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After 15 Years of Planting Simple House Churches Around the World, What Have I Learned?

This article will highlight five areas of learning: (1) the conventional church attendance crisis, (2) church history, (3) Simple House Church planting, (4) the future of “church,” and (5) the rise of Disciple-Making Movements. It is intended to be descriptive. It is my story. In many ways, thanks to the input of many Simple Church planters, it is our collective Simple Church story of the past 15 years.

In hopes of adequately sharing what is currently taking place, this article will include a blend of statistical data, observations from personal experience, analysis of social trends, and a brief summary of my understanding of God’s prophetic end-time vision to which all nations, tribes, languages, and people are invited.

There are still many questions along with the realization that we have made mistakes along the way. However, we have found some answers to the mounting challenges facing westernized churches.

As you read, there will likely be things you find helpful, insightful, disturbing, challenging, and some that may even make you angry. My goal has been to take a candid look at what is developing among God’s end-time people.

The closing thoughts of this article will attempt to synthesize our experience, providing a look at possible next steps.

What We Have Learned About the Church Attendance Crisis

It all started in 2007 while I was doing doctoral research at Andrews University. I discovered church trends coming from Western Europe that

were expected to arrive on North American shores in ten to fifteen years. Given another ten or more years, these church trends would also reshape the church culture in the Global South, beginning in cities where young adults are most connected via the internet to the global culture. What are these church trends?

At the time of my discovery in 2007, about 5% of any given Western European country were considered practicing Christians (meaning they attended church once a month), and according to Barna, 46% of adults in the United States were practicing Christians (Barna 2020: first graph). Additionally, Christian churches spent roughly \$1.5 million on church functions per baptism of one new convert in the United States (The Truth Source N.d.: para 6.).

Now, more than 15 years later, incoming statistics have added more detail to the picture. Church attendance in the United States in 2020 hit an all-time pre-Covid low of 25%. “Now [2020], just one in four Americans (25%) is a practicing Christian. In essence, the share of practicing Christians has nearly dropped in half since 2000 (The Truth Source n.d.: para. 5). Covid has legitimized noncommittal Zoom-churching (Barna 2020: para. 3). Church closures now outnumber church plants (Shimron 2021; Hill 2023:47).

Given these trends, the “Church,” as we have known it in Western society, may be on the way out. Could anything good for the church be on the way in? A statement from Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center, suggests that it could. Stetzer saw Covid as a “blessing.” In his blog, which appears to have been removed from their web page but preserved in my digital library, Stetzer said, “In fact, we must not let the queen back if it means that the people of God are put back on the bench. We must not go back to seeing church as [only an activity on Sabbath or] Sunday morning. It was never all about the weekend, and too many pastors who said that made it too much about them” (Stetzer 2020: para. 10).

Takeaway: The conventional church attendance crisis in North America and eventually the Global South will likely continue to follow Western European church trends—but much faster than originally anticipated.

What We Have Learned About Church History: Constantine and the Clergy

If there is a “queen”—a church culture that keeps the people of God on the bench—we should not be surprised. It is the natural outcome of embracing a settled-pastor model, a model that harks back to when the Roman Emperor Constantine established a professional priesthood. This was one of a cluster of “reforms” through which he essentially married pagan theology and practices with Christianity (Edwards 2015:2, 3).

Fast forward to today, and the outcome of titled and settled clergy—initiated by Constantine, continued in Catholicism, and transferred to Protestantism, has steadily dismantled the priesthood of all believers by placing their functions in the domain of professional priests/pastors who preserve Constantine’s core job description, which was to baptize new believers, perform marriage ceremonies, bury the dead, and oversee the dispensing of communion (Edwards 2015:2, 3).

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White warned against following a method of having pastors assigned to churches when she said, “Church members that are thus looked after and labored *for* become religious weaklings” (White 1902:18.2).

Takeaway: Largely due to the changes made by Constantine, a church culture that keeps a majority of Christian lay people on the bench seems to have made a strong commitment to preserving this weakness.

What We Have Learned About House Church Planting

For the past 15 years, my family and I have been an active part of the “church” that meets in our house. During that same period of time, I developed and coordinated the Simple Church Global Network of house churches (www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com) with the goal of empowering lay people to do all the work of disciple-making in fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission. In this role, I have been able to train lay people and advocate for mission-motivated house churches. The following observations and reflections come from working with members and representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but also with lay people and church leaders around the world who represent a variety of church denominations.

Eight Observations

1. *A fully documented 52% of those attending is unchurched.* Since Simple Church’s inception in July of 2008, we know that over the last 15 years, an average of 52% of the attendance in our lay-led Simple Church Global Network has been secular, unchurched, de-churched, and non-churched—the very mission field we are trying to reach. This statistic has been remarkably stable over those years. This shows a sustained effectiveness, unmatched in the current Western church-scape, for connecting with those who would not otherwise be within the circle of Christian church fellowship and discipleship.

