reassessment. These include Professor Dr. Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University; Ahmed Aboutaleb, the Muslim Mayor of Rotterdam; and Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, the Founding President of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID).

More than ever in its 1400-year history, Islam is on the verge of an awakening that incorporates a new *tafsir* (Arabic for “interpretation”) of the Qur’an. Clarification of the precepts of Islam is creating an unprecedented openness to new ways of thinking. This should incentivize all concerned parties, especially Christians, to support any effort that seeks peaceful resolution of the current state of perpetual conflict. Western Christians’ expressions of love and compassion can help tip the balance toward those pursuing more accurate interpretation of the “holy books” and into the 3rd awakening.

THIRD SPIRITUAL AWAKENING: HOPE IN THE MESSIAH

The 3rd awakening is a spiritual revolution toward Jesus and his teachings among Muslims, Christians and Jews. Untold numbers are dreaming dreams and seeing visions of Jesus the Messiah, and millions are awakening to an enlightened spiritual path.⁶ The disenfranchised are seeking freedom, and finding that “where the Spirit of the Lord is there is (true) freedom.”

For Muslims this involves emphasizing what Jesus taught about love, mercy and compassion. The word Jesus frequently used for “love” in the Aramaic Gospels is the Arabic cognate for “compassion and mercy,” which appears in every chapter (but one) in the Qur’an, and is recited in every Muslim prayer. These revelations are Spirit-driven, rooted in a fresh understanding of Jesus the Messiah, directly undermining the factors that make ISIS, and radicalism in general, such a relentless foe.

This understanding offers a different paradigm for those devoted to Islam. Instead of elevating war and violent death as the way to heaven, it provides a nonviolent, noble path to Paradise for eternity. It also supports the


growing redefinition of Islam, more in keeping with its actual meaning: peace and submission to God.

Christians can help by embracing these awakenings, and responding with some rethinking of their own. Muslims are not the enemy. Radicalism is the enemy. Professor Samuel Huntington stated that East and West are facing a “clash of civilizations,” but author Tim Timmons argues we are really facing a “clash of the kingdoms of good & evil. It is not Islam; it is evil that we stand against!”

Jesus’ command to love extends to every Christian’s Muslim “neighbor.” By changing from adversaries to partners in Islam’s struggle for reform, Christians can directly affect the outcome of these movements. This begins with courageous, visionary leaders exchanging fear of Muslims with the call for love and reconciliation.

At a more personal level, building on new linguistic discoveries about what we have in common opens the door for friendship, which in turn creates new realms of opportunity. From this point of departure, incredible breakthroughs in peace and reconciliation are possible.

Without Jesus’ followers ever lifting a sword, the Roman Empire ultimately adopted the very path they set out to annihilate. How did this happen? It was by the power of courageous faith in the face of ultimate terror. Over time, this Way transformed the minds and hearts of those possessed with hatred and blood-lust.

Is ISIS more powerful than the 4th century Roman Empire? Is it so unthinkable that it could happen again? 

¹ List of situations impacted: <http://www.bridgestocommground.org/our-projects/trac5-a-bold-path-to-peace/> Erasmus blog (July 2014). “Iraqi Christians and the West: A rock and a hard place.” Retrieved from economist.com.

² Drawn from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) Report, and University of Michigan Professors Mark Tessler and Michael D.H. Robbins.

³ See BCG blog post [insert Isaiah 19 link]

⁴ <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-executes-100-foreign-fighters-trying-flee-syria-1764018>

⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/09/us-egypt-sisi-religion-idUSBREA480G820140509>

⁶ See Isaiah 19:20-25 on p. 5 and Joel 2:28: Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

HOW TO PRAY

FOR THE CHAOS & SUFFERING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY **CHRISTY GRAHAM**

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH IN REGIONS WHERE ISIS IS ACTIVE


- 01 For spiritual awakening in the church
- 02 For provision, strength and endurance where they are ministering to the overwhelming needs of refugees.
- 03 For a positive testimony of Christ to the people they serve.
- 04 For unity between Christians from different churches and denominations.
- 05 For Christians to strengthen one another in corporate prayer and worship.
- 06 For the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to be visibly evident in the church.

That, rooted and grounded in love, they will love their enemies.

PRAY FOR MEMBERS OF ISIS

- 01 For Saul to Paul-like encounters with Christ.
- 02 For ISIS members to have dreams and visions of Jesus that would lead them to question their choice to follow ISIS's ideology.
- 03 For ISIS members to discover the love and mercy of God.
- 04 For followers of Jesus to be given opportunities to give bold witness to ISIS members.
- 05 For ISIS members to see the testimony of Jesus through signs and and wonders and deliverance from evil spirits.

PRAY FOR VICTIMS OF ISIS

- 01 For ministers of emotional/ psychological healing to be sent to them.
- 02 For physical healing.
- 03 For children who have had deep losses....family members, friends, home.....that provision would be made for them to heal and grow.
- 04 To find in Jesus Christ the power to forgive, and to find healing for their pain and loss.
- 05 For the fellowships of new believers to grow in numbers and in the knowledge of God, of his word, and his ways. 



Kingdom Kernels

The Lens of Kingdom Movements in Scripture

An Overview of a Biblical Exegesis
of Church Planting Movements

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Are Church-Planting Movements (CPMs) or Disciple-Making Movements (DMM) a concept based in Scripture? Doubters feel CPM practitioners read the Bible with CPM-colored lenses. But, could it be the opposite—that our generation’s lenses no longer see the movements inherent in the New Testament?

All of us have a set of lenses (or a bias) we use when interpreting Scripture. Those lenses are shaped in part by our contemporary situation and theological framework. How do we clear the smudges from our glasses?

Movement vs. Non-Movement Lenses

If we live in a non-movement environment—one in which conversions and church planting are occasional and incremental—do we not tend to interpret the Scriptures from that perspective?

On the other hand, how would a believer in the days following Pentecost (Acts 2) have interpreted

the New Testament? What about disciples in the explosive Wesleyan movement—or Baptists when their churches on the American frontier grew from 60 to 457 churches in 20 years? I believe they would have read their Bibles very differently.

