

About the Author

In 1980, Robby earned an engineering degree from *Caltech* (the California Institute of Technology), then served 24 years with the *U.S. Center for World Mission* (USCWM) where he was mentored by and worked closely with the founder, Dr. Ralph Winter. Robby also served the USCWM in information technology and then as personnel director.



The steady stream of global leaders who visit the USCWM enabled Robby to develop an unusually clear grasp of the strategic considerations necessary for completing the missionary task in our day. Continuing relationships with many of these leaders enables Robby to refine insights from effective models through interactions with other leaders who are gaining complementary insights in other contexts.

Robby and his wife Jackie presently live in Washington state with their three children: Joelle ('96), Dana ('98), and Wesley ('01).

In 2004, Robby and Jackie Butler left the USCWH and launched **Mission Network** to:

- study the factors behind the “Mobilization Gap”—the gap between the Church’s capacity and its fruitfulness toward discipling all peoples, and
- work with North American church movements and mission agencies to close this gap.



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Church Planting Movements

One Perspective from India

Reported by *Robby Butler*

Pre-release of an article from the May/June, 2011 issue of Mission Frontiers, on the theme: Jesus Movements

Why doesn't most ministry produce the kind of fruit evident in the book of Acts?

How is it that *all of Asia* heard the word of the Lord in just two years (Acts 19:8–12)?

A network of leaders in India offers fresh insight through their integration of knowledge and power.

As in the West, “post-harvest loss” is still a major issue, and some controversy surrounds these movements. But we can still learn a great deal from the fruit our Indian brothers and sisters are seeing as they seek to multiply NT churches—with spiritual power and without the baggage accumulated through the reduction of Christ’s *ekklesia* into “church” as it is often practiced today.¹

While the Mar/Apr 2011 *MF* on Church Planting Movements (CPMs) was being finished, Gene Davis² invited me to join him in meeting CPM leaders in India. Thus I was privileged to spend four weeks interviewing and learning directly from leaders of rapidly growing CPMs. These and other leaders provided invaluable feedback throughout the development of this article.

One highlight of my trip was the *Global Summit on Market/Workplace Ministries*³ in Bangalore, where 160 leaders from 21 countries met to learn how to develop self-funding CPMs in their own lands.

Field Insights into Luke 10

(Note: These ideas aren't uniquely Indian. Rick Warren recently offered very similar observations⁴.)

Send with Power (v. 1, 9)

Empower disciples to do what you do: proclaim the Kingdom, perform miracles, baptize new believers, and serve the Lord's table. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21).

Work with Others (v. 1):

George Patterson and Galen Currah list ten reasons to work in pairs.⁵ Here are three:

- Traveling in groups is NT practice.
- Prayer power comes with agreement.
- Groups bring a variety of giftings.

Prepare by Prayerwalking (v. 1–2)

Summit testimonies particularly emphasized prayerwalking—claiming the land, listening together to God's Spirit, and agreeing on-site with Jesus' plans.

In one instance, prayer was focused on just one of two adjacent, identical apartment buildings. In subsequent outreach, 75% of the residents in this building welcomed visitors offering to tell them about Jesus, compared with only 25% in the other building.

Be God to Thrust Out Workers (v. 2)

As Jesus sent the 72 out, He drew attention to the vast need, commanded them to *beg* for more workers, then told seek to find "persons of peace." As many have noted, "the resources (laborers) are in the harvest."

Be Wise Around Opposition (v. 3)

Those going to new villages to preach and hand out tracts used to frequently be beaten up and rejected. Since learning to prayerwalk until the "person of peace" is revealed, they rarely have this experience.

Stay Dependent on God (v. 3–4)

When we bring resources to attract a crowd, it may inhibit local ownership and multiplication. God's power is most evident when ours is most absent. Our testimony is strengthened when God works ahead of us and provides through those who receive us.

Seek out the Person of Peace (v. 5–6)

The hospitable homeowner Jesus told the 72 to seek out would be a man of local credibility, whose acceptance of their message would draw others to accept it as well.

