

The Story of Movements and the Spread of the Gospel

BY **STEVE ADDISON**

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Luke begins the book of Acts by telling us that what Jesus began to do and teach, he now continues to do through his disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Luke's story of the early church is the story of the dynamic Word of the gospel that grows, spreads, and multiplies resulting in new disciples and new churches. We get to the end of Acts and yet the story doesn't end. Paul is under house arrest awaiting trial; meanwhile the unstoppable Word continues to spread throughout the world. Luke's meaning is clear: the story continues through his readers who have the Word, the Spirit and the mandate to make disciples and plant churches.

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Throughout church history we see this pattern continue: the Word going out through ordinary people, disciples and churches multiplying. While the Roman Empire was collapsing, God was calling a young man named Patrick. He lived in Roman Britain but was kidnapped and sold into slavery by Irish raiders. Alone and desperate he cried out to God who rescued him. He went on to form the Celtic missionary movement that was responsible for evangelizing and planting approximately 700 churches throughout Ireland first and then much of Europe over the next several centuries.

Two hundred years after the Reformation, Protestants still had no plan or strategy to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. That was until God used a young Austrian nobleman to transform a bickering band of religious refugees. In 1722 Count Nikolaus Zinzendorf opened his estate to persecuted religious dissenters. Through his Christ-like leadership and the power of the Holy Spirit, they were transformed into the first Protestant missionary movement, known as the Moravians.



When Asbury died in 1816 there were 200,000 Methodists. By 1850 there were one million Methodists led by 4,000 itinerants and 8,000 local preachers. The only organization more extensive was the U.S. government.

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Eventually Methodism lost its passion and settled down to enjoy its achievements. In the process it gave birth to the Holiness movement. William Seymour was a holiness preacher with a desperate desire to know the power of God. He was the son of former slaves, a janitor and blind in one eye. God chose this unlikely man to spark a movement that began in 1906 in a disused Methodist building on Azusa Street.

The emotionally charged meetings ran all day and into the night. The meetings had no central coordination, and Seymour rarely preached. He taught the people to cry out to God for sanctification, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and divine healing.

Immediately, missionaries fanned out from Azusa Street to the world. Within two years they had brought Pentecostalism to parts of Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa. They were poor, untrained, and unprepared. Many died on the field. Their sacrifices were rewarded; the Pentecostal/charismatic and related movements became the fastest growing and most globally diverse expression of worldwide Christianity.

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Jesus founded a missionary movement with a mandate to take the gospel and multiply disciples and churches everywhere. History is replete with examples of movements just like in the book of Acts; I have named only a few. Three essential elements are necessary for Jesus movements: His dynamic Word, the power of the Holy Spirit and disciples who obey what Jesus has commanded. 

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