In the last 32 years I have successively led a rural church with few baptisms, a new urban church with many more, and then a CPM in an unreached people group. Now I work with movements around the world. Like taking an eye-exam—as the Master Optician changes out lenses asking “better or worse?”—my perspective on the Scripture is getting clearer.

It is actually hard to read the New Testament without seeing movements of God. Yet decades of non-movement life have conditioned us to do just that. It is time to remove the lenses of our non-movement ...experiences and read it afresh.

After the 70 disciples returned from a victorious mission establishing the

A THIRTY YEAR NUMERICAL RECORD OF MOVEMENTS

30 AD (Dates are approximate)

• 120 disciples meeting (1:15) but over 500 existent (1 Cor 15); 3,000 become disciples (2:41); More disciples made daily (2:47); more believe (5000) (4:4)

30 - 31 AD

• More than ever believers added – multitudes (5:14); Disciples increasing in number (6:1)

32 AD

• Number of disciples multiplied and including many priests (6:7); Average believers preach the word in many places (8:4)

33 AD

• Samaria believes – many are baptized (8:5ff); Spreads to many Samaritan villages (8:25); Gospel spreads to Ethiopian eunuch (8:26ff)

35 AD

• Conversion of chief persecutor (Saul) and preaching of gospel to Damascus (Acts 9); Believers / churches through all Judea, Galilee and Samaria and are multiplying (9:31)

40AD

• All the residents of Lyda and Sharon turn to Lord (9:35); All Joppa hears about miracle and many believe (9:42); Gospel spreads to Caesarea Gentile community (Cornelius) and many persons become disciples (10:27); (33-45 AD) – Gospel spreads to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (11:19).

45 AD

• Gentile Antioch church established; great number believe (11:19-21); great many disciples added (11:24-26)

kingdom in many places,
Jesus declared:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (Luke 10:21, ESV)

These disciples, fresh from the harvest, saw the mystery of the kingdom in ways the religious leaders did not. Their lenses were clearing. Can we emulate their childlike faith? How would they read the Scriptures that follow?

From beginning to end the New Testament describes, assumes and expects movements of God to start in every locale.

Old Testament: Prophecy of an Eternal Growing Kingdom

Isaiah foretold that there would be no end of the increase of the Messiah's government because the zeal of the Lord would do it (Is. 9:7). Daniel spoke of a new kingdom to remain forever, that would shatter all other kingdoms (Dan. 2:44). Jesus explained that this gate-shattering kingdom was to be a spiritual one, not an earthly one (Jn 18:36).

Gospels: Kingdom Come

Jesus began and ended his teaching ministry with the concept of the kingdom (see Mark 1:15 and Acts 1:3) and spoke of it over 100 times. He taught that the appropriate response was to repent and believe (Mk. 1:15) and to follow and fish (Mk. 1:17). The King calls all to joyfully submit to his rule and to help others do the same.

The gospels launch this kingdom revolution in which every believer becomes a priest. Jesus taught his disciples to beseech their heavenly Father to cause his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9-10). Expectations are created that God wants to answer that prayer in every context.

Jesus underscores that expectation when he sends out his disciples (12, then 70) on two missions, declaring them to expect a plentiful harvest (Mt. 9:38 & Lk. 10:2). Even in places one would not expect a harvest (Samaria), Jesus told his disciples to expect it immediately (Jn. 4:35).

As the kingdom began to grow in the gospels and increased exponentially in Acts it became a movement sweeping thousands into discipleship. Since disciples making

disciples was at its core and many new churches formed in their wake (meeting in home after home), we give these movements descriptive terms: kingdom movements, Church-Planting Movements or Disciple-Making Movements. They were movements of God because they were driven by the Spirit in the hearts of believers, not carefully orchestrated by human plans.

Gospels: Parables of Growth

Jesus described this kingdom growth through parables. Fifteen of the 21 kingdom parables address the growth of the kingdom, with seven of those depicting it as exponential growth.

Though our generation often discounts numerical interpretations, the context of the parables gives clues as to the type of growth. In Luke 4:14-8:3 Jesus demonstrates to his disciples how to spread this kingdom through preaching the gospel and working many miracles. In Luke 8 he teaches them through the parables to expect four responses to the proclaimed Word, including the fourth soil that will bear fruit 30, 60 and 100 times. Then in Luke 9 he sends out the twelve and in Luke 10 the 70 disciples to proclaim

46 AD

• Word of God increases and multiplies in church established thus far (12:24)

47-48 AD

Paul's First Journey

• Word spreading through whole region (Phrygia) (13:49); Great number believe in Iconium (14:1); Many disciples in Derbe (14:21) (Both cities are of Galatia); Churches and elders established in each place (14:23)

50-52 AD

Paul's Second Journey

• Churches from first trip continue to increase in number of disciples daily (16:5); Two households believe in Philippi (16:15-34); Great many Thessalonians believe (17:4). Opponents say they have turned world upside down (17:6); Many

Bereans believe (17:12); Some (a few) believe in Athens (17:34); Many Corinthians believe (18:8, 10)

52-55 AD

Paul's Third Journey

• All disciples in Galatia and Phrygia strengthened (18:23); Word of the Lord spreads to all residents of the province of Asia (19:10, 17) and continues to increase in Ephesus (the capital) (19:20)

57 AD

• Many thousands of disciples among the Jews in Jerusalem (21:20) (many of the original disciples left Jerusalem in 8:4). Paul accused of stirring up riots throughout the world (24:5); The Christian movement cannot escape notice (26:26)

59 AD

• Many healed throughout island of Malta (28:9); Jewish leaders in Rome know the Christian "sect" is spoken against everywhere; some believe (28:22, 24); Gospel is proclaimed from house arrest "without hindrance" – last word of Acts (28:31)

the kingdom and find responsive households. The parables created expectation in the disciples of what should ensue.

