

24:14 Goal



Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (38 months)

Learning from Paul about the Mindsets of Movement Catalysts

By **STAN PARKS**

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Who could have imagined the current growth of Church Planting Movements around the world: encompassing hundreds of unreached people groups and millions of believers? God has certainly done immeasurably more than we could have asked or imagined, according to His power at work within His body.

Whether you call them Church Planting Movements or Disciple Making Movements or Kingdom Movements or Gospel Movements, these “Book of Acts”- type movements have occurred throughout church history. From Acts 19 to Patrick and the Irish, to Boniface in Europe, to the Moravians, to Methodism, to the Nagas—similar movements have continued throughout church history. However, the world has never seen a global spread of movements like we are seeing now.

Only God can start a movement, but He has chosen to work through His body, the Church. Throughout the history of Kingdom Movements, we have seen a key role played by movement catalysts and catalyst teams.

Just as in history, we currently see movement catalysts from many different cultures and nations. As we have seen these movements proliferate, we often see movement catalytic teams made up of cultural outsiders partnering with cultural insiders (either from the focus culture or a near neighbor). Examples would include Americans partnering with Indians, Rwandans partnering with Sudanese, and Brazilians partnering with Arabs.

Since God is using movement catalysts in amazing ways, how can we learn from what He is doing? Can we glean some principles, as we pray and work to equip more movement catalysts? How can we raise up the next generation of movement catalysts? What important truths are needed for becoming a movement catalyst?

Since the Apostle Paul is the most famous missionary catalyst, learning from his mindset is obviously important. In looking at Paul’s life and ministry, we can see certain patterns that can help us in identifying and equipping catalysts. Since exact parallels are impossible, we are looking for clues and nuances. As I compare Paul’s life and work with modern-day Gospel catalysts, I base these personal observations on friendship and co-laboring with many CPM catalysts all over the world during the last 30 years. I don’t present this as a comprehensive list, but I see many helpful parallels.

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I will not describe commonalities these catalysts have with many, many people in these movements

and throughout the global church—such as reliance on Scripture, guidance by the Spirit, and seeking to bring glory to God. Many people throughout the world are passionate about knowing Jesus and making Him known. They echo Paul when he says, *But whatever was gain to me I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and be found in Him...*¹ In movements, and throughout the global church—many know that loving Jesus is foundational before any service we do for Him.

A major commonality seems to be that they have all been passionate and very effective leaders in their “former lives.”

My goal is to describe dynamics unique to movement catalysts. They don’t have an exclusive claim on these characteristics, but we do see an unusual level of these attributes in the lives of movement catalysts. In describing these catalysts and comparing them to Paul, I have no desire to glorify the person instead of glorifying God. We are all sinners saved by grace; there is nothing good in them except Christ living in them—this alone is the hope of glory.

Strong Backgrounds. We all know Paul was a virulent persecutor of the church and a leader of Jewish opposition to the Gospel. Modern-day movement catalysts come from both strong Christian backgrounds and strong anti-Christian backgrounds. Some of the most effective catalysts are modern day Sauls—former persecutors of the church from radical Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Atheist backgrounds—including those serving as priests, militia leaders, terrorists, or religious scholars. I have heard several say, “We were willing to kill for our false beliefs, but now we are willing to die for Jesus.” Others were effective leaders in the Christian world: pastors, professors, business

people and professional leaders who were very influential in their spheres but realized a change was necessary, and often stepped down from very successful ministries. A major commonality seems to be that they have all been passionate and very effective leaders in their “former lives.”

Wholehearted. These movement catalysts do not just turn away from their former religion or their former positions—they do so with a wholeheartedness that echoes the cry of John Knox: “Give me Scotland or I die.”

I was talking to one leader of a CPM that has seen millions of people baptized. When someone praised him for the fruit this movement had seen, he said, “I don’t think about the millions that have been saved. I think about the millions that we have failed to reach, and I think about what we could have done differently. I think about our mistakes that have kept us from being more effective and reaching more people.”

Driven. An axiom of being wholehearted is often being driven. These men and women are driven by the lostness they see around them and are driven to pray and work as hard as they can. Sometimes people talk about not being extreme in ministry. But I do not think anyone would accuse Paul of being “moderate.” He wrote, *But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out His special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by His grace.*² Just as Paul persevered despite beatings, stonings, prison and all types of suffering, we see these catalysts persevere, no matter the circumstances, as many of them overcome similar difficulties. Interestingly, when we have asked non-movement leaders to describe the major barriers to starting movements, they usually focus on external barriers such as persecution, government barriers, and lack of resources. When we ask movement leaders, they almost always describe internal barriers: a lack of sacrifice, a need for more prayer, and other ways that we could better serve God’s mission.

God-sized Vision. In a meeting of 38 CPM catalysts in 2010, we asked: “What are the key contributions of outside catalysts?” The top answer that emerged

¹ Philippians 3:7-9a. All Scriptures from NLT unless otherwise noted.

² 1 Corinthians 15:10

was “vision”: These outside catalysts bring a God-sized vision and find inside catalysts who either have this vision or catch it.

