

Cascading Gospel: Movements Starting Movements

By **STAN PARKS**

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God is on the move! He is starting Church Planting Movements (CPMs), the only ministry approach in which kingdom growth exceeds population growth, while also transforming societies from within—in holistic and financially sustainable ways. In CPMs, disciples multiply disciples, churches multiply churches, and leaders multiply leaders. We are also learning that *movements multiply movements!* A survey of leaders representing over 1500 CPMs showed that 80–90% of movements have been started by other movements. These movements are cascading from their initial peoples and places into other peoples and places, both near and far. And these movements are our best hope under God to fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime.

Matthew 28:19 records Jesus' command to make disciples of all *ethnē*. And we know from Revelation 7:9 that there will be a vast multitude from every tribe and language and people and *ethnē* worshipping God before God's throne. ALL. EVERY. We don't know when this will happen, but we do know this is God's plan.

I use the Greek word *ethnē* because the common translation "nation" often causes people to think of political nation-states instead of ethno-linguistic nations. But seeing the church established in a political nation is not enough.

I was born in Indonesia, where my parents were missionaries and served during an amazing movement of God in 1966–68, when an estimated two million Javanese Muslims came into the church.¹ Years later, my wife and I were praying about our call to missions. Where did God want us to go? We felt an urging from God to serve those in greatest need of the Gospel.

Due to the millions of Indonesian Christians, I saw no need for pioneer efforts there. Imagine my surprise to realize an estimated 121 million Indonesians were part of 200+ Unreached People Groups (UPGs)! In 1996, Indonesian leaders gathered to consider the Great Commission need within Indonesia. Significant collaborative advances were made in prayer, research and mobilization. Within just five years, the number of Indonesian UPGs being served by Gospel workers grew from only 21 to over 100! Amazing and sacrificial efforts were made in the centuries prior and the years after 1996, but **28 years ago there were 121 million unreached Indonesians and today there are 192.5 million unreached Indonesians.**

In 1996 and afterward, our motivation was right, our desire was great, tremendous prayer and

¹ Willis, Avery T. 1977 *Indonesian Revival: Why Two Million Came to Christ*. Pasadena: William Carey Library Publishing.

mobilization happened, and many people made great sacrifices. But we made a fundamental mistake. We thought sending workers to all these groups would result in reaching them. But the vast majority of us used traditional methods to try to reach groups that had been either resistant or cut off from the Gospel for centuries. We saw some bright spots, but for the most part we failed to make enough impact to offer real hope of reaching these groups.

Around the world, there has been an upsurge in attention to the unreached in the last 30 years. But the results are not better.

- 2.25 billion (28%) of the world's people do not have access to the Gospel.²
- 3.37 billion (42.5%) of the world's people are members of the world's 7,415 Unreached People Groups³.
- Only 18.3% of non-Christians personally know a Christian,⁴ and if current trends continue, that will grow to only 20% by 2050! How can they hear unless someone tells them?

And the problem is more complicated than just these facts.

Problem #1: We need to count up before we can count down.

One danger among some Great Commission thinkers is the desire to count down. We want to determine the number of groups who need to be reached, then mark them off our list—based on certain markers of activities as opposed to outcomes. But our goal is the Gospel for every person and multiplying churches that saturate and transform every community within that people/language/tribe/*ethnē*.

2 www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2022/01/Status-of-Global-Christianity-2022.pdf

3 By Joshua Project's definition of groups where Evangelicals <= 2%; Professing Christians <= 5%

4 www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2022/01/Status-of-Global-Christianity-2022.pdf

We almost certainly have more segments than just 7415 UPGs to reach. Some strategists estimate needing a movement effort for each segment of 100,000 people. One engagement for every segment of 100,000 people among 3.37 billion Unreached People Groups would be a minimum of 33,700 segments. When you add to “peoples” their “places” (such as the 43,000 world's districts), the increase in complexity is daunting. If each district averages three segments, that could be 120,000 places in need of movements.

Answer: Movements are cascading into multiple people and places around them. With the DNA of every disciple being a disciple maker and close cultural affinity to the peoples around them, they are far better suited to reach them.

Problem #2: Some “single” people groups are actually multiple groups (they are waffles, not pancakes).

Jesus did not tell us to disciple a few individuals, but to disciple entire *ethnē*. The Greek word *ethnos* (singular of *ethnē*) is defined as “a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions, nation, people.”⁵ Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 round out the picture of the *ethnē* who will be reached, adding three more descriptive terms: tribes, peoples, and languages—various groups with common identities.

In our urgency to simplify the task, for mobilization and strategy, we have lost some wisdom from the early pioneers of the unreached concept. The Lausanne 1982 people group taskforce stated: for evangelistic purposes it is “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”⁶

5 Danker, Frederick William. 2000 *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, based on Walter Bauer and previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 276.

6 www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unreached-peoples

God our Creator loves variety. So while we can recognize similar principles, each story of a movement starting another movement is unique. Learn from the following examples of God's cascading Gospel, as movements start movements.

Here's one specific example. In the 1990s, a research team led by Marvin Leech discovered that the Jawa (Javanese) people group, which had millions of believers and was counted as one large "reached" people group, was almost certainly at least *eight distinct people groups* by the Lausanne definition. Three of these groups had between 7–10% Evangelical Christians while five of them were less than 1% Christian. Obviously, barriers existed between the 10% Christian Jawa Negarigung and the 0.1% Christian Jawa Pesisir Lor. Counting them as one Jawa people group greatly neglected the five groups who were unreached.