The parables make much more sense when interpreted with a “movement lens” rather than a “non-movement lens.” Disciples in the middle of modern-day CPMs easily catch the meaning of the parables. They are living them out.

Gospels: The Discipleship Movement of Jesus

Jesus modeled to his disciples how to build the kingdom by making disciples who could make disciples. In three years the number of Jesus’ disciples grew from 12 to 70 (or 82 – Lk 10:1 “70 others”) then to a core of 120 in an upper room (Acts 1:15) out of a total of 500 that he appeared to (1 Cor. 15:6). In three years Jesus raised up at least 500 disciples in addition to the thousands who hung on his words from place to place.

If you developed 500 disciples in three years, not counting the thousands who attended your meetings, what would you call that—a Disciple-Making Movement? And this was before the disciples had the indwelling of the Spirit.

Acts: Kingdom Growth

Acts is the kingdom growth of the gospel accounts on Spirit-empowered steroids. Pentecost was a game-changer in that regard. Luke describes how kingdom movements had become normal (and viral) over a 30-year span. Kingdom movements were not a passing phenomenon.

If we come to the Acts record laying aside our presuppositions, we are amazed at how fast, through whom and how far the kingdom can spread.

Twenty of the 28 chapters have numerical indicators (study the timeline at the bottom of pages 31-32). Stop and consider what your band of 500 disciples in AD 30 would feel like in AD 35. The gospel had spread to thousands of new disciples and many new churches had started throughout all of Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9:31). What would your band of disciples call this—a church-planting or disciple-making movement?

Then consider this Jerusalem church 27 years after beginning. With most believers having fled the city earlier (8:4) there are still many thousands of new disciples (21:20). The movement is still multiplying.

Paul’s journeys over the span of only ten years defy expectations of how far and rapidly the kingdom can grow—six to eight Roman provinces penetrated with multiplying disciples and churches. Any missionary with such results in 2-3 terms would categorize this as a movement of God.

Within 30 years the eastern half of the Roman Empire is filled with kingdom witness. Acts perpetuates the expectation of kingdom movements taught and modeled by Jesus.

When the numbers are as large as the thousands given in Acts and the places for these disciples to meet are small (often meeting in homes – 2:46; probably the norm once they were kicked out of the temple), then how do you interpret what is happening? Disciples are making disciples. These disciples are forming new groups and churches wherever they can – homes, public spaces, etc. When disciples are making disciples and starting churches in new homes along the way, what do you call that—a Church-Planting Movement?

Examine the timeframe of Acts (especially the first five years) and ask the questions: “How rapidly does the Spirit make disciples who in turn make disciples? How quickly are new churches formed? How quickly were leaders developed?” Fruitful CPM practitioner, Nathan Shank, says, “Whoever said we set the pace? If we take credit for the pace, then we are taking credit for the growth.” If growth is God’s responsibility (1 Cor. 3:6-7), then surely pace is also.

Epistles: Discipling a Movement

At first glance, kingdom movements feel very distant in the Epistles. But put the epistles in the context of the Acts movements and it makes sense how they fit into the discussion. The Acts chronology is the context of the epistles—the context in which we should interpret them.

Putting the epistles in the chronology of the movements they address, it seems likely that they assume the Great Commission is at the heart of the disciples. The new disciples have been obeying the Great Commission and the movements are growing. The epistles generally focus on providing theological and discipleship structure to these movements. The epistles show Paul taking the newly-forming churches of Acts 13-14 and solidifying their health by appointing leaders (14:21-23) or leaving Titus in Crete to develop on-going leadership, structure and discipleship in the new churches (Titus 1:5ff).

Even so, movement growth is acknowledged in the epistles. In the early letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians), written just months after visiting Thessalonica, Paul praises the

disciples for their work of faith, serving as examples to believers throughout the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thes. 1:3, 6-7). The word of the Lord has “sounded forth” from them not only in those two provinces but “everywhere” (1 Thes. 1:8). A few months later their faith continues to “grow abundantly” (2 Thes. 1:3) and they continue to resolve to work in faith (2 Thes. 1:11). Paul then asks them to pray that the word of the Lord will speed ahead of him in his work (2 Thes. 3:1). Some of these references can undoubtedly point to spiritual growth, but numerical growth seems implied from the context as well.

Shortly after planting the work in Corinth, Paul exhorts the saints to abound in the “work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Only months later, 2 Corinthians is addressed to all the believers throughout “the whole of Achaia [Province]” (2 Cor. 1:1). The work in Corinth is not isolated to one church but has spread to a whole province. These two letters exude an atmosphere of believers exercising their gifts in groups small enough to make a difference (1 Cor. 11-14). The Corinthian church apparently started in the house of Titus Justus (Acts 18:7) and spread from there to other homes.

The likelihood of this is bolstered by Paul’s references in several epistles to churches as meeting in homes: Rom. 16:5 (Rome), 1 Cor. 16:19 (Ephesus), and two churches in homes in Colossae – Col. 4:15 and Philemon 1:2. Therefore, as late as Paul’s Roman imprisonment—30 years into the Christian movement—the growing movements appear to be based in homes—a highly reproducible model.

Whether it is in Jerusalem with many thousands (both after Pentecost and again thirty years later in Acts 21:20) or in any of the movements in the missionary journeys in which multitudes believe, it helps to extrapolate out what thousands meeting in homes means. Whether after Pentecost or in Acts 21, these thousands in Jerusalem had to fit into homes. Suppose there are 5,000 believers and a home can hold 25 adults, a simple extrapolation would indicate 200 groups meeting.

Telescope this out into the many other cities in which “multitudes” or a “great many” believed. The same phenomenon of believers winning others and then meeting in homes is multiplied many times over as the normal pattern. Whether you identify each home meeting as a “church” or as a small-group meeting of the larger church in the city, the situation is very much like what we describe as CPMs.

In Titus, written shortly after Paul and Titus catalyzed church plants in several towns, Paul exhorts Titus to help the budding movement to become solidified with healthy leadership (1:5). This appears to be an example of an epistle written to help bring order to the explosion of the kingdom in each locale.

