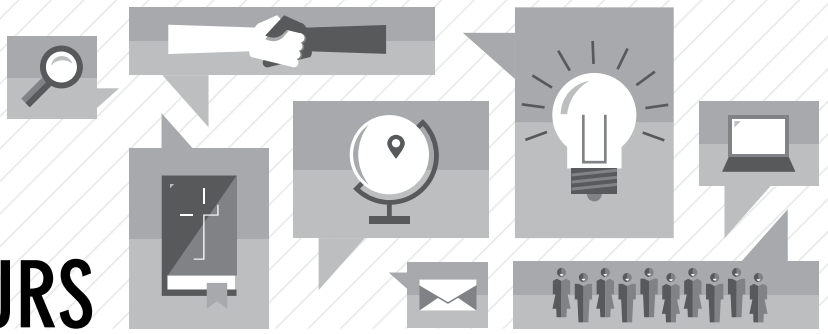


A regular column featuring lessons from Church-Planting Movements around the world



MINUTES AND HOURS

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In the previous issue, I discussed the concept of finding God-prepared people. Because they are so out of the norm from what we normally encounter, I sometimes call them abnormal people: they are prepared by God to respond abnormally quickly and fervently as well as to have abnormal impact in their communities. Much of Church-Planting Movement (CPM) focused ministry is spent in bearing witness to many people in order to find these force-multipliers. They might be one out of ten or one out of a hundred in your culture. Because their responses are so out of the norm from the majority of our witnessing encounters, we often miss them. The differences I see in ministries that experience multiplication often and those that do not is how the evangelist disciples the abnormal person in the first few minutes or hours. Those that adapt their follow-up discipleship to expect abnormal results in the first few hours rather than waiting days or weeks often experience kernels of kingdom explosion.

- The person of peace wins a whole family or web of relationships to Christ within hours or days.
- These disciples repent of sinful

lifestyles, often with miraculous deliverance from strongholds.

- They walk through the waters of baptism with radical abandonment to Jesus.
- They bear witness to their community, stand firm under trial and become a beautiful example of an Acts 2-like church – all within days and weeks.

THE FIRST FEW MINUTES AND HOURS DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCE.

This process is not without backward steps and failures. The enemy is at work to quench the flame of the Spirit unleashed in them. Some of these new disciples fall back into old patterns before emerging into long-term victory. Some fall away completely. Uncomfortable situations co-exist for a while (e.g. the man and woman that live together come to faith and begin planning their Christian wedding). Yet with all the warts, this norm-defying group of people in love with Jesus and each other, through zealous obedience to the Word, grow by leaps and bounds, transforming their community. Their faith reminds us of our first love.

My colleague, Jeff Sundell, calls the initial group of people who come to

faith a “house of peace” much like the New Testament calls the abnormal person a “person of peace” (Luke 10:6). This is a community of people peaceful toward the kingdom who respond in abnormal ways. How does a whole group of people come to faith together so radically?

HOUSES OF PEACE

When Jesus sent out the Twelve on their first mission (Matthew 10, Luke 9) and sent out the Seventy on their mission (Luke 10), what did he expect them to find—an individual alone or a community that would respond to the kingdom of God?

Whatever house [or household] you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son [man] of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. (Luke 10:5-7 ESV)

Understanding the person of peace concept is a critical first step in following the leading of the Spirit to enter new communities for the kingdom. They are the pathways the Spirit has set up for the kingdom to flow through. However, the person of peace (abnormal person) is just the gateway into a web of relationships. It is easy to miss the web of relationships out of sheer excitement of seeing the initial person respond.

In the passage above Jesus made it clear that the goal was to escort a whole household (not just one

person) into the kingdom of God. In the gospels and Acts, numerous examples emerge of whole networks of relationships coming to faith. Often our value of individualism blinds us to this kingdom potential. We fail to move from discipling an individual to winning and discipling a group. For kingdom movements, we must re-introduce biblical patterns into the first few minutes and hours after the salvation of a person of peace.