Answer: We have seen movements start in all five of the Jawa UPGs in the last 10 years. They were started by movement catalysts from Indonesian and Javanese backgrounds. Much more effort is needed to reach 100+ million Jawa people, *but* this is a very encouraging start. Also of great importance is that these Jawa movements and other movement practitioners are reaching out and have started multiplying disciples and churches, with movements in 30+ UPGs and some pre-movement fruit in another 40+ UPGs. This same dynamic is happening all over the world! You will read other exciting examples in the rest of this issue.

Problem #3: 2% may be too low.

A history of the term "unreached" shows that prior to 1980, 20% seemed to be the accepted line between reached and unreached. Then in the 1980s, various figures such as 5%, 10%, 20% began to circulate.

In 1995, a committee representing Operation World, Adopt-a-People, IMB, SIL, and AD2000 made a decision to choose "somewhat arbitrary" criteria of less than 2% Evangelical Christian and 5% Professing Christians.⁷

Dave Datema states he was "unable to find any other research or study to back up the choice of 2% Evangelical as a criterion" nor could he find "research to justify" the use of 5%.⁸

Interestingly, Patrick Johnstone writes in 2011 that many sociologists take 20% as the point at which a population segment begins to impact the worldview of the wider society.⁹

In 2011, a study out of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute found that the "tipping point" for the rapid spread of ideas was 10%. "Once that number grows above 10 percent, the idea spreads like flame."¹⁰ Perhaps we should re-open the conversation about percentages and consider the current evidence in making this decision.

Answer: Movements are not just good at starting; they are very strong at sustaining efforts. Some movements are seeing 15, 20, even 30 generations. Once a movement reaches four generations in multiple streams, it is very likely to continue multiplying and effectively reach segments and sub-segments of their people group(s).

Problem #4: Overemphasis on ethno-linguistic groups

I have been an eager proponent of focusing on UPGs. But we have to admit that many of us have focused almost exclusively on ethno-linguistic groups, without significantly noting tribal, language, cultural, kinship and many other groupings.

7 Datema, Dave. 2016 "Defining Unreached: A Short History". *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33:2, 55-60. www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/33_2_PDFs/IJFM_33_2-Datema.pdf.

8 *Ibid.*, 60-61.

9 Johnstone, Patrick. 2011 *The Future of the Global Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International), 224.

10 Xie, J., et. al. 2011 "Minority Rules: Scientists Discover Tipping Point for the Spread of Ideas," news.rpi.edu/luwakkey/2902. Original paper is at: www.cs.rpi.edu/~szymansk/papers/pre.11.pdf.

Consider the reality that people groups are not segregated into one pure homogenous homeland. They are increasingly intermingled with other groups. This is why the 24:14 Coalition has the vision of movements in every unreached people and place.

The starkest example is cities. There are “593 majority non-Christian megacities”.¹¹ Justin Long states that the incredible complexity of the cities “means that including ‘cities’ as segments to be listed, focused on, described, researched, documented, tracked, measured, and strategically engaged is probably just as important as ‘unreached people groups.’”¹²

Answer: Movements are increasingly focused on reaching cities and geographical segments, in addition to ethno-linguistic segments. Several of the articles in this edition offer examples of this.

Problem #5: The failures of the Church¹³

- The Church has roughly 3,000 times the financial resources and 9,000 times the manpower needed to finish the Great Commission.
- Evangelical Christians could provide all the funds needed to plant a church in each of the 7,400 unreached people groups, with only 0.03% of their income.
- Annually, we spend \$52 billion on missions of any kind. Meanwhile \$59 billion is lost to theft by church members.

Answer: God is doing a new thing! These movements are brand-new breakthroughs by God, with 2,000-year-old patterns. The global Church has the opportunity to join this fresh move of God. God is starting streams in the desert, as the most fruitful movements are growing in many of the (formerly) hardest, least reached peoples and places of the world. The rest of this issue shows the main way God seems to be working to reach the unreached.

In the article in this issue: “How Long to Reach the Goal?” Justin Long documents that since 1995,

movements have grown at “an average annual growth rate of 23%, or the number of believers doubling on average every 3.5 years.” That is far different from the 1.18% average growth rate of global Christianity in the last 20 years, or even the 1.8% growth of Evangelical and 1.89% of Pentecostal Christians.

This 23% growth is primarily internal, as the movements reach their own populations. And yet while seeking to reach their own desperately unreached people groups, these movement disciples are frequently compelled by the Spirit to reach beyond their borders to other nearby peoples and places.

We currently know of:

- 1,967 CPMs
- 1600+ pre-movements, with 2nd and 3rd generation fruit
- 2000+ other movement engagements

Notably, 200+ initial CPMs have started approximately 3,300 CPMs and pre-CPMs! We can begin to see how 33,700 or even 120,000 movement engagements could be possible.

God our Creator loves variety. So while we can recognize similar principles, each story of a movement starting another movement is unique. Learn from the following examples of God’s cascading Gospel, as movements start movements.

As you read, ask God how you can be involved. Then read the concluding article, “What Must be Done?” for some specific ideas to spur your thinking. ❏

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¹¹ Long, Justin. 2021 “Urbanization and Measuring the Remaining Task.” *Mission Frontiers*, Sept/Oct, 30-31.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The following statistics are from www.thetravelingteam.org/stats.