Paul exhorts Timothy to disciple faithful men who can teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). The pattern he gives to Timothy, late in his ministry, echoes the message of the Great Commission when the Lord taught his disciples to teach new disciples to obey all he commanded (including the Great Commission). Thus, Paul’s theme from one of his first epistles (1 Thes.) to one of his last (1 Tim.) speaks to the multiplication of disciples.

Revelation: Triumph of the Kingdom

The message of the gospels is the establishing of the kingdom of God. Acts marks its progress over thirty years. The epistles provide discipleship instructions in that context. Revelation provides the end of the story in similar terms—the triumph of the kingdom of God over all opposition:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”
(Rev. 11:15, ESV)

Chapters two and three demonstrate the difficulty the enemy has had in thwarting God’s work in seven churches. These churches and disciples, set in the Asia Province movement (likely birthed in Acts 19), show remarkable resilience 40 years later even though they have problems.

Just as Acts 21:20 records the continued growth of the kingdom movement in Jerusalem 30 years after it began (around 60 AD), so also Revelation gives another multi-decade marker. The Ephesian church at the center of an amazing movement in the province of Asia is still, 40 years later, working hard in the kingdom (Rev. 2:2), though they need a course correction in their efforts. These markers (Acts 21:20 and Rev. 2:2) demonstrate that movements need not be short-lived if they receive godly coaching and leadership.

Overall Revelation ends the New Testament with a picture of multitudes of saints around the throne that no one can count (Rev. 7:9). What was launched on the seashores of Galilee became a movement of God taking the world by



storm. From beginning to end, what is described in the NT is a movement of disciples and churches spreading to all the nations of the earth in numbers that are uncountable.

Revelation marks the triumph of the kingdom, as a multitude no one can count from every nation and tribe is represented before the throne (7:9, 19:1, 6) and nations stream to the new city (21:24-26).

This is the picture that the Spirit wants to leave in the minds of believers at the end of the canon. First or Second Century disciples reading these New Testament books would have expected that movements were the normal and expected way of the kingdom of God.

Acknowledging multitudes no one can count does not preclude the truth of passages such as Matthew 7:13-14, which acknowledges that the gate to salvation is narrow and few find it. A belief in CPM-like movements does not imply that the majority of a people

group will believe. Yet, if even a small percentage of a large population group believes, multitudes result.

Suppose that XYZ people group of 1.5 million people receives the gospel. New believers are discipled to 1) follow Jesus wholeheartedly, and 2) fish for men. As they win others, they disciple with the same expectation. In the span of a few years, a movement emerges in a place where no churches existed earlier.

- If only 10% believe, the result is 150,000 disciples. If the average church size is 30 (excluding kids), 5,000 churches are the result.
- If only 5% believe, there are 75,000 disciples and 2,500 churches.
- If only 1% believe, there are 15,000 disciples and 500 churches.
- If only 0.5% believe, there are 7,500 disciples and 250 churches.

What would we call any of those four scenarios? When our work in Asia approached the 0.5% range it

was being called a Church-Planting Movement. Inherent within its DNA was the momentum for the kingdom to spread throughout the people group and to neighboring tribes.

When even a small percentage of a people group becomes ignited in their faith, like the mustard seed it becomes a movement. The result that Revelation paints is that these individual movements (like Rev. 2 and 3) have become a global movement consisting of uncountable multitudes.

Core of the Great Commission

This Gospels-to-Revelation overview illustrates the disciples' commitment to the core of the Great Commission—the mission Jesus left to his church. Over the course of thirty years from the giving of the Commission to the close of Acts, average disciples are faithfully obeying the command of the Lord to make disciples and teaching them to obey the same things. Forty

years after the close of Acts, the movement has still grown amidst great opposition. The Great Commission was a command the Lord gave His disciples and served as a lens to interpret what they would read in the New Testament.

When I read my Bible, I know I have a set of lenses. I keep trying to readjust my lenses so that they are as true and clear as possible. But when I read my Bible, I cannot help but see kingdom movements throughout.

Two common approaches to what we hear about kingdom movements exist. One is to question what is being reported, to discount it, and perhaps even to brand it as contrary to Scripture and what is expected. This view can be summed up as: expecting less to be happening than we know about. This set of lenses can lead us to assume that movements are not in Scripture and that CPM practitioners read too much into the text.

The second approach is to expect that what we hear about (new disciples, new churches, miracles, etc.) is just part of what God is really doing. This viewpoint can be summed up as: expecting more to be happening than we know about. This set of lenses can lead us to see much in Scripture that teaches and describes CPM-like movements. The danger is that we see a CPM behind every text.

These two viewpoints can serve as extremes on a scale. Where should we fall on that scale? The Apostle John gives us a glimpse into his perspective at the end of his Gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are

written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31, ESV)

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:25, ESV)

The sheer preponderance of Scripture texts related to growth and movements should serve as a barometer for interpretation. The question does not have to be “do they advocate movements like CPMs?” A fair reading of these texts (read them as a child might) should at the very least allow the reader to say, “They may be interpreted this way and support for movements is plausible.”

Believers in movements at various times in our history (e.g. the several great awakenings) have felt their movements clearly described in the New Testament. And they faced much opposition from those outside the movement.

One day a lady criticized D. L. Moody for his methods of evangelism in attempting to win people to the Lord. Moody’s reply was, “I agree with you. I don’t like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?” The lady replied, “I don’t do it.” Moody retorted, “Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”

Moody expected great harvests and found support for them in Scripture. Today we look back on such men with admiration, but at the time they were much maligned.

Jesus rebutted the criticism leveled at both himself and John the Baptist by saying, “Wisdom is justified by her

deeds,” (Matt. 11:19, ESV) or, “Wisdom is justified by all her children (Luke 7:35, ESV). Jesus told them to look at the fruit of their work to see if it proved the wisdom of their teaching and ministries.


