

Dr. Steve Smith's Extraordinary Vision and Legacy

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Early in the first decade of this century, the Holy Spirit guided and empowered Steve Smith in launching a Church Planting Movement among a minority people group in East Asia.

Steve then teamed up with Ying Kai to write *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution: The Story Behind the World's Fastest Growing Church Planting Movement and How it Can Happen in Your Community!* Steve went on to supervise and coach many others in starting similar movements.

Through these experiences Steve came to a deep conviction that with a return to biblical ministry methods and reliance on the Holy Spirit, our generation could play a key role in fulfilling the human side of Jesus' promise in Matthew 24:14.

In November 2015, Steve released the first book in his *No Place Left* saga, a story he had written 20 years earlier as a young pastor—urging an all-out effort, with urgency, to fulfill the Great Commission by 2025.

Supported by a global prayer network, extraordinary trust relationships and collaborative learning, in its first two years the 24:14 Coalition has found that God's Spirit has been moving well beyond what Steve envisioned. Over the

past 25 years, nearly 1% of the world's population have become disciples within rapidly multiplying movements of churches, mostly among unreached people groups.

Through the tireless efforts of Steve and others, the 24:14 Coalition is now well-established, and maturing rapidly into what may become the most fruitful network in history. Before God called him home, Steve fueled more fruitful reliance on the Holy Spirit through his final book, *Spirit Walk: The Extraordinary Power of Acts for Ordinary People*.

An anonymous poem in tribute to Steve's impact is posted at NPL2025.org/tribute, along with a complimentary copy of *Hastening*, links to many of Steve's *Mission Frontiers* articles, and a one-minute video clip of Steve calling for a sense of urgency in running the final lap of history.

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The following adaptation from Steve's book *Hastening*, Book One of the *No Place Left* saga reveals much of the perspective driving Steve's passion.

Christopher and Chara sat on the ancient sofa, knees and shoulders touching. It was dark outside, but a pair of lamps cast a warm glow across the room. They were grateful to be home with their closest friends—John and Renee on the well-worn love seat, and Nic and Stacy on the two folding chairs.

On the table in front of the sofa lay the precious photocopy of the Livermore dissertation that Christopher and Chara had gone to England to track down.

After a relaxed time of praising God, listening for His voice and asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance, Renee leaned forward and read aloud: "The Collapse of the Military Metaphor in the Mission of the Early Church, and the Resulting Stalemate in the Advance of the Gospel.' A dissertation by M. J. Livermore. 1898. Sounds interesting. Have you read it yet?"

"Yes!" Christopher said, "and it was very convicting! Let me start tonight's discussion, by summarizing it for you."

"The early Church advanced rapidly—supernaturally fast—through most of the first century. At that rate, the known world would have been evangelized within just a few centuries!"

"But then a major shift occurred," Chara added. "And world evangelization slowed to a crawl. Even though the pace picked up in the 1800s, Livermore showed it still lagged far behind that first century. It had become a mission by the few rather than a mission by the whole Church."

"Exactly," John said. "The early Church had no Bible or buildings, yet it grew like wildfire. I have studied several efforts to explain the difference, but all seem to be lacking something. What does Livermore say?"

"Her analysis is brilliant," Christopher said. "Her Salvation Army upbringing helped her see the wartime mindset of the New Testament Church, in which everyone lived as a spiritual soldier seeking to advance God's kingdom."

Chris paused to sip his coffee.

"This is crazy!" Nic said. "I've been reading ahead for our Perspectives class, and Dr. Winter has an article on this same theme. Hold on..."

Nic leafed through his book. "Yeah, here it is. 'Reconsecration to a Wartime, Not a Peacetime, Lifestyle.' Winter says here that, when outfitted for war, the Queen Mary housed fifteen thousand soldiers, even though it only had room for three thousand passengers as a peacetime luxury liner. Winter's point is that we believers are living with a peacetime mindset today."

"Exactly," Christopher said. "The Allies won World War II only through the same kind of all-out investment and focus that characterized the first-century believers in advancing God's kingdom. Both the Allies and those early believers understood they weren't just pursuing a task at their leisure, but fighting to win very real wars."



