God ON THE Move

Making Disciples Among the Nations

Dave Coles | Editor

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God on the Move: Making Disciples Among the Nations

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Fifteen Years of Disciple Making Movements

Samuel Kebreab

I first learned about Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) in 2006 during a difficult time. I was serving as our denomination's outreach coordinator. We had a church planting effort among the Yoma people (pseudonym), an unreached group in southern Ethiopia. We aimed to plant one hundred village churches in fifteen years. By 2006, in our seventh year, we had only planted seven churches. I felt discouraged, and our goal seemed impossible.

During the DMM training, I felt the ideas made a lot of sense. I heard personal stories of DMMs leading to thousands of churches and tens of thousands of followers of Jesus. I began to hope this could happen in our area if we followed the DMM principles.

Soon after, I started training and coaching our church planters using DMM principles. I also trained the few young Yoma men and women who had come to faith through our ministry. The work began to grow slowly but steadily. It grew especially through the young Yoma men and women who were part of the Yoma community. They started reaching out to their parents and other close relatives. By March 2009, these young Yoma were baptizing their close relatives and many others in the community. The number of village churches grew to fifty-four.

When I first wrote this chapter, the DMM among the Yoma people had continued for fourteen years. They had 5,672 followers of Jesus in 364 village churches, spanning seven generations of churches. In April 2020, the movement sent Yoma workers to a neighboring unreached group to engage them with DMM. We were thrilled to see a movement that started in one group spreading to another unreached group.

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My story is just one of thousands of DMM stories, similar to stories in Acts. These inspire God's people to praise him as they learn about his kingdom growing. I worked for nine years as Africa Research Director for New Generations. This role allowed me to visit and closely watch movements in all five of our African regions. I also received reports on DMMs in other parts of the world.

This chapter will describe what our organization has observed over fifteen years. Since 2005, we have tried to start DMMs in fifty-six countries in Africa and Asia. These movements show Jesus at work. When people focus on Jesus's teachings, God often starts great movements.

We will focus in this chapter on the results in thirty-one African countries and one South Asian country. We use both numbers and stories to see what God is doing and to understand what we might be missing. The results of our research have greatly encouraged us and helped us assist other organizations.

Before sharing the data from these years, I want to describe the DMMs we have studied.

Features of Disciple Making Movements

New Generations created the term DMM to describe the spread of the gospel by making disciples who learn to follow God's word and quickly make other disciples who do the same. This leads to many churches being planted. A DMM is not just a strategy or program but a way of life and a ministry philosophy based on kingdom values modeled by Jesus in the Gospels.

DMMs Depend Heavily on Prayer, Often Followed by Miraculous Signs

Every DMM we have seen starts with intense prayer and fasting. Faith-filled prayers ask God to bring his kingdom into people's lives and entire villages and cities. This leads to changed lives, communities, towns, and cities. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come; this important prayer leads to kingdom results.

When Jesus's disciples went from village to village to share the kingdom message, he gave them the power to show signs of God's kingdom presence among the people. They shared the good news along with healing and deliverance. In DMM, we have seen the kingdom show itself through

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healing, deliverance, and other miraculous signs alongside sharing the gospel. We estimate that miraculous signs have happened in 50 to 70 percent of the times when movements have started.

DMMs Equip Ordinary People to Achieve the Impossible

DMMs are simple, easy to grow, and sustainable partly because they usually start with committed and obedient ordinary people. Some of our successful movement leaders have been housewives, poor widows, bicycle taxi drivers, masons, farmers, and former commercial sex workers. DMMs do not rely on highly skilled and educated outsiders to share the message. They rely on obedient insiders who may not have any special skills or education. They do not depend on resources from outside but can be sustained through what local people can afford and create (Matt 10:9–10). They do not lack workers because workers come from within the harvest field itself.