God is undoubtedly moving around the world in Church-Planting and Disciple-Making Movements. The godly men and women he is using to catalyze these movements rely deeply upon the Word of God to guide their efforts. They live in reliance upon the Spirit to bring in a plentiful harvest. They find it easier to believe in movements of God rather than not as they read the Scripture.

This overview flies over Scripture at 30,000 feet to help us gain a perspective on movements in Scripture. On each CPM principle (e.g. finding God-prepared people or reproducing discipleship) it is possible to look to the text for in-depth exegesis to guide us in that principle.

Are these things not given to us for our encouragement?

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom. 15:3, ESV)

Just as the Old Testament served as an encouragement to the New Testament saints, so may the New Testament serve as an equal encouragement to us. What should you expect God to do in bringing the increase to your faithful service?

Let us all seek to clear our lenses and become like little children again as we look at the Word. 

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Rapid Mobilization

HOW THE WEST WAS WON

BY **STEVE ADDISON,**

AUTHOR OF “MOVEMENTS THAT CHANGE THE WORLD”

“It is hard to imagine any sum of money that would have caused an Anglican Bishop to travel nearly 300,000 miles on horseback as Francis Asbury did, disregarding weather and chronic ill health, “to goad his men and to supervise their work.”

ROGER FINKE & RODNEY STARK

Editor’s Note: In our Sept-Oct 2011 issue of MF we highlighted the power of the Methodist Movement in Britain. That nation was transformed by John Wesley and the Methodists as people became members of mandatory small group “class meetings;” they came to know Christ; learned to read by studying the Scriptures and singing hymns; confessed their sins one to another; became frugal, hard working and sober; and, through obedience to the Word, they became circuit riders and non-professional pastors to spread the gospel even further. They employed many of the characteristics of

the Church-Planting Movement methodology of our day to very remarkable effect. The following story tells of the similar impact the Methodist movement had in the United States as the country moved westward. Like the movement in Britain, the movement in the U.S. also began to decline when “class meetings” were no longer required and the Methodists began to require seminary education instead of allowing pastors to rise up from the class meetings. See the sidebar on the following page for more on this.

When the 26 year-old Methodist pioneer, Francis Asbury, arrived in the American colonies in 1771, he believed he was called to fulfill a great destiny. He was right—although that destiny was far greater than he ever imagined.¹ In 1771 there were only 300 American Methodists, led by four ministers. By the time of Asbury’s death in 1816, Methodism had 2,000 ministers and over 200,000 members in a well-coordinated movement. By 1830 official membership

was almost half a million, and the number of actual attenders was six million. Most of these people had no previous church connection before they became Methodists.²

Asbury, like his mentor John Wesley, modeled the commitment required to achieve such success. Throughout his ministry Asbury delivered more than 16,000 sermons. He traveled nearly 300,000 miles on horseback. He remained unmarried so that he could

devote himself fully to his mission. He was often ill and had no permanent home. He was paid the salary of an ordinary traveling preacher and was still traveling when he died at 70 years of age.

Asbury's leadership and example inspired an army of circuit riders, many of whom followed his example and remained unmarried. There were no formal vows, but in the early days of the movement the majority of the riders lived by the three rules of the monastic orders: poverty, chastity and obedience. Methodism was a kind of Protestant missionary order under one leader, adapted to reaching isolated communities in harsh conditions across an entire nation.³

Jacob Young, a typical circuit rider, was 26 years old in 1802 when he took up the challenge of pioneering a Methodist circuit along the Green River in Kentucky. Young developed his own strategy to evangelize the region. He would travel five miles, find a settlement and look for a family who would let him preach in their log cabin to interested friends and neighbors. Sometimes he found groups already gathered, waiting for a preacher to arrive; in one location he discovered a society run by an illiterate African American slave with impressive preaching and leadership skills. Young established class meetings wherever he went, to be run by local leaders in his absence.

Circuit riders like Jacob Young began with limited formal education, but they followed the example of Wesley and Asbury and used their time on horseback for study. They spoke the simple language of the frontier.

They faced ridicule, and even violence, with courage and endurance. Above all else they sought conversions. Within a year of his call, Young had gathered 301 new

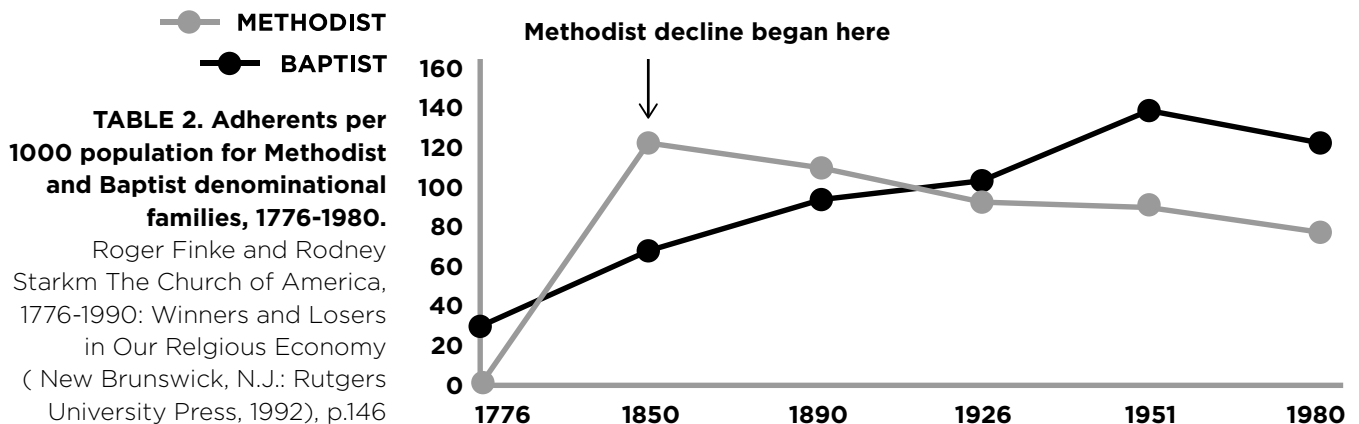
members; for his efforts he received just \$30—a cost of ten cents per new member.⁴

In 1776 only 17 percent of the American population was affiliated with any church. By 1850 that number had doubled to 34 percent. Most of the growth was as a result of the gains by the Methodists and Baptists on the frontier. Francis Asbury could never have reached a nation as vast as the United States, no matter how many miles he rode, no matter how many sermons he preached, without rapidly mobilizing young circuit riders like Jacob Young.

