

SPIRIT-LED FIRST STEPS

BIRTH MOVEMENTS WITH ESSENTIAL

DNA

FEATURE ARTICLE

EDITED BY **ALLEN W. AND JAMES R.**

allenw@fastmail.us

Allen W. has dedicated the last 25 years to developing movements in southern Asia. James R. heads a partnering ministry in the region. He and his team have been developing a movement among a highly unreached social group in one country for the past five years.

VIJAY'S PRAYER WALKING JOURNEY LED him to a town where he was not known. He went there because the people were part of an unreached group that he wanted very much to see reached. But as he walked around, he got nothing but unfriendly stares. "Who are you?" challenged the man at the shop where he stopped for his morning tea. "Why did you come here?"

As an outsider and stranger, Vijay faced a delicate situation. What he did next could make the difference between an open door into this community or a closed one. A well-trained, Spirit-led response could cause the word to spread quickly that *this* stranger is "okay."

DNA begins with the first steps.

Whether or not he realizes it, a catalyst's first steps in a new community have even deeper significance. They set the pattern of health for the future church he hopes to start. The very DNA of future churches begins with what the disciple maker does in his first days. Those beginning steps leave a mark on every church in the movement for years to come. Will future disciples be known for reflecting the compassion of Jesus? Will they bring transformation? Will they replicate? Will the movement be sustainable?

Catalysts of Disciple Making Movements (DMM) face Vijay's situation all the time. In southern Asia, it is rare to experience friendly and open acceptance in new communities. Disciple makers have only one chance to make good first impressions. But what is the best way to do that — through an expensive social project, or through a host of Jesus followers who have eyes to see what Jesus sees and a commitment to respond like He did?

Personal, spontaneous and locally relevant

Traditional approaches to entering a new community frequently involve predetermined programs. They often depend on outside resources and systems that require paying and sustaining workers and activities. These tactics often do result in birthing a church. But they are seen as impersonal and new churches end up with serious flaws in their DNA. Vital elements of disciple making must be taught or "grafted" in later when the church is well established.

Well trained Disciple makers who follow biblical patterns, are better able to demonstrate compassion in ways that are uniquely meaningful and relevant to each

community. They learn to do things that do not require costly programs. These disciples are deeply in love with God, and thoroughly familiar with and obedient to His ways. They begin by seeking His guidance through prayer for every new community.

When Catalysts introduce DNA that reflects this lifestyle, new Discovery Bibles Studies launch and lead to birthing of new churches. They become known for their lifestyle of love, compassion, power and truth modeled after Jesus. New disciples see that they have the resources to start new groups, leading to multiplication to the 3rd and 4th generations.

Three stories illustrate the difference this makes in an unreached area.

"You don't have to suffer like this."

"When he *saw* the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Matthew 9:36

Stephen was walking through a village, praying as he went. In conversations with residents, he learned they were being decimated by an outbreak of the swine flu. He began asking how many people were affected and how many had died.

It was heartbreaking to hear of the loss of life, because he knew they did not have to suffer like this. A free vaccination was available from the government, but they knew nothing about it or how to get it.

So, he met with the leaders and informed them about the vaccination. He helped them carefully document the number of people living in the village so that the right number of vaccinations could be sanctioned. The leaders sent a delegation with him to the proper authorities and got authorization for the vaccinations.

"Why did you do this for us?" people began asking Stephen. One family immediately invited him into their home. He began a Discovery Bible Study with them. Soon, that Discovery Group became a new church. That family started another DBS in another place which also grew into a church. One of the new disciples from that church quickly started another group on their own. Within a short time, this grew to three generations of churches.

Compassion as a lifestyle is a key characteristic of Jesus'

“In the complex world we live in, the way forward requires a host of disciples who live and operate with eyes wide open and the conviction that God will use them to make a difference.”

disciples. Ordinary people demonstrate compassion as a part of their daily lives. Stephen was not seen as a representative of an organization. He simply showed genuine concern. He knew of a resource that could help, and he made the connection.

How can I help?

“Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals...”
Luke 10:4

According to Jesus’ instructions, Samuel took no extra money with him as he began visiting a village of about 150 homes. As usual, no one would speak to him, but he prayed for a way to connect with these people.

He noticed children running around, uncared for

and undisciplined. He learned these were children of working parents who had no time or skills to help them with their school work. The public school they attended did not offer to help them learn how to study and prepare for exams. So, they were left unattended for most of the afternoon.

Samuel was prompted through prayer to tutor them himself. There was a large tree in the center of the village where he offered to meet and tutor these children. He began with five and soon grew to fifteen. After study time, he would share Bible stories, teaching them to be good and to obey their parents.

The parents began seeing changes in their children. One couple observed what he was doing and invited

him into their home, eventually telling him of problems in their marriage. Soon Samuel was sharing Bible stories with the whole family. He would ask what they learned from the stories and what they would do about it. This group began to grow. Then the ninth-grade daughter started another group with five of her friends. Then mom and dad started another group in the community where they worked.

Going into a community without any resources to share is counter-intuitive. It is more common to bring something from outside. This traditional approach focuses on helping the community with something they cannot do for themselves.

However, good intentions are often interpreted as “buying” the right to be listened to, a common assumption in most of Asia. There is hardly anything more damaging to the start of a movement than to perpetuate an approach that leads to this misunderstanding.

Determined not to be a burden

“You remember, brothers, our labor and toil: We worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” – 1 Thessalonians 2:9

Dileep found another way to serve the community. He got a job selling newspapers. This way, he was no burden to the community and had a way to get to know people.

At one house on his delivery route, a man named Ravi would come out to pay for his paper. One day, it wasn't Ravi, but his wife, who came out of the house. “Where is your husband?” he asked. She explained, “He hasn't been well for two weeks. We even took him to the hospital for treatment, but he is not getting better.” Dileep asked, “May I come in and talk with him?”

So, Dileep visited with Ravi, hearing all about his problems and sharing the story of God's creation of the world and care for mankind. “Don't worry,” he said, “I will pray to God that He might heal your sickness.” The next morning, Ravi was feeling better. This led to regular visits by Dileep and more stories from the Bible. The visits then became a discovery group of seven. Very soon, one of the seven started another group of five.

Dileep's creativity led to both personal income and an ongoing avenue of connection. Once a relationship was established, all he had to do was continue what he had been doing. Sustainability can't be an afterthought. A program can run out of resources, but a life of self-sacrifice is a continuing testimony to God's grace.



Personal, relevant and ongoing

Three disciple makers found that a personal commitment to see needs and to meaningfully love their neighbors in response bore lasting fruit.

In one case, the disciple maker saw the problem and helped the community avail itself of a government resource. In another, he used a personal resource – his own time and effort to tutor children. And in the third, he found a job to sustain himself and be available without being a burden.

All three were trained and mentored to operationalize principles from the Scriptures, turning them to practical action steps that achieve strategic impact. In the complex world we live in, the way forward requires a host of disciples who live and operate with eyes wide open and the conviction that God will use them to make a difference. The result is the birthing of new gatherings with this same DNA imbedded in them from the very beginning. There is a remarkable difference in the vital characteristics of movements that start this way. 