

# Effective Strategies for Reaching Frontier Peoples

By **KEVIN HIGGINS**

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In this edition of *Mission Frontiers*, as the title suggests, you will be able to consider the perspectives of several authors who are wrestling with and exploring the theme of strategies and roles.

My column will focus on strategy, and as I do, I want to briefly explore how we see these key terms: Frontier Peoples, Reaching, and Effective Strategies. I will also take the chance to offer a brief glimpse into what FV's approach to all this is.

## Frontier Peoples

I can't think of a better definition than what is offered on the website of FV's own Joshua Project:

*A Frontier People Group (FPG) is an Unreached People Group (UPG) with virtually no followers of Jesus and no known movements to Jesus, still needing pioneer cross-cultural workers. Joshua Project approximates FPGs as 0.1% or fewer Christian Adherents and no confirmed, sustained movements. In FPGs, pioneer workers are generally limited to starting with non-believers. In other UPGs it is often possible to partner with same-culture believers. (<https://joshuaproject.net/frontier>)*

This MF edition is about whole populations of human beings with no connection, no human point of connection, with all of whom Jesus is and all of what Jesus means for us. One of the purposes of FV since our beginnings has been to learn to *see*, to see people, to see peoples, to see the human world in all the variety that God has created and FV endeavors *to see the peoples of the world in the way God sees them: as God's beloved, upon all of whom God purposes to pour all the fullness of the blessing of God.*

## Reaching

For many Christians, this can refer to a wide range of ideas, from “making contact” to “sharing the Gospel”. But as most of our readers will be aware, it is used in a more specific way in our context—not just a message or contact, but actually movements to Jesus that are thriving and vital, in which families experience increasing fullness of life in Jesus in all its varied dimensions.

Another way to frame those four elements could be to say that fullness of life in Jesus will bear fruit in how we think, and who we are, what we do and the outflow of all that into the people and communities and world around us.

In FV we talk about movements growing in 4 H's: head and heart and hands and holistic transformation.

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## Effective Strategies

As you read through the articles in this edition of MF I trust you will see the breadth of how different authors are approaching this question. The words *effective* and *strategy* can conjure images of rolled up sleeves, project management, goal setting (and achieving) and can leave one with the impression

that if we just do things smarter and with maybe a little harder effort, we can “get this done.”

But that is not how I see it, nor how FV sees it, nor our authors would see it.

In some ways we can trace the history of the frontier movement in three big phases. I have not tested this out except in very informal ways, so I reserve the right to change my mind or refine my thinking! But here is what I see as three phases, with three different approaches to strategy:

**1. Get more people to go to the unreached (mobilization):**

The initial insights 40 years ago focused on a significant barrier leading to the reality of unreached peoples: the gap between the assigning of mission personnel to reached peoples versus unreached. So, the strategy? Adjust the ratios and get more personnel to the least reached than we currently have. Then, the next phase...

**2. Get more people doing the right things with the unreached (contextualization):**

I put it crassly, but this is the phase we might call contextualization. In this phase, the barrier is not just about whether or not they are doing things in such a way as to promote the overcoming of barriers of understanding and acceptance. Forms of church, communication issues, and much else came to the fore. But all of that still begs a question, which is becoming a major focus in the third phase:

**3. Become the right kind of people serving among the unreached (formation):**

Here the barriers are as much internal, inside of us, as they are external or practical (how many of us are there and what are we doing).

I am not suggesting these three phases are somehow so separate from each other that they did not and do not co-exist! I am not, for example, suggesting that no one thought about formation 40 years ago, or mobilization today.

But as necessary emphases in the mission movement, these three phases seem to suggest shifts in what was seen and promoted as “effective strategy”.

And I do see a very necessary component of any such strategy to be our own formation: we as transformed people. Indeed, I don’t see it as a component, but as the soil from which any other effective strategy must draw sustenance and nourishment (including mobilization and contextualization, as well as many other examples).

In FV we seek to carry a fresh sense of our own need for formation, self-awareness, humility and for cultivating our hearts as learners and as beloveds, as we seek to live in such a way that reflects the good news of Jesus with grace and courage.

## And Frontier Ventures?

My definitions of the key words in this edition’s theme title suggest three focal points of effective strategy: seeing humanity as God sees (and so seeing the least reached, and frontier peoples); holistic, fullness of life in Jesus (reaching); and becoming people who will not be barriers ourselves (the core of effective strategy).

Partly as a response to these sorts of insights, in FV we have reorganized ourselves around four major “catalytic functions”, which one may argue are our way of describing the major elements of effective strategy:

### Formation

There are subtle ways in how we do things in the mission world continues to raise unnecessary barriers. This includes our own previous approach to barriers as technical challenges to overcome with the application of better methods of doing essentially what we already knew to do.

In FV we seek to carry a fresh sense of our own need for formation, self-awareness, humility and for cultivating our hearts as learners and as beloveds, as we seek to live in such a way that reflects the good news of Jesus with grace and courage. *For this, we are continually exploring new ways of formation, of living more fully into union*

*with God in Christ, and as we do, offering what we are learning to others.*

### Innovation

In FV we see that innovation is also about who we are becoming in Jesus. There are some subtle ways in which how we do things in the mission world continues to raise unnecessary barriers, including our own previous ways of innovation in which we tended to approach barriers as technical challenges to overcome with the application of better methods of doing essentially what we already “knew” to do. Complex challenges require a different approach. We need to blend spiritual discernment, alternate ways of thinking and seeing and addressing barriers that are “upstream” from the barriers we see—the barriers that might cause the barriers.” *For this, our approach to innovation is shaped by prayer and listening, including listening to more people, people who are closer to where the barriers are being discovered.*

### Missiology

FV has always been a band of thinkers and learners. Our history speaks to the ways we have always explored the multiple disciplines that combine to form what is called missiology: Bible, theology, culture, language, religion, science, communication, etc. But more and more, and in part because of the fruit of the last decades, we are able today to learn from “the edges;” to learn from men

and women globally who are seeing fresh things in the Scriptures and their contexts, and things that can shape our own missiology.

*For this our missiology will be more and more the fruit of multiple voices—multiple sources of insight—globally from the movements to Jesus emerging among the unreached.*

### Publishing

I use the word here in its simple functional sense: making things known (though we do publish in other senses of the term; after all, you are reading MF, a publication!) There remains a vital need for the publishing of tested insights, and insights still being tested, as these help to encourage and inspire others. For this, *our work of publishing will continue to maximize our current publications and will also discover and develop new channels and outlets and publications.*

### Conclusion

Effective Strategies will mean a lot of things to a lot of people, and in this edition we are helping you access a sampling of that.

Our hope is that these pages will spark new insights, questions and encouragement, and result in more of us and more of you, our readers, pressing more fully and deeply into the heart of Jesus. May that be the very center and soul of the effects God desires to work in and through us. ❏



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