Circuit riders like Jacob Young began with limited formal education, but they followed the example of Wesley and Asbury and used their time on horseback for study.

The Protestant mainline denominations (Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists) failed dismally to keep pace with these Baptist and Methodist upstarts. Having succumbed to a more settled version of the faith and having lost the zeal for evangelism, the message of the mainline denominations became too vague and too accommodating to have an impact.

The clergy of the mainline churches were well educated and refined, drawn from the social elites. At least 95 percent of Congregational, Episcopalian and Presbyterian ministers were college graduates, compared to only ten percent of the Baptists. As a combined group the mainline denominations had trained 6,000 ministers before the first Methodist minister graduated from a seminary.



Why Methodism Ceased to be a Movement

BY FRANK DECKER &
DARRELL WHITEMAN

of The Mission Society

The Wesleyan renewal stimulated the transformation of a generation, and is well known for its balanced emphasis on practical disciple-making coupled with an ardent ministry to those in material need. However, in the latter part of the 19th century two significant decisions were made which caused the emphasis on disciple-making to wane:

1. It was officially decided that membership in a small group (“class meeting”) would no longer be required for church membership. This was

unfortunate because it was in these class meetings that the truly practical encouragement and equipping took place, what Wesley called “watching over one another in love,” enabling transformation in the life of believers in a way that attendance at only the larger Sunday gathering was unable to provide.

2. An emphasis on formal seminary education supplanted the previous grass-roots process by which leadership was largely developed. In early

Methodism one could rise from class membership to the level of an itinerant preacher, but the subsequent emphasis on more formal education fomented a greater professionalization of the clergy.

Many churches today have also adopted these two aspects of ministry to their detriment. According to Mark Nysewander in *No More Spectators*, these two “plate shifts” are what caused Methodism to cease to be a movement over a century ago. Nonetheless, the example of the early Methodists remains as an excellent template for holistic mission today.

Higher education lifted the mainline clergy above the social status of their congregations and turned them into religious professionals. Secularized theological education and social background influenced both the content of their message and how it was delivered.

The clergy preferred to educate their hearers rather than convert them. The clergy’s carefully drafted scholarly sermons did little to stir hearts; they were out of touch with the common people. There also weren’t enough of them; it was not possible to mobilize enough well-educated, well-paid clergy to respond to the challenge of the rapidly expanding frontier. If expansion had been left to the older denominations, American Christianity may have ended up today looking more like the church of Europe—theologically refined, but declining.⁵

As they preached, the power of God was not only spoken about, it was experienced.

So the mainline clergy watched from the safety of the larger towns and cities along the Atlantic seaboard while the Baptists and Methodists moved west. On the frontier it was hard to tell Methodist and Baptist preachers apart. They were ordinary folk with limited education. They spoke the language of the people and preached from the heart about the need for salvation from sin. As they preached, the power of God was not only spoken about, it was experienced. Methodist pioneer Peter Cartwright recalled that, “while I was preaching, the power of God fell on the assembly and there was an awful shaking among the dry bones. Several fell on the floor and cried for mercy.”⁶

The Baptists and the Methodists developed strategies that made it easy for gifted and committed laypeople to take up leadership and go where the people and the opportunities were. Deployment was rapid because very little upfront investment of resources and education was required. Methodist preachers, many of whom were teenagers, were trained on the job as “apprentices” by more experienced workers. They were expected to be continually studying as they traveled. They practiced lifelong learning and graduated the day they died.

The Methodists were centrally governed, whereas the Baptists believed in local autonomy. But in actuality, both movements planted self-governing congregations. The Methodist circuit riders did not have the time to settle down in one place and take control. Their role was to pioneer new works and mobilize local workers to continue the ministry in depth. These self-governing congregations were well suited to rapid multiplication in the frontier culture.

They spoke the language of the people and preached from the heart about the need for salvation from sin.

Methodism gave unprecedented freedom to both women and African Americans to engage in ministry.⁷ Methodist preachers called the converted to join a growing movement and offered them the opportunity to make a significant contribution—as class leaders, lay preachers or even circuit riders. Some women served as preachers, and many more served as class leaders, unofficial counselors to the circuit riders, network builders and financial patrons. Large numbers of African American Methodist preachers emerged following the Revolutionary War. Some were well-known public figures. Harry Hosier, probably born a slave, traveled with Asbury and other Methodist leaders and preached to large crowds, both white and black. Methodists and Baptists, unlike the established churches, preached in a way uneducated slaves could understand and affirmed the place of spiritual experiences and emotion. African American preachers played a significant role in shaping the Methodist movement.

The Baptists and Methodists flourished because they mobilized common people to preach the gospel and plant churches wherever there was a need.

The Baptists and Methodists flourished because they mobilized common people to preach the gospel and plant churches wherever there was a need. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Congregationalists languished

because they were controlled by well-paid clergy who were recruited from the social and financial elite. Early growth was dramatic for the Methodists—from 2.5 percent of the church-going population in 1776 to 34 percent in 1850, with 4,000 itinerant preachers, almost 8,000 local preachers and over one million members.⁸ This made them by far the largest religious body in the nation. There was only one national institution that was more extensive—the U.S. government. This achievement would have been impossible without the mobilization of ordinary people—white and black, young and old, men and women—and the removal of artificial barriers to their engagement in significant leadership such as class leaders, local workers and itinerant preachers. Unfortunately, the Methodist rise was short-lived. Whereas before 1840 the Methodists had virtually no college-educated clergy among their circuit riders and local preachers,⁹ their amateur clergy was gradually replaced by seminary-educated professionals who claimed the authority of the church hierarchy over their congregations.¹⁰ Their relative slump began at the same time; by the end of the 19th century the Baptists had overtaken them in numbers. (MF)

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¹ Origen, "Against Celsus," Ante-Nicene Fathers, accessed March 13, 2009, at <www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anfo4.toc.html>.

² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 3.

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⁹ Ibid., pp. 20, 193.

¹⁰ Stark, *Cities of God*, p. 3. Following Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), pp. 12, 13.

The Evangelical Recession and the Mission Task

BY JEAN JOHNSON

JEAN JOHNSON

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Jean Johnson is the author of *We Are Not The Hero: A Missionary's Guide for Sharing Christ, Not a Culture of Dependency*. Jean served as a missionary with the Assemblies of God in Cambodia for 16 years in the areas of pioneer church planting, on-the-job leadership training, and oral strategies. She is currently a co-director of World Mission Associates and teaches and coaches on church sustainability and multiplication.

I just returned from 14 days of ministry in the United Kingdom—York, Redcliffe College in Gloucester, Coventry, and Oxford—as a speaker, facilitator, and consultant. World Mission Associates teamed up with Jim Harries of Alliance for Vulnerable Mission for this endeavor. Executive leaders of mission organizations and agencies expressed a concern regarding the declining church attendance in the UK and the resulting decrease in giving to global missions. And then, just yesterday, a colleague was telling me about a USA-based mission charity that lost their key funding because their primary donor's business is nearly collapsing. These two realities have made my reading of a book called *The Great Evangelical Recession* by John Dickerson a critical one.

John Dickerson is a successful, award-winning journalist. He writes by allowing research and data to tell the story or bring concerns to light. Presently, Dickerson serves as a pastor and publishes opinion-editorial columns in leading newspapers. Why am I interested in Dickerson's analysis and subsequent concerns of an Evangelical recession and how does it relate to this *Mission Frontiers* column, "Raising Local Resources"?

First, Dickerson reveals that extensive research and ample experts have shown "patterns of fewer new believers, more quitters, decreasing giving, political

infighting, and a growing hostility from the host culture" are shrinking the evangelical church in a significant way.¹ Allow me to use one of Dickerson's many statistics. "Many ministries will see revenue decrease by 50 to 70 percent in the next 10 to 30 years."² We would likely discover similar statistics from the George Barna Research Group. As a Christian living in America, I do not need a lot of statistics to convince me that there is an alarming decline in those who attend church, and thus give to and through the church.

Secondly, Dickerson warns that leaders need to be proactive about the severe shrinkage by reinventing the church presently, rather than become victims of a future collapse. In this vein he shares six factors that he has concluded will crash the church and six preemptive solutions. However, he believes most leaders will ignore the great recession and the call to rethink the church because of fear, busyness, present success in one's own setting, disbelief, or because they are too invested (thus they don't want to see the need to change).

The reason I am bringing Dickerson's well-researched declarations to the *Mission Frontiers* audience is due to the impact an evangelical recession could have on mission fields that are heavily subsidized by churches, agencies, and donors from a few wealthy countries. If Dickerson

warns that leaders of evangelical churches will be eventual victims to the consequences of a recession, should there not also be a warning issued to churches and ministries in nations who depend on donor funding from American Christians that they also may become victims? Furthermore, shouldn't missionaries equally be thinking about reinventing their missionary paradigms now, rather than waiting until they find themselves and the world in crisis? In his book, Dickerson quoted George Friedman:³

*It is simply that the things that appear to be so permanent and dominant at any given moment in history can change with stunning rapidity.*⁴

We live in an age in which a trendy technological device that you bought today could be on its way out tomorrow. In other words, nothing is guaranteed, but we sometimes conduct ourselves as if it is. Presently, donations from wealthy countries are the dominant and seemingly permanent source of financial and material resources for the church in much of the world. Even if Dickerson has miscalculated, I am fairly sure that we should not build the church on a foundation that gives a few donor-countries the illusion that their

ability to fund the church worldwide is permanent and dominant, when it is actually temporary and could change in a moment.

You can imagine what happened to the Cambodian churches, projects, ministries, institutions, leaders, and workers who were dependent on missionaries' monetary resources, when the missionaries were suddenly evacuated due to a violent coup in 1997. The mother birds flew off and left the dependent birds suddenly on their own. The apostle Paul exhorted us to be careful how we build the church and to be cautious of not laying foundations other than Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). What is the gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw of our day? Isaiah and David warn of the inevitable sorrows of relying on horse and chariots, rather than on the Lord (Isaiah 31:1 and Psalm 20:7).

I suggest that missionaries consider the following four proactive strategies to prepare mission fields for sustainability:

- 1) Promote models (disciple-making, compassion, community, church planting, etc.) that are not dependent on lots of money.
- 2) Encourage local giving and mobilization of local resources.

3) Inspire creativity: using what people already have to create what they need.⁵

4) Teach about a disciple's lifestyle, which includes perseverance, sacrifice, community interdependence, and so forth.

I am not trying to be a naysayer or judgmental. But I sense that the missionary community needs to strategize together about how to make our paradigms less about horses and chariots and more about the Lord. Let's keep the conversation going. 

¹ John Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 16.

² Ibid, 168.

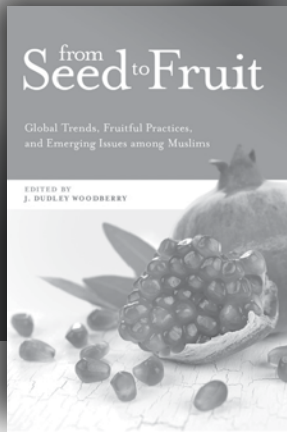
³ George Friedman's book is called *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*.

⁴ John Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 13.

⁵ Margaret Wheatly and Deborah Frieze, *Walk Out Walk On* (San Francisco, CA: Berkana Publication, 2011), 3.