How did Jesus and the early disciples transition the kingdom from a person of peace to a house of peace? Read these examples and ponder how the whole group came to faith:

1. Levi and his friends: Luke 5:27-32, Mark 2:14-17
2. The Samaritan woman and the town of Sychar: John 4:7-42
3. Zaccheus and his friends: Luke 19:1-10
4. The Gadarene (Gerasene) demoniac and the Ten Cities (Decapolis): Mark 5:1-20; 7:31; (Matt. 15:29-31 explains what happened when Jesus returned to the Decapolis in Mark 7:31)
5. Lazarus, his household and community: John 11:1-46, 12:9-11
6. Cornelius and his household: Acts 10:1-11:18
7. Lydia and her household: Acts 16:14-15, 40
8. The Philippian jailer and his household: Acts 16:23-34
9. The first believers and leaders in Corinth: Acts 18:4-11; 1 Cor. 1:14-17, 16:15-18

Who initiated the salvation of the household, town or group of friends?

- At times the evangelist witnessed to the whole group at once (rather than one individual) and led them to faith (e.g. Cornelius).

- At times the evangelist trained the newly-saved person of peace to go home to win his household to faith (e.g. the Gadarene demoniac).
- Sometimes the evangelist accompanied the person of peace to win the household together (e.g. the Philippian jailer).

Consistent in the thoughts of the evangelist was the winning of a whole network of family and friends through

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the initial responder. The salvation of this group of people occurred concurrently with or within minutes, hours or days of the salvation of the person of peace.

WHEN WERE THEY BAPTIZED?

Remarkably quickly, often together! The evangelists sought to secure their initial devotion and commitment to Christ with immediate baptism (e.g. Peter commanding Cornelius' group to be baptized immediately – Acts 10:47-48). In the case of the Philippian jailer and his family, this appears to have been in the wee

hours of the morning (Acts 16:33 “at once”), so urgent was this step. In fact, other than Saul of Tarsus fasting and waiting three days after his conversion for his baptism (Acts 9:9ff), we are hard-pressed to find any examples in Acts where new converts were not baptized the day of their salvation. That was because baptism was a sign that these disciples were sure, not that they were mature in following the King.

So effective were these patterns set that these houses of peace often became the leaders of the churches and ministries established through them (e.g. Stephanas' household 1 Cor. 16:15).

COACHING ABNORMAL PEOPLE TOWARD A MOVEMENT

Within minutes or hours, when critical patterns and expectations are set, the evangelists began to set the DNA for a movement. In various ways they accepted, encouraged or coached the person of peace to reach his web of relationships.

Beyond encouraging their firm commitment to Christ, what were the frequent elements of this coaching?

- Help them look outward and be responsible for their household: In many of the examples, the evangelist implicitly or explicitly encouraged the abnormal person to gain a vision for reaching his family, friends and community. Rather than the evangelist taking responsibility for their salvation, he put the onus on the new disciple to be the fisher of men. Even the angel who came to Cornelius prior to his salvation gave him a vision to gather his whole household for the message they would receive (Acts 11:14).
- Coach them on what to do: The evangelists did not assume the

new believer would know how to bear witness but rather coached them on what to do and say. Sometimes they accompanied the new believer and shared the gospel themselves. Sometimes they sent the new believer back to bear witness. Sometimes both. A clear example is the account of the Gadarene demoniac:

“And [Jesus]...said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.” (Mark 5:19-20)

Jesus gave him a clear target and a clear way to begin to bear witness – one that was simple enough for this hours-old disciple.

LESSONS OF MINUTES AND HOURS: FOLLOW AND FISH

If we will emulate the expectations of the New Testament movements, we must look at our watches rather than our calendars when a person shows interest in the gospel or gives his life to Christ. Within minutes or hours, we should disciple in the twin expectations that Jesus gave his first disciples – follow and fish (Mark 1:17). CPMs around the world are injecting this discipleship DNA in various ways but follow a similar pattern:

- **FOLLOW:** Baptize and prepare them for persecution (counting the cost). Like the evangelists above, we must begin with encouraging their white-hot devotion to Christ. This comes through helping them count the cost rather than avoiding the hard discussions. New disciples of Jesus can grasp the persecution that may come but

out of love for him will joyfully accept it. We must help them see that the King is worth it. The New Testament avenue of helping them become a fervent follower is to do this through immediate baptism. How long do new believers in your context wait before they can demonstrate this sign that they are sure about following Jesus?

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- **FISH:** Encourage the new believer to bear witness or the interested person to gather his family and friends to hear the gospel. Coaching to witness should incorporate three simple elements:

WHY - Give them vision to look outward (“you and household”)

WHOM – Help them identify family and friends who need to hear this message.