However, this does not mean there is no need for gifted and highly skilled outsiders to start, promote, or help a movement. In DMM, an outsider's main role is to equip ordinary people, who then do the work of starting, promoting, and helping the movement (Eph 4). The ministry model that depends on highly educated and paid clergy does not produce a simple, easy-to-grow, and sustainable movement.

DMMs Are Holistic: Combining Compassion and Healing with the Gospel of Kingdom Transformation

In Jesus's earthly ministry, we do not see a separation between sharing the kingdom message and showing compassion. The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus came to heal and preach. When he sent the Twelve to the villages to share the kingdom message, he gave them authority to heal and free people from evil spirits. DMMs follow the principle of entering communities with genuine love shown through compassionate ministry. This can include healing and deliverance or providing resources that help the whole community, like clean water, seeds, better health, better education, or skill development. Compassionate ministry is not an end in itself but is connected to our desire to see people come to know God. Compassion also helps us gain acceptance in the community and makes people willing to hear our message.

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DMMs Trust God to Provide Resources Locally

Luke 10 and Matthew 10 describe two important resources God provides that help DMMs overcome cultural and financial barriers when entering a new area.

The first resource is God's preset person to bridge the gospel to their family, friends, community, or workplace. The Bible calls this person a "person of peace." These people are usually open to the gospel, welcoming, and willing to introduce their families to the gospel. The person of peace, whether a man or woman, breaks the cultural barrier. As a cultural insider, they do the inside work of promoting the gospel in their family, community, and tribe from day one.

The other provision is for field expenses. Jesus tells his disciples not to carry money when they go to the harvest field because everything they need will be provided for them there. This approach greatly reduces the money needed to make disciples and plant churches. The traditional way of making disciples and planting churches costs a lot of money that must come from outside. For example, David Barrett and Todd Johnson (2001, 520–29) estimate the total cost per baptism in the United States to be $1.55 million. In our case, all DMM expenses usually total much less than $100 for each person baptized, and most of these resources are provided locally.

DMMs Depend on Lost People Discovering God in the Bible and Choosing to Obey

We believe God is already working to prepare people's hearts (especially the person of peace). So, the harvest worker's job is to help lost people discover the truth from the Bible and obey it.

We call this method Discovery Bible Study (DBS). A DBS usually happens in a group and has four parts:

1. The group hears or reads a Bible passage or story in their own language.
2. Each person in the group retells the message in their own words.
3. Each person shares an "I will" statement, describing what they feel they should do in response to the passage and making a promise to obey it.
4. Each person lists the people they plan to share the passage with.

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This way, from day one, we start making disciples who have a lifestyle of obeying God and making other disciples. People might start to obey God individually, in groups, or as a community. We call a group that meets regularly to hear God's word and intends to obey it a "discovery group." Besides studying the Bible together, a discovery group worships God together, prays for their needs and the needs of their community, and supports each other. They also check if members have followed their "I will" statements and shared what they learned in the previous lesson.

DMMs Involve Ordinary Disciples Making Disciples and Churches Planting Churches

One of the most important parts of DMM is the multiplication of disciples across generations, leading to the multiplication of churches. This creates a movement that will have a lasting result: reaching and changing communities, people groups, affinity groups, towns, and cities. This happens through sharing, showing, and experiencing the gospel. As the DMM progresses, most movements create their own natural structure that helps them organize and keep the movement growing. This differs from traditional methods in which the form and structure of a new church are decided by the mother church or denomination.

DMMs Require Courage and Sacrifice

Matthew 10:16–42 teaches us that suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom come with movements of kingdom advance. We have heard many stories of sacrifice in our fifteen-year DMM journey. However, this has not discouraged the Christians in these movements; instead, it has made them stronger. In most cases, persecution has not stopped movements. It has, instead, made people think more about the cost of discipleship and move on to new opportunities to bring change in the hardest places.

Data Collection Method and Data Verification Process

Data Collection Strategies and Methodologies

Our organization has a data and research team of eight people. Team members collect data and analyze the results of the DMM activities every quarter. We also collect DMM stories from each region every quarter.

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