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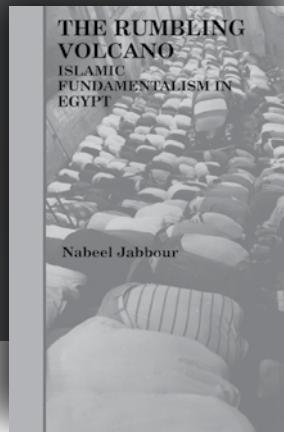
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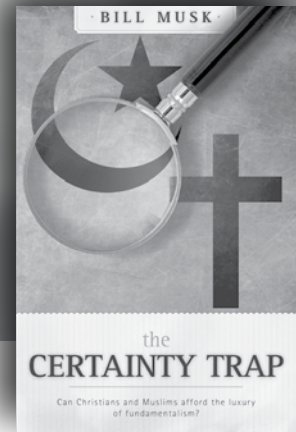


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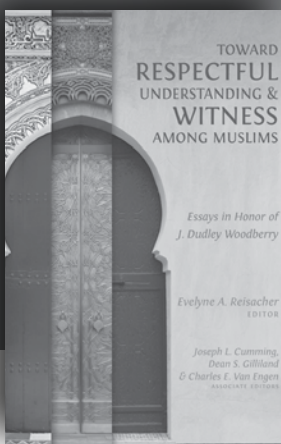
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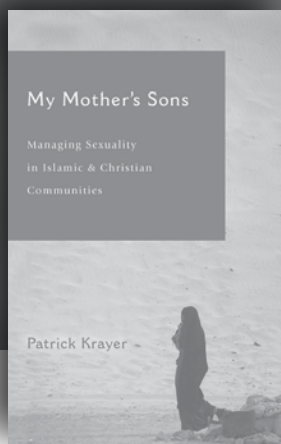
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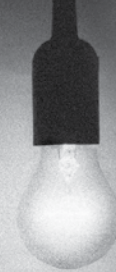
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ISBN 978-0-87808-443-2 Rick Love (Author)
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Hope in the Midst of Despair



by Greg Parsons

Director of Global Connections
Frontier Ventures

When I think about what Jesus commanded us to do, I tend to alternate between hope and despair. Despair is defined as the loss of hope, so these are polar opposites. I never totally lose hope, but neither do I ever think everything is just wonderful.

We must cast all our anxieties on him—whether they are personal or global—because he cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) That verse follows after a word about the elders and is followed by admonitions to be watchful, sober-minded, resisting the evil one who is seeking to destroy us. We know anything that will be done, will be done by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, not by our gifts or human power.

So our despair comes from looking at our own inadequacies, or blaming the inadequacies of the church in its outreach. Both require us to turn away from our human perspective toward God. Only he can overcome our flesh, which we allow to overwhelm us.

I experienced this while in Thailand, India and China this year. Any of us can feel hopeless when we hear about the next ISIS aggression. Exposure to great and growing need for the gospel stretches our views of the reality of the task remaining. We also see signs of great hope. And we usually see things that we don't know how to interpret. We see in

part. We understand only a small portion of what is happening. Ralph Winter used to say that when you are in a cross-cultural situation, where you are out of your own culture and understanding, you are like a dog in a museum. Seeing everything but understanding nothing.

I felt that way many times this year.

After 32 years at this kind of work, I (usually or eventually) remind myself to go back to the Lord and his Word, and throw myself on his mercy and sovereignty. It is his task and power that accomplishes anything and everything for good and for his glory. We press on only because of him and by his power. We only have hope in the midst of a world devoid of hope because of the one thing that can break human despair: the cross.

We can only imagine the crushing experience represented by death on a cross. We feel it every time we read the gospel accounts or see Christ's death depicted in film. Part of what we are feeling is for the disciples, who lost all hope that night. Part of what we feel is that our sin put him on that cross. He took on our sin—meaning he took it off of us completely.

So the despair of that day gives way to the power of the resurrection. Power and hope now dwell in those who know him. And that amazing power enables us to actually do his work and please him—in part, by bringing people into relationship with him.

John Stott, in his book, *The Cross*, said it well:

I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross.... In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?... I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering.

There, and only there, can we rest and have hope. Rest when we desperately need to stop and sit and be still, and rest in the midst of the hard work that is life and ministry in Christ.

As I observed first hand some of the massive spiritual and human need around the world—and also see it in my own nation—I needed to remind myself that it doesn't depend on me. When I think it does, I am overwhelmed. God blesses us and uses us so we can be a blessing through his power, which is at work in and through us. That gives us hope.





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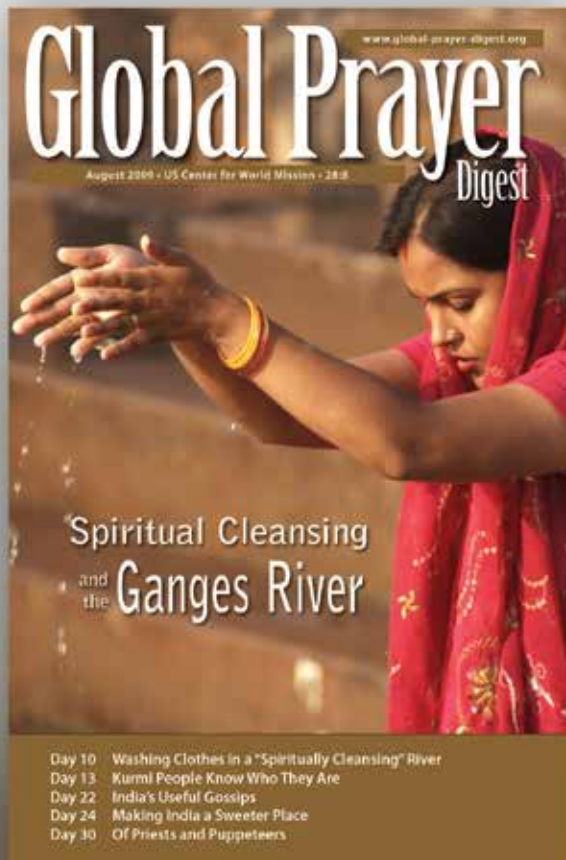
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