Establish Relationships (v. 7–8)

The 72 were to first enjoy fellowship with the person of peace, staying in one place and relaxing over food, eating and drinking "whatever is set before you."

Show God's Care and Power (v. 8)

My Indian friends have great insight into the essential components of effectual prayer for healing—holiness, faith, sensitivity to God's Spirit, laying on hands, etc. (God began answering my own prayers for others' healing in a way I had not previously experienced.)

Proclaim God's Kingdom (v. 9)

Once the person of peace has experienced God's Kingdom through relationship with someone who demonstrates God's power, they will want to learn more and be trained to reproduce.

Continue Mentoring (v. 17–24)

After the 72 reported how God had worked through them, Jesus continued the mentoring cycle by correcting and redirecting their priorities. Without ongoing mentoring (which generates plans, and teaching to support those plans), church reproduction does not continue.

There are more dynamics for the success of this model: In the synagogue Paul was dealing with Jews only, once a week on the Sabbath. In the marketplace, he interacted with both Jews and the Gentiles on a daily basis.

It does not matter how well crafted your discipleship course is, the essential ingredients are: supernatural acts that catalyze CPMs, and the continuous mentoring and monitoring of disciples. Without both components in place, any model will falter.

To learn more dynamics of multiplication, see the materials of George Patterson and Galen Currah.¹⁴ For working through fears about such dynamics (your own or those of others especially in ministry), see Galen Currah's article "Five Fears of Pastors."¹⁵

To learn supernatural dynamics, it may be that one needs to spend time with those who are experiencing this.

As appropriate, both the Indian and U.S. leaders involved with these movements are available to help others learn and apply these effective principles. To interact with them or me, please use the author contact form at MissionFrontiers.org/members/6.

Endnotes:

¹ TellAsia.org/kingdom-ekkleisia.pdf

² Gene Davis as a former board member of the U.S. Center for World Mission who has worked tirelessly to build a movement to reach the Banjara (gypsies) of India. He has spent decades serving Indian leaders in developing CPMs.

³ GlobalMarketSummit.com. The title reflects the self-supporting nature of this work, and the recognition of the marketplace as an important place of ministry.

⁴ blog.godreports.com/2011/03/rick-warren-issues-call-for-greater-collaboration-partnering-in-missions

⁵ Paul-Timothy.net/mentornet/pdf/mentornet38.pdf

⁶ cf the addendum to Kevin Higgin's article in the Jan/Feb *MF* missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/discipling-the-nations.

⁷ news.sbts.edu/2010/02/27/afl-2010-live-blog-david-platt

⁸ Find the web-exclusive *Pentecost as a Global Day to Harvest Souls* at MissionFrontiers.org.

⁹ Paul-Timothy.net/pages/perspectives/lesson_13_rev.pdf

¹⁰ FathersHand.net

¹¹ 4shared.com/document/UreR1atk

¹² en.StarfishPortal.net/downloads

¹³ DawnMinistries.org

¹⁴ Paul-Timothy.net. See also Patrick O'Connor's summary of George Patterson's principles in *Reproducible Pastoral Training* (William Carey Library, 2006).

¹⁵ currah.info/pages/dis744/five_fears_of_pastors.pdf

Neil Gamble¹⁰ is another American who spent more than half his time over nine years training house church leaders in India, and has worked closely with Choudhrie.

Choudhrie's *Starfish Alliance*¹¹ parallels the *Starfish Vision* and *Starfish Manifesto*¹² of Wolfgang Simson, who had previously worked with Jim Montgomery in *DAWN Ministries*.¹³ In isolation from one another, God led Choudhrie and Simson simultaneously and independently to very similar conclusions and appreciation for the prophetic biology of the starfish.

Next Steps

In light of developing opportunities in the Middle East, Dr. Choudhrie has tentatively planned another gathering in October to serve those working among Muslims. Practitioners from any country are welcome, but help is needed to underwrite travel costs for those coming from Asia and the Middle East. One Campus Crusade worker in Kazakhstan, who brought a Kazakh leader to the Summit in Bangalore, wants to bring to this next training friends and mission workers from "Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and maybe Turkmenistan too."

