

# “Insider” Movements: The Role of Being an Alongsider

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The movements we refer to as IMs required new vocabulary, and the nature of the movements under discussion led to the use of the word “insider.” Along the way, the question began to emerge as to how to refer to those “outsiders” who served in the early pioneering and ongoing growth of such movements.

A term that seems to be gaining traction is “alongsider.” In fact, Frontier Ventures is beginning to weave this term into much of what we do, how we talk and who we seek to be.

But what does it mean, or what do we mean by it?

I begin with the premise that what we are is more fundamentally important than what we do. This is true of leaders, of the mission movement, and it is actually deeply connected to our missiology.

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First, of course, are Jesus’ own statements about this, for example in John 14 through 17. “I in you, and you in me, and we in them, and them in us” might serve as a summary.

Turning to Paul, let me use just one statement, his opening in Colossians 1:2, in which he writes to “the in-Christ-holy-and-faithful-brothers/sisters-in-Colossae.” The hyphens are my attempt to capture the sense of the united nature of the double identity: in Christ, and in Colossae.

Paul is context specific, yes, but also spiritually grounded. There is no way to be in Christ other than in a context, and no way to live authentically in a context other than in Christ.

In this paper, I will look at a few scenes from “the field” to try to describe personal experiences of “being” and trying

to “be” alongside in several contexts, then address the implications of this for what I call missional leadership, rooted in “being,” and helpfully described as leading “alongside.”

## “Being, Alongside”

### *Scene 1*

My wife and I had arrived in Rwanda earlier in the day to take part with our organization’s African leadership team in a series of meetings, planning for the future of the sending bases there and spending time in Scripture and prayer. The center where we planned to gather was a bit more than 200 kilometers from the airport by vehicle.

After some rest, we and the team piled into a van and began the journey. The van was slow. Very slow. I consoled myself thinking that our driver was being careful in the city. We would pick up speed once we got out to the highway.

But we got slower. And slower. I am not sure, but we may have been passed by a bicycle. Or two.

Evening descended. The sun disappeared. The moon arose. And we crawled on.

Sometime after one in the morning we stopped near a very small town. We were still not quite half-way. I was grateful for the stop, for several reasons involving physical comfort that I will not expound upon. However, it gradually became clear that there were other reasons for the stop. The condition of the vehicle was being debated.

My very practical mind set to work. “I have some cash. We can rent another vehicle. We could get everyone there sooner. We need to be rested for the days ahead.”

I wanted to say those words to our Africa Director, but waited as he was speaking to our Rwanda Coordinator. My internal struggle was almost tangible.

I had cultivated a motto within our leadership, “when I am in Africa I am under the leadership of that Director, and we in turn are under the leadership of whichever country coordinator we happen to be visiting.”

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My Africa Director approached me. I was hopeful he was going to ask for my opinion, but kept myself quiet. I listened, but I admit that I also waited for a chance to offer my solution. He seemed reluctant to really talk about the situation in other than vague terms. I decided on an indirect approach, mentioning that if someone suggested the idea of a different vehicle, but if there was worry about the cost, that I could help, but also reassured him I trusted his decision.

There was a reluctant pause. “Yes, thank you, but let’s see how our brother (the country coordinator) thinks to handle the matter.”

I did have a faint realization that he was following my motto, and wondered if I liked it so much in reality!

Over the next hour it became clear that the plan was going to be to pile back in the same vehicle and start crawling again. The Africa Director sat next to me and leaned over to explain.

“This driver is married to a relative of our coordinator. This is his vehicle. He feels very embarrassed already and if we arranged something else, he would lose face completely within his own family, and our coordinator might also. I think also, we should not leave the driver here alone, it is a strange place. We are all in this together.”

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### Scene 2

A friend in South Asia, who had been raised all his life in the religion of his people and had for a time been involved with a militant expression of that religion, once asked me, “Do you want to know what caused me to come to faith?” Of course, I was eager to know which of the wise and powerful insights I had shared with him had led him to faith. I paid attention.

“I saw people like you and a few others and I watched how you were as married people and as parents, and I thought, ‘We need this in my people.’”

While I was disappointed that it was not my profound wisdom, I suppose I will always be grateful this brother saw good things in us. And what he saw had to do with our “being”—not our doing.

### Scene 3

We have developed a ministry in one religious context who attend shrines in one particular country. This involves visits to the shrines ourselves, lots of prayer, praying for people and also interceding at these places.

On one visit a dear brother, who had been in the Lord for some years, went with us and almost immediately upon entering the shrine was clearly taken under the power of a very strong spiritual evil. We prayed, we took him outside and prayed more. He was completely oblivious to us and continued to pound his head against the floor and ground. It appeared our prayers and commands for the evil one to leave were of no avail.

Eventually he calmed down but it was clear our work was not done. We drove him home and over the six or seven hour journey I was seeking the Lord for how to handle this.

We arrived home and several of us gathered around him for more prayer, in the middle of which I sensed God’s whisper, “He needs to confess.”

I had no problem suggesting this but I was aware enough of the cultural dynamics to know how difficult this would be. “Lord, how do we do this?” I asked.

I can’t say exactly how I knew but I just knew that the best thing to do would be for all of us to confess, starting with me. I opened to the fruits of the Spirit and the deeds of the flesh in Galatians and one by one through both lists I confessed whatever I could see in my own life. One by one we went around the circle, with the last one to confess being the brother we were praying for.

He joined us, confessed to whatever came to him, and almost immediately he was free (and has remained so).

The point of this is not the deliverance, as wonderful as that was. The point is that “being,” “being with,” “being together” and “being alongside” *in confession* was crucial to this brother receiving God’s work in his life.

Each of the scenes is tied to deep challenges in self-awareness, spiritual dependence, hearing and discerning God’s voice and “being with” or alongside others. This is all crucial to cross-cultural contexts of course, but equally so in our leadership, whether of teams or organizations.

As leaders, we need to be cultivating the same GPS systems in our own lives and leadership that we hope our various organizations and those we lead are producing and encouraging within those we send and within those who are disciplined.

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## Becoming Those Who Can Be Alongside

Near the beginning of this essay I referred to Paul’s opening in Colossians 1:2, in which he writes to “the in-Christ-holy-and-faithful-brothers/sisters-in-Colossae.” This is the united nature of our double identity: in Christ, and in Context. And so I have two convictions:

Conviction 1: we have a tremendous opportunity to plumb the **missiological** depths of life in Christ.

Conviction 2: we have a tremendous opportunity to plumb the **spiritual** depths of life in Christ.

I suppose a third conviction might be that the two convictions I just cited are not really two, but deeply linked, one and the same. Regardless, plumbing these depths will position us aright no matter what we may encounter in our voyage forward.