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"My grandmother used to tell us about the war. Everyone did something, and everything was rationed. Every able-bodied man joined the fight, and those who didn't felt ashamed. Women worked in the factories because the men were all at war. School kids saved their money to buy war bonds. Nothing was wasted. Everything was recycled. And everyone was mobilized. This is the kind of 'all in' mindset the early Church also had for their spiritual war."

Setting down his mug, Christopher stood and began pacing. "The early believers set their hearts on heaven. They didn't worry about having the latest comforts or electronic gadgets."

"They deliberately simplified their lives so they could focus on the spiritual battle," Nic said.

Chara's face lit up. "And they weren't just conscious of the spiritual conflict; they knew they were going to win the war, and that their beloved Commander in Chief could show up any day. That's what fueled their sense of urgency."

A frown creased Renee's brow as she sipped her coffee. "Things are so different now. When's the last time I thought about Jesus' return?"

"Exactly," Stacy added. "I'm distracted by so many things!"



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"We have lost sight of the war, and reduced the Great Commission into a task to be completed at our leisure," John said. "'What's the rush?' we think. 'Why sacrifice everything for God's kingdom when it could be another two thousand years before He returns?'"

"Right," Nic said. "We don't feel any urgency, and it's been that way for a long time. We have settled into a peacetime mentality."

Christopher continued pacing. "Livermore said that by the time Christianity became the state religion of Rome, the Church had become more focused on arguing theology than on

obeying Jesus' command to disciple all nations. The central mission of the Church had been reduced from the rallying battle cry to just another activity."

"Precisely!" Stacy cried. "Jesus' central command has been marginalized!"

"Just imagine," John added, "if Jesus' commission were posted at the top of our church's website, bulletin board and weekly program. What if it were foremost in our minds as we plan our Men's Breakfasts, Grief Groups, Moms for Moms, potlucks, and even car wash fundraisers."

"Livermore's dissertation," Christopher continued, "contained several more really thought-provoking ideas. She said Revelation was given to John—the last surviving apostle—to remind the Church God had not forgotten the mission, and neither should they. Revelation is God's reminder to each generation that He's still in control, and His promise that His Kingdom will prevail. It holds Christ's marching orders for His body—to inspire His Church to ever-greater exploits. Unfortunately, most believers either ignore Revelation or miss this central point while trying to interpret the symbolism to predict future events.

"Livermore asserted that the only way to complete our God-given commission is full-scale mobilization of the global Church for spiritual battle, fueled by expectant faith in the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Christopher sat back down next to Chara, clasped her hand and resumed sipping his coffee.

The room fell silent. Renee closed her eyes. Nic stared into his empty mug. Stacy shifted uncomfortably on her chair.

With a big sigh, John finally gave voice to what they were all thinking. "You're right,

Christopher. This is convicting! So, ... what do we do with this understanding?"

Christopher and Chara grinned at each other. "As Chara and I see it," he said, "we are the first generation in history to have a real shot at completing our assignment. I've read that non-Christians outnumbered those first century believers 360 to one. Today there are only about seven non-Christians for every Christian. In Romans 15:23, Paul said there was 'no place left' for him to work in Asia. There was still more to do of course, but his disciples could finish what he had started. If the Church would begin equipping our members to multiply disciples, the kind of pioneering work Paul did could be completed worldwide in our generation, and there would be 'no place left' without multiplying disciples."

Christopher stood again. "We have to inspire and guide our generation to live with a wartime mentality, in anticipation of Christ's return. By His strength it is so doable!

"We must pray for and equip laborers like those Marines we met on the flight to London. May God help us raise up a generation of spiritual commandos; missionary shock troops preparing for Jesus' return by establishing vibrant, multiplying movements in every remaining unreached people group and place."

"Our first step," Christopher said, looking each of his friends in the eye, "is for the six of us—and then all of Church in the City—to seriously grapple with the fact that Jesus really could return at any time!" Christopher sat again and waited.

"Right," John nodded. "Knowing Jesus could come tomorrow really does change my perspective! Do you think ..."