2. *Money for ministry.* Without buildings to maintain, budgets to fund, or professional pastors to hire, offerings are freed up and used to make a

practical difference in the lives of people who are within influence-reach of Bible truth. The ability to offer a no-strings-attached provision for their needs helps to soften and open their hearts to God's end-time prophetic story and invitation.

3. *The myth of owning truth.* Denominations do not own the Bible message they steward. For example, Baptists do not own the practice of baptism by immersion, although they have faithfully defended this biblical practice. Lutherans do not own the teaching of righteousness by faith, although they are historically known for this treasure of truth. And Adventists do not own the three angels' messages of Revelation, although they have been entrusted with a deep understanding of them. From this realization flows a freedom to entrust Bible truth to any who will receive it, obey it, and share it.

4. *Do or die endeavor.* Simple Churches begin with a CORE team consisting of a minimum of two or a maximum of four adults who embrace a "do or die" determination. In other words, there is no pastor to blame, no committee action to hide behind, and no office of personal ministry to ask for help. They must go to their knees and then to the mission field around them. It is this that makes them front-line missionaries.

5. *Dispersion of the salt pile.* In the Dead Sea or the salt flats of Utah, little or nothing grows. Salt is good only when it is dispersed. Simple Church missionaries are a people who:

LEAVE: Simple Church missionaries intentionally move away from the salt pile to free their time for front-line mission work.

MINGLE: Simple Church people spend time to find people whose hearts are open to God.

LISTEN: Those attending a Simple Church are taught to sympathetically listen to people's hopes and heartaches to see where God is already at work in their lives.

MINISTER: The goal of Simple Church is to minister to people's physical, mental, emotional, and relational needs.

WIN TRUST: Growing relationships help develop trust that allows Simple Church people to lead and encourage others to grow spiritually.

INVITE: The ultimate goal is to invite new people to follow Jesus and prepare for his soon coming.

This process does not seek to add people to a salt pile. We have discovered that people thrive spiritually when living in the trenches of front-line modern missionary work. "Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed" (Prov 11:25). "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

6. *Re-reading of the Gospel Commission.* Based on Jesus' own omnipotent authority, he entrusted this job description to every disciple. They are

all to make disciples, baptize, and teach others to obey Jesus' commands (Matt 18:19-20). This authority is not based on church policy or permission from a church leader (Adams 2019).

7. *Re-empowerment of the laity.* When a lay person baptizes someone they have led to Jesus and teaches him or her to obey Jesus' commands, this experience typically ignites a conviction that leads to a more focused and intentional life of spending time with the "least, the last, and the lost" for the purpose of making disciples.

8. *Disciple-making toward accountability.* Westernized cultures are typically individualistic rather than communal. Disciple-making toward accountability has been challenging. But we have recently had a breakthrough in our ability to disciple people in Western cultures. This discovery is not a simple formula. It is a process that works in the context of relational simple house churches where *being* the church is very different from *doing* church or *going to* church.

Five Challenges

1. *Disciple-making takes longer than we expected.* This is partly due to low-trust and slow-trust tendencies in Western cultures. And, perhaps, also due to expectations. Apparently, what we have come to expect of disciple-making is a relatively short process of leading a person to accept God's offer of salvation and then be baptized, when what we *should expect* is a disciple-making process of *continued* spiritual, mental, and physical healing; accountability; and dynamic growth (John 8:31). In other words, baptism is not a doctrinal arrival point. It is the beginning of a new life of turning away from all that devalues and destroys, and obeying Jesus as He prepares us to live forever with Him. Therefore, we must anticipate continued growth as part of disciple-making. And it takes time.

2. *Multiplication has been difficult but not impossible.* In our experience, most Simple Church multiplications happen when part of a CORE team physically moves and plants another Simple Church while the first Simple Church continues in its original location. This seems to indicate that most house church planters maintain a strong commitment to leading a simple house church, but are not inclined to divide an existing one, even for the purpose of multiplication. A friend who typically works with house church planting in non-Westernized countries has been house church planting in the United States for the past five years. He called me and shared, "If we had been doing this in another country for the same period of time, we would have 'accidentally' planted 15 house churches without even trying. Here in the U.S. it is much harder than I had anticipated." Of course, this begs the question, Why is it harder in the U.S.? More on this

topic will be shared in the sections called “The Future of ‘Church’” and “The Rise of Disciple-making Movements.”

3. *Commitment to “the big three” requires blazing a new trail.* The commitment of Simple Church to counteracting the effects of “the big three” changes Constantine introduced when he politically married paganism to Christianity has inevitably brought skeptical consideration from both denominational representatives, on the one hand, and house church advocates on the other.

