

# Fruit-Based Ministry, in the King's Joy

BY TREVOR LARSEN

**Trevor Larsen** is a seminary teacher and a “come-alongside coach” who is convinced of God’s desire for all peoples. He and his wife live alongside 16 Asian movement catalysts in a “fruitful Band of Brothers.” Trevor’s goal is to help these brothers maximize their fruit as multiplying movements, and through them help other movement catalysts. He tells stories of these movement catalysts and offers biblical materials that support movements in 3 digital books completed so far at [www.FocusOnFruit.org](http://www.FocusOnFruit.org). Trevor started the first team in 1998, which birthed the first believer group in a UPG in 2000. Together they have been learning “fruitful practices” through field experimentation and biblical reflection. They combine community development, inner healing, and multiplication of believer groups while empowering leaders’ groups. Their fruit has multiplied into a family of linked movements in UPGs. They continue to be surprised by God’s grace.

What are some of the challenges and obstacles you’ve experienced? How do you remove the obstacles?

Challenges must be considered in relation to fruit. Christ intended that we bear much fruit, “*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit*” (John 15:8). Much fruit comes with challenges, for He prunes us to prepare us for more fruitfulness. “*Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit*” (John 15:2). Challenges and obstacles are part of God’s pathway to more fruit. But there is much joy on this pathway, for we share His joy. “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full*” (John 15:11). We must see God behind the challenges and His desire that we bear much fruit.

Considering a different paradigm requires courage, but we may need a new paradigm when we face challenges. Most of us simply follow the paradigm or model of whatever Christian organization we’re in. One significant feature I find in many ministry paradigms is *activities-based*



*management.* Activities-based management asks, “How many people did you teach? How many people did you evangelize? How many articles did you write?” Leadership communications and reporting reinforce this *activities-based management* style. As long as we’re doing the right activities, we obtain honor in our system and we’re honored by others in our system. But it lacks evaluation on whether or not those activities are the best activities to get to fruit.

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In our current ministry we, by contrast, recommend a *fruit-based management* paradigm. Fruit-based management encourages us to identify obstacles, think about alternate approaches, flexibly modify our activities when we face challenges and explore different ways around the problem. All this evaluation and modification of activities is driven by focusing first on the fruit God wants, and on the outcomes targeted. Then we work backwards to look at the possible ways to get to that fruit.

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Setting our minds on what God honors helps us more flexibly adjust to challenges, in relation to the fruit God desires. We read in the book of Acts and the gospels that God's people faced many obstacles. So, we ask, "What gospel advances or outcomes were recorded as honorable, as making God happy and God's people happy? What kind of fruit did the early believers rejoice in?" The early church reported the number of people saved; they reported numbers of cities where new churches were established. They recorded stories of people who were healed and people from whom demons were expelled. They recorded the choosing of teams of elders. They rejoiced in cities newly reached. Starting with this partial list, we ask, "Did God put the spotlight on people's *habitual activities*? Or did the biblical authors spotlight the joy that came from the *fruit of their activities*?"

I found that when I moved the dialogue from *activities* ("What have we been doing?") to *fruit* ("What are the next *outcomes* or *fruit* we want to see?"), this shift in our attention encouraged innovation and increased resilience to challenges. Field workers became more willing to modify the *activities they had been doing*, and consider,

"Are there other ways to *reach our desired outcomes more effectively*?"

This shift from an activities-focus to a fruit-focus gives people more freedom, especially catalytic people, who can be very creative. Doing what has not been done traditionally requires taking a risk and demands courage, because you don't know if the means you chose will result in fruit. And people with new ideas get criticized. But because you want to focus on getting to fruit, you use that lens to evaluate what you are doing. Then after a period of time (every three months in our model), you can look back and see your progress. If you wanted to get to 10, of some kind of fruit, but you only got three, you ask yourself, "Is my identity tied up in this? Is evaluating my progress toward fruit a process God wants me to take?" To do this we must firm up our identity in Christ, reflecting on our riches in Christ, aside from what we do. We don't have to *do* things to firm up our identity. Because we are already rich in Christ, we do things because we want more fruit for the King. Think of the parable of the minas in Luke 19: "*What did you do with your one mina? What did you do with your five minas? What did you do with your 10 minas?*" This appears to ask about the doing, but the focus is actually on the outcomes gained for the King through what they did.

When we are secure in Christ, problems become just part of the context God allows in our lives. They don't threaten our security and they don't prevent us from doing what God wants us to do.

Don't look over your shoulder at someone else, to find out how much fruit that person got for the King with their minas. Just hear Christ asking, "What did you do with *your* mina? What is the best use you could put *your* resources to, to get the best kingdom return on investment for the King?" As He gives you minas, He leaves room for you to make decisions; He doesn't legislate how you should invest. This parable encourages us to think about the kingdom return on investment because the King wants certain outcomes. It's not tied to our identity. We assess what we've been given and work through all the possible ways we could utilize those things for the King's return. Then we pursue the best kingdom return on investment we can get, with all of who

we are: our opportunities, our relationships, our gifts and our training. This includes periodically re-evaluating, “Could I do this in a somewhat different way, in hopes it will bear more fruit the next time?”

Many of Jesus’ parables have this perspective, “How will you evaluate?” Not from a place of insecurity about who we are in Christ. We know who Christ has made us. We’re on solid ground. We know it’s all about what Christ has done in our lives to change us, to make us holy, to move us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Christ makes all the other “who I am in Christ” statements true in our lives. The Bible contains many of these, and they remain secure. Out of that place of security in Christ, “How can we best participate in the joy of the Master, through the investment of our lives?”

Each of the 16 movement leaders I mentor says the same thing when I ask, “Did you ever expect to get to this much fruit?”



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They say, “No, I had no idea! This has been a shock to me!” They have a lot of joy. Not that it all works out easily. Leading movements involves a lot of hard parts. But God gives us only one life. If we choose one path, we’re not choosing another path. If, as we’re going down the path we chose, we sense we’re hand-in-hand with the Lord and we’re enjoying Him and what He is doing, we have no reason to think about what might have been down some other path. That’s not our story. *This* is our story: “Who should we invest in as part of our story today, in a way that gets to fruit?”

During COVID with its constraints and opportunities, we have asked, “What can we do for the kingdom and how can we participate in His joy?” You are facing many challenges, but God shows himself in the midst of challenges.

It reminds me of the way a lemon tree bears fruit. When I was young, I worked for a lemon farmer. One day he asked me to take a hatchet and scar the bark on the trunk of all the lemon trees. I protested, “I don’t want to ruin your lemon trees!” He told me that the scarred tree thinks it’s dying and so sends out blossoms; this in turn creates more fruit. If you’re in a time of trial, you can think of it this way: the Master Gardener is working to bring you to a point of greater fruitfulness. 🌱