"And we have to impart this urgency to others!" Christopher jumped up and started pacing again. "The disciples we make, at home

and among unreached people groups, must carry this same expectancy that Jesus could return any moment. And we must demonstrate this in our ministry. Like the Apostle Paul, we can't settle into babysitting believers, but we must equip every new believer to multiply, and entrust them to the Holy Spirit with the same responsibility for expanding the Kingdom among their own people and beyond, even taking some of them with us as we press on to other unreached people groups!"

Chara smiled up at Christopher. "Would you believe he's drinking decaf?"

Everyone chuckled.

"Wait a second!" Stacy protested. "From what I've heard and read in our Perspectives class, unreached people groups are unreached because of language and cultural barriers, and it takes a long-term intentional effort to translate the Bible and start churches among them. If starting churches among UPGs were simple it would have been done long ago."

"Listen, Stacy," Chara said. "Christopher's not suggesting we don't also need long-term missionaries. Just the opposite. The kind of spiritual shock troops we are proposing go in the power of God's Spirit to do what Paul did—establish the first contagious communities of believing households in a new unreached people group. But Paul also left others to build up what he had started. Just as in military operations, others are needed to come alongside to serve and assist the resulting movements—including Bible translation where that is necessary."

Christopher once again took his seat. John rose and approached the makeshift whiteboard that had become a regular feature in these huddles. Christopher winked at Chara. John was in, and he was about to do what he did best.

"History tells us there's another reason the

world may need something fresh like we are discussing. All types of movements tend to calcify over time." On the white board, John drew a blue line rising and then plateauing.

"For instance, our established organizations began as missions-sending *movements*. But over time, every movement develops institutionalism. This adds long-term stability while restricting innovation and risk-taking."

Nic leaned forward and pointed at the whiteboard. "They resist risk-taking because too much is at stake. Happens in business all the time."

"But it takes a long time for things to calcify, doesn't it?" Stacy said. "And besides, don't we need stability?"

"Calcification can take a few years or a few decades," John said, "but eventually what started as a movement stalls out, and new initiatives are needed to continue forward progress."

John added a green line above the blue one. "Stability is good, but not at the expense of progress. If we are going to reach the remaining unreached people groups, we need a fresh initiative."

Christopher looked warmly at his normally skeptical friend. "Yes! To complement what is already going on, we need thousands of new laborers seeking the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering, and willing to take risks. These believers would act as spiritual commandos, called and equipped for pioneering ventures and ready to sacrifice all for the King's war effort. They'll inspire others to pursue similar initiatives. And we must also challenge those who are not called to the front lines to live just as sacrificially, so that resources are freed up for the task.



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"Our rallying cry must be Jesus' own words in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel be proclaimed in all the world—as a testimony to every remaining people group—before His return. We cannot cause Christ's return, but we can fulfill this condition!"

Christopher stood and joined John at the whiteboard. John nodded, handed him the marker, and gave him a quick wink. Above the lines on the board, Christopher wrote a big green *2025—No Place Left*.

"By 'No Place Left,' I mean no place or people group where the gospel has yet to be preached. And to escape peacetime complacency we must embrace a target date by which we aim to finish this quest—no matter what it costs us. Our mission objective must be nothing less than *no place left!*"

The two men returned to their seats, and the room fell silent.

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"I don't imagine the evil one will take this final pursuit of God's Kingdom lying down," Chara said. "He'll throw everything he's got at us. And we'll need thousands of people to go—young, old, and everything in between. We *must* call people to this, but let's not forget," she looked at the group intently, "many of us will suffer persecution—and some of us may die."

Christopher nodded solemnly. "Let's remember the generation in Revelation 12:11: 'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.'" He looked again at his dear brothers and sisters. "Are we willing to pay the price?"

Everyone nodded soberly.

The six joined hands and prayed for strength to match their resolve. Christopher's heart swelled with the joy of unity with his close friends in a quest of utmost importance for his King.

Before heading to bed, Christopher tweeted:

#NoPlaceLeft2025 is impossible without a wartime mindset. Will you mobilize with us for the final effort? A Kingdom Preparation Force!

