

Kingdom Kernels: Momentum for a Movement— Pushing Through Generational Hurdles



BY **STEVE SMITH**

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Momentum is paramount in movements. With the right impetus by human catalysts and the divine empowering of the Holy Spirit, Church-Planting Movements (CPMs) can and should continue in momentum generation after generation as they spread to saturate a people group or area. Many CPMs also cascade into other unreached people groups. CPM practitioners understanding the nature of this momentum is critical if the human catalyst side of the equation is to be effective.

Ninety percent of my efforts in relating to church-planting or disciple-making movements are focused on this issue of momentum—gaining and maintaining momentum in the face of the inevitable hurdles. These hurdles typically come in the first four generations of a budding movement. We label pre-existing missionaries and national Christians as the baseline generation—Gen 0 (zero). Gen 1 consists of new churches formed of new believers, not simply new churches formed of Gen 0 Christians. Gen 2 churches are formed from Gen 1 churches, and again primarily include new believers that have come from Gen 1 efforts. This progression carries on generation after generation. When we can track at least multiple separate relational streams of 4th-plus generation churches (and usually 100 churches or more), a movement has begun.

The moment a new generation starts, the clock starts ticking for them. How many days, weeks or months will it take for that generation to reproduce a new generation? What is the gestation period before they have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren? This gestation period, which we call a generational rate, must be understood and cultivated by CPM catalysts.

In the beginning, the generational rate is not often on their minds. With the euphoria that comes from seeing a Gen 1 church started with new believers, a church planter gives primary attention to their basic discipleship and making sure the new church grows in health, and rightly so. In the excitement and celebration of that season, however, is anyone actually saying, “How long will it take for us to birth our own Gen 2 church?”

A critical precedent is being set from Gen 1 to Gen 2, and from Gen 2 to Gen 3. That precedent is how long it will take for each generation to push through the natural hurdles of birthing a new generation. The precedent is a fight for a healthy generational rate. Without attention, the generational rate can slow down into months or years, and years are too slow for it to become a movement.

Therefore, the majority of my time as a consultant and trainer is to help CPM catalysts from around the world understand how to keep momentum moving forward, especially as they push through the hurdles of each new generation. I have discovered that if a movement can push through the first four major generational hurdles, it will probably push through any other later hurdles resulting in churches that number 13 generations, 18 generations, or even 30+ generations.

However, examining the three foundational areas of movements will often solve the problem by revealing that one of the foundational areas is deficient. In this article, I will unpack how deficiencies in any foundational area can slow down momentum in a movement, while in my subsequent article I will deal with common generation hurdles and their solutions. These three foundational areas are the *most simple way I know to do an overall assessment of a movement*. Master these and you are on the way to diagnosing problems and finding solutions.

Three foundational areas of movements

In the Jan/Feb 2016 edition of *Mission Frontiers* I outlined these three basic areas and refer you there for a fuller explanation. To make things more memorable through alliteration, I’ve changed the name of first area from Spiritual Climate to Spiritual Posture:

1. Spiritual POSTURE
2. Clear, simple PATH
3. Reproducing discipleship PROCESS

No movement can emerge or last very long in a healthy manner without attention to these three areas:

1. **Spiritual POSTURE**—Are the spiritual elements in place that invite God to enter into the ministry? Core elements include 1) vision among the believer to pursue what is on God’s heart not their own vision, 2) deep abiding in Christ, full of His Spirit, 3) fervent prayer and 4) willingness to die (John 12:24) or pay the price to see the vision on God’s heart fulfilled.
2. **Clear, simple PATH** (sometimes called “four fields”)—Once the vision is clear and believers are surrendered in faith, a path is laid out for them to 1) engage people, 2) evangelize the lost, 3) immediately disciple those who believe, and 4) form them into healthy churches. The tools or methods of this path must be simple enough

that new believers from the harvest can implement them in new generations. If so, in the process 5) leaders will emerge as the generations multiply and healthy movements begin.

3. Reproducing discipleship PROCESS (three-thirds process) – It is not enough to put CPM tools or methods in the hands of these new disciples. Each week, they need to gather together in groups that equip and encourage them to obey God’s Word, as well as use the tools they are learning. We most often call these three-thirds groups because they divide their meeting times into three parts:

- a. *Look back*—a time of worship, personal care, encouragement (fresh vision) and accountability to evaluate how effective they were at obeying whatever God told them the prior week
- b. *Look up*—time in the Scripture to hear God speak afresh
- c. *Look ahead*—time to set some goals based on what God is telling them, to practice the tools they will need in the process and to pray for each other as they go out in anticipation

To be a healthy movement, a CPM needs these three areas to remain balanced. Finding what is out of balance often solves the generational hurdles.

1. Spiritual Posture Deficiencies

A few years ago, I began to spot a common problem in CPM ministry attempts. CPM practitioners were becoming excited to implement CPM principles in areas two and three above. In the area of a **2) clear, simple path**, they were finding very reproducible methods to enable better evangelism—evangelism that could be implemented by new disciples arising from the harvest. Discipleship tools that were worldview appropriate were enabling these new disciples to start down the path of short-term discipleship, and many of them could do the same with family and friends they led to faith. Perhaps most exciting were some revolutionary new tools based on Acts 2 and other passages for helping small groups truly cross the line into being healthy churches in both identity and function. One missionary told me that when he came to his region thirty years earlier, the average time to form a church was 22 years. He was ecstatic to find a way to form healthy churches within weeks and months.

Because the methods were reproducible, a lot of church planting ministries were finally bearing second and perhaps third generation churches.