HOW – Give them a simple way to start in the first few minutes – their story of what God just did for them (testimony). Like the Gadarene demoniac, encourage them just to tell the story and as the days go by you can help them develop a more comprehensive gospel presentation.

Below is a case study in which the missionary has implemented these principles with explosive results.

“G” PEOPLE CASE STUDY

/NATHAN SHANK

For the last twelve years, my growing team and I have been targeting the 25 to 30 million “G” people groups who are spread out across 2000 kilometers. In my family, I am a first generation Christian. Though I work cross-culturally, I am fluent in the trade language of the people groups. I’ve worked hard to research the local culture and religions and have led out in contextualization, but with much criticism for my approaches. This won’t stop me because I long for the Lord’s return and want to equip every new believer to join us as ministers of reconciliation.

Our multi-cultural polytheistic people groups have never heard of Jesus and our team is the first to engage most of these fields. A strong economy has led to broad trade, exposure to various philosophies and secular motives in densely-populated urban areas. Financial incentives mean that religious traditions are fiercely guarded.

Persecution has followed kingdom breakthroughs as new disciples abandon temples. We’ve also been persecuted by members of our home religious culture as we have departed from Christian traditions we deemed unbiblical.

Most of our ministry partners have been new believers inside the culture who have become fruitful laborers. Other than a few core teammates, we have not spent time mobilizing outside resources. Explosive sustained growth has come through on-the-job training for new local leaders raised up from the harvest.

Strategy

We've employed a very simple strategy based on Jesus' instructions:

1. Find and win believers through Holy Spirit direction.
2. Disciple converts to immediately reach their family and friends.
3. Immediately baptize them as a foundation of obedience.
4. Gather churches in homes.
5. Instruct and hold leaders accountable before persecution forces us to move on.
6. Entrust the believers to the Holy Spirit and the Word. Return when possible, correspond often, and watch for obedience.

Amazingly, miracles are frequent. Encounters with pagan deities have led to breakthroughs in which several religious and political leaders have come to Christ. Normally households are our target. This aids church formation as families believe and are baptized. New leaders often emerge naturally within family structures. Because persecution limits how long we can stay in one locale, we have developed a common discipleship pattern implemented in all churches. This has streamlined reproduction by new believers who can pass on this discipleship anywhere.

Results

Six provincial movements of reproducing churches have resulted in a broad evangelization of local populations. Personal ministry responsibility among the thousands of new believers and our refusal to hold authority over churches has been a key for rapid maturity. The strong leadership base of trainers in each region means that engagement in these fields is sustainable.

Difficulties

1. False teaching has infiltrated some networks of churches. We have chosen to confront these traditions directly with truth from Scripture, often expelling false teachers.
2. Frankly some churches have major problems. False gospels, unscriptural eschatology and abuse of spiritual gifts have affected multiple churches. We've also discovered legalism, abuse

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of the Lord's Supper, immorality and factions among leadership.

3. The New Testament is not yet available resulting in dependence on oral methods for teaching about Christ. Literacy is estimated below 25%.
4. Long-term discipleship by our team is difficult due to distances. Though we revisit some churches, most of the second and third generation churches do not fit into our calendar. Therefore we write churches frequently

on various topics: our basic discipleship package, God's power, biblical theology, holy lifestyle and love for God's word. We also instruct believers concerning non-negotiables: salvation by faith, deity of Jesus, etc.

Conclusion

Despite these shortcomings, the six kingdom movements move forward in an exponential manner. Everything needed for sustained growth and health is present. After twelve years of service in these fields I feel the Lord saying there is no room left for my pioneering work and that it is time for me to move on.

YOUR FIRST MINUTES AND HOURS

As you read this case study, what were your initial responses both positive and negative? Did the missionary seem reckless or on the right path? Could this missionary have been Paul the Apostle working among the "G"entile people groups? Read it again.

A fresh read of New Testament patterns may shake us into a new awareness of kingdom ways.

If the lifestyle of new believers were set on course by the DNA you help them establish in the first few minutes or hours, what would their lives look like? Could a movement result? In your initial discipleship, is a new believer empowered to act in minutes and hours or encouraged to wait weeks, months or years to follow radically and gather his community to do the same? Are you willing to take the risk, along with its messiness, of unleashing the Spirit of God in the life of this abnormally-prepared person and community? 