

Innovation Grounded in the Spirituality of Frontier Mission

BY PAUL DZUBINSKI
& STEVEN SPICER

Paul Dzubinski is the Innovation Catalyst of Frontier Ventures and the Director of the Winter Launch Lab, the innovation lab of Frontier Ventures. He is on the Vision 5:9 European Region Core Team and served many years as a church-planter in Spain and Austria. He currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife.

Steven Spicer is the Innovation Lead in Frontier Ventures' Winter Launch Lab, where he works to integrate innovation and spiritual discernment in mission. His orientation towards group discernment was shaped by four years in a prayer ministry focused on encouraging intercession and member care for emerging movements in the Middle East and Central Asia.

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From big business to the laboratory to tech companies, everyone is talking about innovation and how to make the next incredible new thing. And we think about the amazing innovators of the past like Madam Curie (who discovered radioactivity and won Nobel Peace prizes in two fields), Thomas Edison and his light bulb, the Wright Brothers (who gave us flight), and Dr. Shirley Jackson (who completed research that led to solar cells, fiber optic cables, portable fax machines, touch-tone telephones and caller ID.) These are amazing people and quite honestly, we are grateful to God for the innovations that they discovered, but we are not talking about that kind of thing in this edition of *Mission Frontiers*.

We are talking about innovation that brings about the breakthrough of Jesus' kingdom. You will see articles that discuss innovation in multi-cultural settings, innovation related to alongsiders and how

Jesus-centered innovation can bring change to ministries and even social contexts. This is part of kingdom transformation.

At Frontier Ventures we define innovation for integral mission as the creation of sustainable new solutions to the problems faced in discerning, proclaiming and living out God's good news for individual persons, societies and creation. We approach this with tools and practices of design thinking and systems thinking, but we insist on adding to them group thinking, spiritual discernment, theological grounding, and a missiological focus.

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Group Spiritual Discernment

We believe that significant innovation in missions requires a group of believers to be on a journey of discernment together. Insights and innovative ways forward emerge from communities of prayer.

They surface over time through a group's experience of transformation together that leads to new ways of seeing, listening, and being. While innovation practices provide helpful ways of thinking, asking questions, and reframing challenges, prayerful group discernment is about creating space to abide in Jesus, allowing the Spirit to inspire fresh imagination in us as we follow the Father's wisdom and direction.

Theological Grounding

The articles in this edition of *Mission Frontiers* address things like ministry models, contextualization and social transformation. But all of them have a theological grounding in a holistic understanding of the gospel of Jesus. As Colossians 1:14-20 shows us, it is the saving message of the cross, but because that work was so powerful in its impact on humanity, it also unites all peoples into the family of God, produces an ethical transformation in all of us, exposes evil before God's judgment and is the power of God at work in history and in creation (*The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World* condensed, 2010).

Missiological Focus

The focus of *Mission Frontiers* is the frontiers of mission. That is also where we want to see innovation happen. We agree with the definition of frontier missiology that is used at Frontier Ventures. It is the attempt to understand and encourage the initial incarnation of the gospel into relational networks of people, and the growth of the initial disciples within such initial efforts into biblical, indigenous, holistic and sustainable movements of Jesus followers.

Not all of the articles in this edition of *Mission Frontiers* fit squarely into this definition. However, they all express an innovation in missions that either can be or is already at the frontiers of mission.

Inside This Edition

With that in mind let us look at the edition of *Mission Frontiers* that we have at hand. The nine articles that make up this edition can be divided into three categories of innovation in mission. Each expresses a different focus: alongsiding innovation toward localized gospel expressions, societal transformation and ministry design. Let's look at each of them.

Alongsiding Innovation toward Localized Expressions

Grab a cup of coffee or tea and dive into the lead article. It is here that we, Steven Spicer and Paul Dzubinski, describe how discerning innovative ways forward in frontier missions requires personal and community transformation. A group that is open to being led by God into new and life-giving ways of being in Jesus outside of our cultural models and worldviews can help forge new paths forward at

the frontiers of mission. Those paths might look and sound quite different all while following the same Jesus who shepherds us.

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Some of the most difficult barriers to the gospel require new localized expressions of following Jesus. This often involves walking alongside others from a particular context as they discern faithful ways of expressing the Good News. This type of innovation in a multi-cultural setting is addressed by Kevin Higgins in his regular article entitled "Toward the Edges." He shows us what innovating at the edges of mission can be like when insiders begin to explore ways for least-reached peoples to experience new life in Jesus. Innovation practices yield unexpected results. And while that can be true, Claire TC Chong's article about contextualization in Cambodia shows how Cambodian leaders come alongside their culture to find nuanced insights toward new localized expressions of faith for the sake of the gospel.

Societal Transformation and Innovation

Innovation aimed at societal transformation is often called social innovation. It is about the creation of new value and good for the community by aligning people, relationships and resources in new ways. In mission this is expressed with a focus on kingdom

transformation and expressing God's blessing. A wonderful example of this is the work of Wordly Collective, which has built a collaborative ecosystem to help minority language communities flourish. Steven interviewed Pastor Melvyn Mak to hear more about Wordly's fascinating work. Another example is the work of Ed and Joan McManness with a community of students from around the world. Their work integrates care for people, community, creation and God's spiritual directives.

Ministry Design and Innovation

The last four articles show innovative approaches and practices for ministry design. They focus on ways in mission for creating sustainable new opportunities, services, and impact in people's lives. Here, Victor Tukura beautifully shows us how Africans mobilize the church for global missions. Brent McHugh challenges us to adopt design thinking in order to reach the 7,000+ unreached peoples. Ryan Crozier describes an approach to support and walk alongside the underdogs who have a calling to bring change through all sectors of society. Finally, Derek Seipp gives us a disciplined approach to planning ministry differently.

All of these nine articles will give you a wonderful taste of innovation in missions both internationally and domestically.

May God bless you as you read. 

INNOVATION



IN MISSIONS