Interested in attending, praying or assisting? Contact me: <RobbyQButler@gmail.com>.

Digging Deeper

Throughout this article I have footnoted links for further study and exploration.

Regarding the model of Acts 19:8–12, through which "the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Acts 19:20), Choudhrie adds this insight:

Paul was in Ephesus for three years, of which he spent a fruitless three months in the synagogue; one year and nine months in the Hall. The NT does not report what he did in the third year, but it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that he visited and strengthened his disciples all over Asia. No wonder he had little post harvest loss.

The hall of Tyrannous was situated in the middle of the fish market. (My wife recently visited the site.) Paul made tents inside the hall, as he taught to an audience who were his clients. His clients would be itinerant people who needed the tents, such as the shepherds, the fishermen and petty business people who itinerated. This captive audience not only heard teaching with their ears but also saw mighty miracles with their own eyes. This mix triggered the CPM, simply because his disciples would go and share the radical teachings as well as describe and perform signs wherever they went.

Talk to any one of our grassroots workers and he or she will tell you the latest supernatural thing that has happened to accelerate growth.

Rapidly Multiplying Churches often ...

- cultivate *scattering* (for multiplication) in the family and workplace, as well as gathering (for edification). *Scattering* maximizes these churches' *influence*.
- equip *reproductive disciplers* rather than producing passive church audiences. This leads to *rapid multiplication*.
- focus on the *Great Commission* and not just local needs. This makes the church *obedient*.
- emphasize both *Word* and *power* (instead of just right doctrine), so that members proclaim God's Kingdom effectively. *Power* confirms the *truth* of God's *Word*.
- prioritize *going* where Christ is not yet named. This leads to discipling *all peoples* in every place.

Key Principles

God Works when we Listen and Obey
Listening is central to prayer. But we busy Americans tend to develop our own plans and rely on what we can do rather than demonstrating what only God can do.

Baptism Completes Salvation

While not essential, baptism is a standard part of salvation and helps greatly to cement long-term commitment to Christ.

Swift Obedience Brings Rapid Growth

Baptize new believers immediately (even if just sprinkling until immersion is practical), then encourage immediate obedience in witnessing to and baptizing others.

Jesus' Presence Rests on Obedience

Reminiscent of William Carey's *Enquiry*, one rapid movement among Muslims holds that Jesus' promise to be with us depends on our obedience to Mt 28:19–20.

Empower Everyone to Reproduce

Give everyone, including women and children, the same authority to make disciples which Christ has given you—to go, to baptize, and to teach others to obey.

Don't Just Send People to Church

Coach them to also start discipling others wherever they gather—in their own home, workplace and marketplace, and in the homes of family, friends and co-workers.

Start with your own "Jerusalem"

It is sometimes easier to witness to strangers than to those who know our faults. However witnessing to family and friends encourages a deeper work of God's Spirit in our own lives. And it may be that we are the best people to disciple those closest to us.

Set and Pursue Goals

Without measurable goals, multiplication stalls. After the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee not only with power, but with a clear mission and strategy. To rise above "bump into" guidance, we need clear direction from God. Prayerfully develop increasing annual goals for baptisms, disciples who are baptizing, what we will earn and give, etc.

Christ Only Has One Body

The NT refers to "the Church" (universal), and to only one "church" in each locality (believers meeting in homes and more public venues), with elders responsible for both the saved and the unsaved in their locality. God's Kingdom suffers when "church" buildings come to represent divisions between believers. All who seek together to obey Jesus are His Church.

Buildings May Slow Multiplication

Jesus' Church is found wherever believers gather in His name to obey all that the NT specifies (especially those commands that cannot be fulfilled by a lone individual). Multiplication stalls when "church" comes to revolve around a building (or a person) to which we go (and bring others). Jesus didn't tell us to build buildings, but He did command us to go disciple all nations. When we focus on sending obedient disciples (our job), Jesus builds His Church (His job).