Second, as many CPM practitioners began to equip believers with these methods using a **3) reproducing discipleship process** (three-thirds meetings), the implementation rate by new disciples was increasing. With such an environment of better, culturally appropriate biblical tools and a context in which believers could be lovingly equipped with freedom to fail, but always encouraged to keep trying, some multiplication was inevitable—but not for the long term.

A problem was developing to such an extent that it prompted me to emphasize foundational area one (spiritual posture) almost out of proportion to the other two areas. For example, with five hundred missionaries I oversaw in Southeast Asia, a few ministries were achieving Gen 2 and Gen 3 churches, but stopping there. The problem was not in the methods, but in the spiritual posture of the ministry. It was all too easy to rely upon these newly discovered methods and processes and ignore the leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

This prompted me to begin teaching more on the spiritual posture of a movement, how to seek the vision on God’s heart, how to pray fervently for that vision and a willingness to pay the price to see the gospel go to the hardest places. But even more than these was helping our missionaries and their national believers learn to truly abide in Christ. They needed to learn how to be full of the Spirit daily and follow His leading.

Without this vital ingredient, we were ignoring Jesus’ command to wait until power came from on high before going out to do the work (e.g. Lk. 24:49). By and large, we had thousands of believers doing the work without fully understanding how to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This prompted me to finally write my latest book *Spirit Walk* to help CPM practitioners and believers in general take the fear out of the Spirit and learn what it is to truly live in relationship with Him daily.

Recently, a dear brother (who I consider one of the most faithful CPM practitioners and who is bearing fruit) finished reading *Spirit Walk*. He said, “Steve, this was the missing ingredient for me.” When we read the book of Acts, we are impressed at how the disciples, and especially Paul’s team, followed the guidance of the Spirit. A deficiency in

this area keeps us from bearing fruit for the long term. This is because we have the tools and a discipleship process, but only the Spirit can tell us where and with whom. He guides us to the people God has prepared.

2. Clear, Simple Path and 3. Reproducing Discipleship Process Deficiencies

My next article will detail numerous challenges practitioners face when they encounter generational hurdles from Gen 0 to Gen 4. The vast majority of these fall within these latter two foundational areas. *Assuming that spiritual posture is in place*, then solving these other issues can propel a movement through the most common hurdles.

Finding answers in these two areas is critical. We must avoid the attitude of a missionary who told me 20 years ago, “I don’t do any planning or use any methods; I just follow the leading of the Spirit.” Perhaps that works for a few highly gifted individuals, but Jesus clearly gave His disciples methods to use in outreach and the evangelists in Acts used these same methods. A very fruitful friend of mine has said, “I find it a lot easier to follow the leading of the Spirit when I have lots of tools in my toolbelt.”

We *all* need the methods and tools that come from a clear path that moves us through entry, evangelism, discipleship, church formation and leadership development. And more importantly, disciples from the harvest need these tools. They need to know how to share the gospel. They need to know how to pray. They need to know how to be church.

But simply putting tools in their hands is not enough. I remember teaching my sons to use a power saw. There was no way I was going to put that saw in their hands without modeling how to do it and then a lot of assisting and watching until they got it right *safely*. The reproducing discipleship process helps new disciples pick up each tool they need, see it modeled, personally practice it and then confidently implement it in the world outside of their small group or church as they are led by the Spirit.

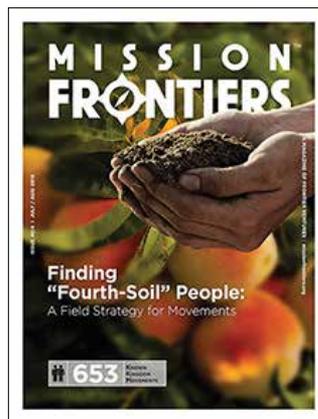
As you look at your work or the work of others, I encourage you to ask questions such as these:

1. Are the basic spiritual elements in place for believers to rely upon God to achieve what is on His heart? Are they postured in an attitude of surrender and fullness of the Spirit?

2. Do these surrendered disciples have methods that are simple enough that each generation can use? Do they naturally connect in one path from 1) entry (who to talk to and how to start) to 2) evangelism to 3) discipleship to 4) church formation to 5) leadership development?
3. Are these methods being implemented in a healthy discipleship process where 1) they can look back and evaluate in a safe, loving environment, 2) they can look up to receive instructions from God’s Word and 3) they can take the time to practice a method or tool and make plans to obey what God said? Is this three-thirds process helping them effectively implement the methods of the simple path above at each new generation?

When these three areas are in balance, you will find that most of the issues you need to overcome to press through generational hurdles will be solved. Each generation will then find the God-prepared people who will bear fruit 30, 60 and 100x. I call these individuals by several interchangeable names: Person of Peace, Fourth Soil Person, Worthy Person (Matt. 10:11) or simply God-prepared person as a summary. Two editions ago, my friend Kevin Greeson drew a distinction between these. After considering it, he is posting this update to that edition.

Statement from Kevin Greeson on Persons of Peace



In my article in Mission Frontiers (July-August 2018, Finding “Fourth-Soil” People: Fourth-Soil Person or Person of Peace), I offered similarities and distinctions between the Fourth-soil Person and a Person of Peace. The possibility of them being one and the same exists. Regardless, both are found through sowing of the Word of God and seeing who responds. Aiming for one or the other falls within Jesus’ field modus operandi. A CPM practitioner stands on solid ground when sowing with the intent of finding Persons of Peace and Fourth-Soil individuals. MF