Of course, Paul literally had a vision of Jesus that revolutionized his life. He relates that Jesus said to him, *Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me.*³ Later he describes the scope of his work: *For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, by the power of miraculous signs and wonders, and by the power of God’s Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the good news about the Messiah from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.*⁴

No missionary task, whether small or big can be done by ourselves because Jesus tells us *apart from me you can do nothing*. But sometimes when faced with a more “typical” task, such as starting one church, we can mistakenly rely too much on our own wisdom and experience. One of the main reasons so many CPMs seem to have started in modern times is that people accepted a God-sized vision of focusing on reaching entire people groups. When faced with the task of reaching an unreached group consisting of millions of people, it becomes obvious that one worker cannot accomplish anything on their own. We are driven to a total dependence on God and an urgent need to involve many others in the body of Christ.

In the Great Commission, Jesus tells His disciples to “make disciples of *panta ta ethnē*” (all people groups). The question becomes: “How do you disciple an entire *ethnos*?” This God-sized question forces catalysts to embrace a God-sized vision and a God-driven approach. The only way to see entire people groups reached is through *multiplication*: of disciples who make disciples, leaders who develop leaders, and churches that multiply churches. The only way for multiplication to happen is to avoid human traditions and paradigms, and return to a 2,000-year-old strategy in which every believer is a priest and ambassador for God.

³ Acts 26:17b-18

⁴ Romans 15:18-19 HCSB

Focus on the Unreached. In the already-cited passage of Romans 15, Paul goes on to say: *My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘Those who have never been told about Him will see, and those who have never heard of Him will understand.’*⁵

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Modern-day movement catalysts also focus on reaching those who have never heard. Approximately 90% of CPMs are occurring in unreached areas of the world, among those without previous access to the Gospel.

Just as Paul kept moving to new places, these movement catalysts have a burning desire to see the Gospel proclaimed among new peoples and places. Recently, one movement catalyst stepped down from his leadership of an indigenous mission agency he had founded in order to give more attention to the unengaged UPGs of his region. His broader partnership network includes 30+ movements and another 115+ CPM engagements, but he is more focused on the 150+ UUPGs with no movement efforts yet.

Those counted as nothing. In one meeting we asked a group of movement catalysts how they identified which of their new trainees would become effective. Half the catalysts spontaneously laughed out loud. The consistent answer was that *we have no idea*. Those we think will be very effective often end up doing nothing. Those we think are destined for failure often end up as the most fruitful multipliers. We have often made the mistake of using human perspectives and assumptions to pre-judge people. We have increasingly learned to wait and let people’s commitment, obedience, and fruit show us who God will use.

⁵ Romans 15:20-21

Paul spoke of this dynamic when he said, *This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.*⁶

Humility. Although exceptions can be found, the vast majority of movement catalysts I know are very humble. When my wife and I asked one movement catalyst how we could pray for him, he said, "Pray that God will root out any pride—I don't want to have even one ounce of pride."

Early in his career (AD 53-54), Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians that he was *the least of the Apostles*. A few years later (AD 60-61), he wrote in Ephesians that he was *the least of the saints*. And toward the

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:25-29

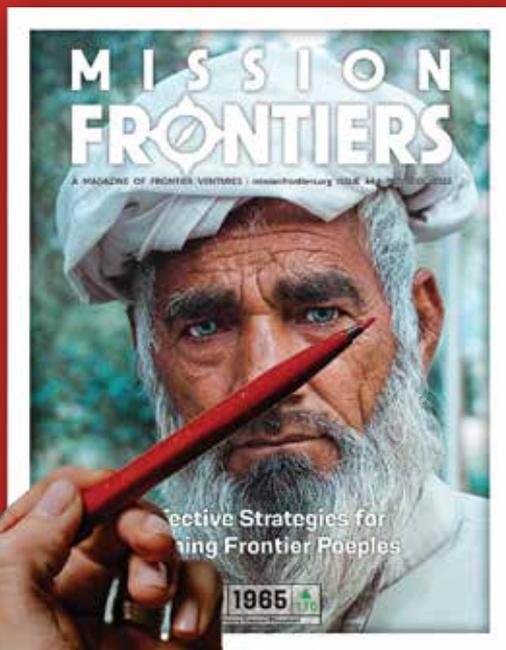
end of his career (between AD 65-67), he wrote in 1 Timothy that he was *the worst of sinners*.

If we are in the right posture, the longer we serve God, the higher our opinion of Him and the lower our opinion of ourselves. Movement catalysts know that the movements they are experiencing, with thousands of new disciples and churches, are entirely a work of God. They realize that any false pride claiming the fruit as their own is a doorway for Satan's influence—in themselves and in the movement.

Conclusion. The global Body of Christ has many gifts and callings. As 1 Corinthians 12 tells us, all the parts are valuable and needed. The early church needed Peter, Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla and Timothy and many, many other unwritten faithful and sacrificial servants. Movement catalysts are not more important than other roles in fulfilling the Great Commission. But the better we understand the mindsets of movement catalysts, the better we can partner as Christ's body to start, expand, and mature "Book of Acts" Movements among every unreached people and place.

Coming next: How movement catalysts can learn from Paul's preparation and processes. ✎

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