



The Best Hope for Reaching frontier people groups

By **STAN PARKS**

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In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded us to make disciples of all nations (i.e., *ethne*)—whole populations united by culture, traditions, geography, and languages. What does it mean to disciple an entire people group?

Today, we see an unprecedented move of the Holy Spirit around the world where God starts and sustains church planting movements (CPMs). These movements involve multiplication: disciples making disciples and leaders developing leaders, resulting in indigenous churches planting churches. These churches begin to spread rapidly through a people group or population segment. Although these new disciples and churches have typical human failures and weaknesses, God uses them to begin transforming their communities. They become new manifestations of Christ's Body living out kingdom values.

Consider that out of 7,000+ unreached people groups (UPGs), almost 5,000 are frontier people groups (FPGs are UPGs with less than 0.1% Christian). Exponential multiplication is clearly the only way to reach the billions of people in these groups.

Thankfully, these UPGs and FPGs are not isolated communities needing 7,000 or 5,000 separate gospel efforts. These groups are interrelated through language, culture, geography, religion, and kinship. The Joshua Project identifies 269 people clusters containing all 17,286 people groups globally. The 123 still-unreached clusters contain 7,250 UPGs. Reaching one or more UPGs in a cluster can create leverage to reach the remaining UPGs.

For example, the Bhojpuri CPM leaders were not willing to limit their efforts to the 100+ million Bhojpuri speakers. God has used them to impact millions of others by catalyzing CPMs in eight neighboring language groups and five major cities in North India.¹ All over the world, we see not only disciples making disciples and churches birthing churches but also *movements catalyzing movements*.

As researchers study the amazing work of God in 1,965 currently known CPMs with 114+ million disciples,² they have discovered a critical truth. Not only are movements the fastest way God's kingdom is growing in our day; they are also the source from which

¹ Parks, Stan and Dave Coles, *24:14—A Testimony to All Peoples*. Self-Published, 185–88.

As these movements launch into new groups, we recognize they are having a greater impact on the FPGs than we realized. Research from the 24:14 coalition of movements shows the following information.

most *new* movements are springing up. Only about 10% of existing movements were started by a catalyst(s) from a far-distant culture who found an inside catalyst(s) to plant the first churches.³ The vast majority of current movements (approximately 90% of them) were started by believers from other near-culture movements. Some used the term “hot coals” to describe this spread as a metaphor for embers from an existing fire being used to start fires in a new location.

Some have asked, “How can we motivate these CPM disciples to reach FPGs?” In reality, they are far more motivated (and sacrificial and effective) than are many Westerners. Our role as the global Body of Christ should be to learn from them and serve them as they lead the way in reaching FPGs.

These CPMs around the world have been so catalytic that the currently listed 1,965 movements are reported by only 40 movement “families.”⁴ For example, “Family 1” has started multiplying churches in 768+ languages. “Family 2” is multiplying churches in 157 of the 320 UPGs in their region with plans to begin reaching the remaining 163 UPGs in the next few years. “Family 3” is impacting 73+ UPGs with efforts to reach an additional 50+. “Family 4” started 12 years ago and serves 400+ UPGs with 4+ generations of churches, another 130 with some fruit, and an additional 400 UPGs they need to reach.

		#	Population
Category	frontier people groups (FPGs)	4974	1.985 billion
1	FPGs where there is a CPM in the same country among people speaking the FPG’s language	1042	607 million
2	FPGs where there is a CPM in another country among people speaking the FPG’s language	1819	1.064 billion
3	FPGs where there are no known CPMs anywhere among people speaking the FPG’s language	2113	314 million

This information creates a clear strategic delineation.

For category #1, we need to ask the movement leaders how best to assist them, either in beginning work or expanding already existing work. Category #2 is typically more challenging, so we need to ask how we can work together to bring “hot coals” to ignite responses among FPGs in a different country.

For category #3, we can inform movement leaders and disciples of the need and see if any respond to go to a new group and then help them as much as possible. If that does not happen, our best approach would be to work with both movement leaders and outside movement catalysts to mold new catalysts from anywhere in the world. We then work together to help them catalyze pioneering efforts into the gaps. CPMs are well positioned to reach the FPGs for several reasons:

1. Bible as foundation

Disciples in CPMs take Scripture very seriously. Everyone is expected to obey God’s Word. God is the foremost teacher (John 6:44–45).

² Cf. “Global Movement Statistics.” Online: 2414now.net/resources.

³ See the Jan/Feb 2023 issue of *Mission Frontiers*. Online: missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/cascading-gospel-movements-starting-movements

⁴ A “movement family” is a group of movements that are connected relationally.

Disciples know they are accountable for obeying the Word. This emphasis helps to avoid importing outside biases and traditions into the new work. The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to guide new disciples into all truth. The good news bears fruit in ways natural to each culture yet rooted in the Bible.

2. Prayer

A church planting movement is always preceded by a prayer movement. CPMs are also marked by prayer, being “prayer movements” in and of themselves. New disciples know what it means to live in darkness. They also know that God is the only one who can break the bondage. So, these disciples realize the need to pray and to multiply prayer in others.

3. Ordinary people

One striking aspect of CPMs is the role of the “ordinary person.” CPM DNA can be passed from an existing movement to a new movement. God’s work is not restricted to trained professionals. Instead, the Holy Spirit uses ordinary people to share the gospel, cast out demons, heal the sick, and multiply disciples and churches. Brand new believers are powerfully bringing the gospel to new places. They are ordinary people filled with the Spirit of an extraordinary God.

4. Groups not individuals

In Acts, we see households and even some whole communities turn to the Lord. Likewise, we are seeing the same dynamic in today’s movements. Most of these movements are happening among UPGs, who tend to be much more communal than Westerners. In these cultures, decisions are made by the families and/or clans. Collective responses to Christ can make a rapid impact in reaching new families and clans.

5. Empowering others

Leaders in CPMs are focused on reproducing new leaders, not the number of their own personal followers. They seek to empower people to reach others, training new leaders and delegating responsibilities. Just as Jesus said his disciples would do greater things than he did, healthy movement leaders equip their spiritual children and grandchildren to surpass them.

6. Business for kingdom advance

House churches are led by volunteers rather than professional clergy. Everyone is a minister and church offerings go to help the poor and share the gospel. Major funding is not needed because the churches do not have special church buildings or staff. However, they sometimes do need funds to take the gospel to new areas. Sometimes funds have come from the outside as the global Body of Christ helps the movements reach into new people groups and places. However, receiving outside funds is increasingly challenging in many unreached countries due to growing government surveillance and restrictions. In recent years, many movements have started kingdom-focused businesses that can fund ongoing pioneer efforts.

Clearly, movements with hundreds or thousands of churches yield many of the best laborers to spark similar movements among FPGs. As a global body, we should prioritize resourcing and serving CPM disciples. They are the best hope to reach the millions of people in the remaining FPGs. 

