

Greg Livingstone wrote:

Why Church planting? Should it be a 'non-negotiable'?

Whatever terms you prefer, we must constantly ask ourselves, what are we leaving behind?

What leads to His Kingdom coming into manifest witness among a Muslim people? [i.e.

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it! 1Thess 1:6-8

Why did Paul write near the end of his career: *"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me? Yet, what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body"?*

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the Faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." Phil 1:22-26

I note that our great pacesetter, Paul, does not state that he needs to stay on earth longer, so that more /*ethne*/ can be saved, but to spend time with the saints that they might progress in the Faith (manifested by joy).

Presumably, then, joyful saints demonstrating the difference Christ in them makes is the most fruitful kind of evangelism, reproductive church birthing, possibly even a catalyst to 'people movements'.

So when our King of Kings commands us to '*make disciples*', He has in Mind, NOT people who mumble a prayer then go into hiding. Christ apprehended Muslims' very existence commands the attention of those around them...as did the early church for almost 300 years. Genuine followers of Christ Jesus are manifestly salt and light.

So, let us warn Muslims [and everyone else] who call themselves 'believers', or followers of Isa Al Masih, that unless their walk with God is real; unless they are enjoying communion with Him so much they cannot be silent; until they are fearful of being disobedient, they are either counterfeits, or simply loving themselves and the praise of men more than God.

Instead of year after year trying to 'pump up' scared hiding so-called Muslim believers, such persons should be warned that we must spend our time with 'the real thing'; i.e. those who *hunger and thirst* to please God and accomplish His purposes.

Yet, even the most determined saint will struggle to grow unless s/he can pool his gifts with other likeminded disciples. Hence, communities of people consciously under the Headship of

Christ, who live out the 'one-another commands' with godly, inspiring leadership (elders if you will) must continually be the goal of everything else we do.

Greg Livingstone
Thailand August 2009

Abram Duran added:

Uncle Greg, thanks for your words.

Something else of critical importance is that CP is the way of completing what is called 'the Great Commission' and this is what is OUR community is all about. (Romans 1:5 and 15:20-21).

As we all know, Jesus commanded us to "*Disciple all ethne*" (Mt 28:19 lit). We achieve this by "baptizing them" and "teaching them to obey" everything he taught us. Most of what the Lord taught us (if not all) is relational (cf. Mark 12:30-31, Matthew 18:15-20; 16:18-19). The 'one another' teachings fill the Epistles applied mainly to life in the gatherings of believers (Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 3:15).

One of the only two other uses of the word "*Disciple*" as a verb is in Acts 14: 2 where it is seen as part of the apostolic task along with "*giving the Good News to the city*", "*strengthening their lives*" and "*appointing elders in each gathering*".

So, it is basically impossible to fulfill the Great Commission without leaving behind gatherings of people who are "the Lord's" (the meaning of the word Church in English) or, in other words, who are "*in the Kingdom*" or "*in Christ*" and "*obey the faith*". This is so because many of the commandments we must obey refer to other believers to be fulfilled as a community of believers toward those who are not believers.

Every ministry that proclaims or demonstrates the Kingdom of God is good, but the Great Commission is not achieved without leaving behind these gatherings.(ekklesia) Therefore, we, in our "Apostolic Spiritual Community" we call Frontiers are defined by this non negotiable more than we define it. We may be negotiable but Church Planting is not. Of course, we need to dig more and more into the Word to ensure that what we are establishing is indeed His church and not ours. But that's another topic.

Owen Campbell's warning:

Dear Greg & Other Family Members,

I want to thank you all for what you have written. I will file these both for future use, and use them to help convey to people, in my own circles, the non-negotiable-ness of CP and the nature of what the planted church should look like.

I agree with Greg that seeing gatherings left behind (communities of believers) is crucial. I agree with Abram that we are defined by this more than we define it... or at least we should be.