Surprises

No Buildings, Payrolls, or Labels

Buildings and payrolls drive denominational and ministry labels necessary for funding appeals. Many Indian ministries compete for Western funds through extravagant exaggeration, if not downright dishonesty. Yet among these bivocational CPM leaders, the only interest in Western funding is for travel, training and literature, etc. The greatest financial need is for travel assistance to accelerate the spread of these movements throughout India and to other lands.

"Contextualization" isn't an Issue

Some American (and Indian?) leaders fret over whether Hindus or Muslims must call themselves Christians to be saved. As a result many "converts to Christianity" experience intense persecution that hinders others from following their example. But this wasn't a concern for these Indian leaders. As they see God bringing large numbers of Hindus and Muslims to Himself, they encourage baptism and other obedience to Christ in ways that respect and build bridges in the birth communities of those who are following Jesus.⁶

Empowerment of the Other 50%

The recognition and valuation of women—in anything and everything that is done by the men, from apostolic leadership to baptism of new believers—is vital to the rapid spread of Christianity in India and many other nations around the world.

Americans are Too Eager to Teach

Many Americans visiting India are so eager to teach that they miss out on the opportunity to learn from leaders who are seeing greater fruit than they are. These humble Indian leaders generally defer to the Americans' agenda until invited to share what God has taught them.

Rapid Growth Generates Suspicion

The faster movements grow, the more difficult they are to track, especially if they lack buildings and other Christian "trappings." My U.S. friends who have worked with these movements for years have satisfied their initial incredulity. Along with my Indian brothers, they invite others to "come and see." Meanwhile professional researchers are developing new ways to confirm and correct the growth estimates. Until such research is available, let us test and learn from these movements, and rejoice in growth that outpaces our ability to measure it!

Adoption is Better than Orphanages

As these leaders are increasingly opening their homes to needy children, their example could lead to church-planting movements placing all children in families. David Platt's church (see the Nov/Dec 2000 *MF*) has modeled a similar dynamic in providing homes for all the foster children in their county.⁷ May God do something new for kids in our day!

Celebration of Pentecost

This network of CPMs has seen tremendous growth as individual leaders disciple throughout the year toward a goal of 3,000 or more immersions on or by Pentecost.⁸ This vision is now spreading into the 10/40 Window.

From Driven to Discipler

The effective Indian leaders I met have become relaxed, relational disciplers, and abandoned the "driven-ness" common among Christian workers. Instead of living to "prove" their worthiness and need for a building and a salary, these leaders are becoming bivocational and discipling just a few, who disciple others, in more generations than they can track. The result is a more effective testimony to the abundant life Christ offers now.

- One man has a disciple in each of twelve districts of his state. Each month they all meet in a different district for five days of prayer and planning, learning from and supporting one another in their oversight of rapidly multiplying house churches. Together they estimate that 100,000 people have been baptized through this network, and they expect to see half of their state baptized over the next few years!
- Another pastored seven small churches for 14 years; each day of the week spent serving a different church. A year ago he quit pastoring to focus on making reproducing disciplers through house churches. Now he estimates 40,000 baptisms through several generations of his disciples baptizing others.

- A third once worked 16 hour days overseeing a region for his denomination. After learning to multiply disciples through house churches, he encouraged his 100 fellow pastors to start house churches; 619 were started in three months' time! Now he estimates that more than 100,000 have been baptized through his generations of disciples, while he also enjoys fruitful work with his wife and children among their high-caste, land-owning Hindu neighbors.

Key Influences

Dr. Victor Choudhrie, a Senior Fellow of both the American and British *College of Surgeons*, resigned in 1992 as Director of *Christian Medical College* to take up full time training of house church leaders.

Choudhrie's parents were baptized by Dr. Donald McGavran, who later founded the *School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary*.

However where the *growth* McGavran promoted became associated with increasing the size and number of churches dependent on buildings and salaried pastors, and producing mostly "spectator" Christians, Choudhrie pursued *multiplication* of more reproducible churches, with bivocational pastors and in which everyone is equipped and expected to engage in ministry.

Gene Davis, the American I was with in India, has assisted Indian leaders for decades in applying George Patterson's principles of *Obedience Oriented Discipleship*. (This is central to *Perspectives* lesson 13, *Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches*.⁹)