I think that Steve Holloway's point is also very important. I.e., we are in danger organizationally of defining the mechanism by which CP takes place in narrow terms that are packaged into a step by step process to be done by 6-8 adults. While I would be quick to affirm each of the individual components of the process (evangelism, discipleship, gathering, etc.), the creation (intentionally or inadvertently) of an organizational culture that defines the steps to CP in rigid terms is problematic in a number of ways:

1. It may omit components that are often seen in scriptural case studies of CP (for example, prayer, and I am sure there are other elements that I have not personally "majored" in!)
2. It may overlook case studies in Scripture (and otherwise) that resulted in communities of believers being planted through a process that did not include some of the steps we advocate. (evidence that God can produce a church in a multitude of different ways)
3. In some regions, the process of CP that we have outlined does not have a track record of success that gives it credibility as being the best way to approach the task to see reproducing communities of believers among Muslims). I am not saying that our advocated seven phases has done worse than other approaches, simply that often it has not necessarily stood out as a particularly successful model, even when tried diligently over a long period of time.

I think that one of the weaknesses of our movement is that we have held people accountable to a PROCESS of CP, not a RESULT of communities planted. I believe that our passion to be good stewards of our calling to do church planting has caused us to live in organizational fear of deviating from the process that we have defined CP to be.

When the process itself becomes the non-negotiable, instead of the result, the innovation that is necessary to see communities planted may be stifled. When innovation in areas that are Biblically sound with the goal of seeing communities planted is labeled "a slippery slope" (as I have often heard it called)... meaning that once tried, it will be impossible to back out of that experiment should one desire to do so... we are running the danger of quenching Holy Spirit led initiatives with rules of men. I have observed, over the years, one or two "slippery slopes" that have actually led to communities planted among Ms!

So when a team has been "stuck in phase 3" for a long time, perhaps the CPers should be accountable to innovate; try a different approach to CP altogether, not simply try to do the same thing in a more effective manner (assuming that has already been tried). When innovation IS tried, let's give it sufficient time to succeed before calling it a failure. Don't we give our "orthodox" model [in some cases 10+ years with no visible results] such time?

Greg and Abram, what I loved in your thoughts was your powerful defense of the centrality of CP as our calling. My only concern in the discussion overall is that we as an organization might overlook our urgent need to make sure that we do not inadvertently marginalize the CP innovators.

Abram Duran's agreement to which Greg says 'AMEN'.

Owen, Thanks for your comments.

The fact that I am strongly convinced about CP as what the New Testament and our calling demands does not mean that I am dogmatic about a particular method of doing CP. Neither is Greg.

In my paper, "*The Beauty of Jesus as an Evangelistic Factor*" you will see that a) God's sovereignty and b) prevailing, constant, systematic, intercessory prayer were the two first factors I mentioned as essential for a move of God in which we are somehow involved.

One important factor bringing response from Muslims, in that study, was "attraction" to the Lord's personality, teaching, and what the Muslims could see in our own lives. However, one of my dear friends asked [just after I explained as carefully as I could those vital elements in our approach to CP] "*Yeah, yeah, attraction, beauty, but HOW? What do you do first? What are the steps?*"

So, you see, I am not mechanistic; I don't believe that if we simply follow the steps of a recipe we will obtain our goals. Still, it is evident, especially newer disciple-makers need some concrete 'starting' steps. *

We agree that the genius of our CP equipping may have been in identifying the key components of the process. Those ARE the key activities. But some of the definitions may be too narrow. The authors (I must clarify) were always very clear that the list was not a step by step process but a list of activities that usually happen; human nature and legalism have made it rigid for many. That we are committed to upgrading is demonstrated by Steve's department, **Knowledge Stewardship**, which is more closely showing evidence of the elements of "fruitful practices" in C.P.

I think you understand the phenomenon of people deciding they have the right formula. Your own, strongly biblical, defense of prevailing prayer as one of the two key priorities for apostles (which has challenged me very positively) has been wrongly identified with a particular method of prayer that you may or not subscribe to personally. But we realize you are far from dogmatic on methods of prayer any more than you are on C.P. methods.

So I am all for Frontiers' non negotiable of Church planting among Muslims, but the particular methods ARE negotiable. We all need to be growing in a practical and biblical understanding of what CP means, in any given time, or place as we seek to be faithful to fulfill the Lord's will, not our own.

* P.S. from Greg: I'm fond of remembering words of Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade re: *The Four Spiritual Laws*. "*You don't need to utilize the 4 laws approach if you have something better. Just don't do worse!*" He was alluding to how muddled much so-called evangelism is.