And what are the “big three”? In short: (1) the priesthood of all believers was replaced with professional leadership (pastors, priests, lay pastors, Bible workers); (2) house church gatherings were moved to public church buildings (basilicas, cathedrals, and churches); and (3) while less well-known in Protestant denominations, the seventh-day Sabbath was politically changed to Sunday as the official day of worship (Geiermann 1957). For Constantine, this merger was a masterful stroke of genius. Every pagan priest who wanted to keep his job simply had to become a Christian. With house churches closed, his now-Christian temple experienced standing-room only. Since the lay people were forbidden to baptize, marry, bury, etc., the priest’s job was secure. And since the seventh day Sabbath had been officially reassigned to Sunday, his day of worship stayed the same. This was a win-win-win for pagan priests and for Constantine himself, whose popularity benefitted from ostensibly honoring Christianity while practically benefitting paganism. The rest is history.

Even though our commitment to helping people evaluate church tradition in light of biblical truth has created a lonelier journey than we had originally anticipated, we are seeing an increase in the number of people who no longer blindly accept Constantine’s “big three.” They are digging into their Bibles with a zeal to find truth and live out their allegiance to Jesus and his commands.

4. *Consumerism often runs deeper than mission.* Over the years, we have learned that church members primarily evaluate the church by what they like. This should never come as a surprise since Western culture trains us to be consumers. Religious consumerism expresses itself in the questions people ask: “Do I like the children’s programs?” “Do I like the music?” “Do I get ‘fed’ by the pastor?” “Do I have friends who are like-minded?” Notice the common denominator: “Do I . . . ?” Moving from being consumers to “What’s in it for me?”—to becoming other-focused servants is one of the greatest obstacles missionaries—in our case, Simple Church missionaries—must overcome.

Ironically, there is hope in a demographic (the “doers”) who are leaving their local churches because they *do not* subscribe to consumerism. After valiant attempts to encourage other church members to move from being consumers to being missionaries, they have concluded that their

energies are better spent elsewhere. In short, they are done providing religious content for church members who happily consume week after week. An increasing number of Simple Church planters are repurposed “doers” (Packard and Hope 2015:20-23).

5. *Preservation of the institution or the status quo often takes priority over the mission.* Over half of the attendance in the Simple Church Global Network is comprised of people who, if they were not attending a house church, would not be within the circle of fellowship and discipleship that is typically called “church.” This is a strong measure of missional effectiveness. (See above under “A fully documented 52%”). Even when house churches demonstrate effectiveness in mission, many denominations and denominational leaders are skeptical of them because they are not able to control them, normalize them into existing policy, or guarantee financial gain.

To be fair, there may be no one to fault. It is a typical pattern found in systems development theory in both secular and religious entities. Why? Because built into most systems, is a conflict of interest called “my salary.” Institutions hire people to advance the mission or goal of the institution. This is to be expected. But what happens, according to Clay Shirky and others who have studied systems development theory, is that the original mission or goal of the institution takes second place as it is replaced by the new, first-place imperative of institutional preservation (Shirky n.d.). Top-level church leaders, independent of each other, have gently explained to me how the church will talk about creative models of reaching people, but when a model shows promise, it will need to “normalize” into the existing church policies or be ejected from the system.

Four Surprising Discoveries

1. *Male initiative and involvement.* Most Simple Churches have been started by men who own their own businesses or professionals who work in the medical field. Why? I suspect it has to do with real-life Kingdom risk-taking. In other areas of life, men fight for, defend, or die for a cause they believe in. They take risks and do what it takes to provide for their families. By contrast, Christianity for men in the free world has largely been dumbed down. Typically, they become passive spectators, pay their dues, and occasionally participate in low-risk church activities. Simple Church seems to touch a deep cord in men, giving them the opportunity to make decisions, shape outcomes, and take big and meaningful risks in God’s Kingdom work—something worth living and dying for.

2. *Cosmetic change and hybridization.* As house churches have gained popularity, house church terminology and hybridized models are being adopted by conventional churches at a surface level.

Example #1: Church leaders who oversee several pastors and churches decided to buy homes and hire employees to plant “house churches” in these houses. This is one example of changing surface cosmetics without changing the deeper theological issues.

Example #2: When small groups were popular back in the 1980s and 1990s, mid-week prayer meetings, Sunday school classes, and Sabbath school classes were called and counted as “small groups.” In the early 2000s “cell groups” became the new trend. And, as could be expected, small groups were now called “cells.” With the rise of house churches, what used to be called “small groups” and “cells” are now called “house churches.” But this surface adoption typically does not embrace the underlying theological revolution that re-empowers the laity to do all the work of disciple-making described in the Gospel Commission. Instead, hybridized models continue to (1) maintain the Constantinian laity-clergy divide, (2) preserve denominational control, and (3) feed the central worship service—which is typically referred to as “church.”

I suggest that hybridization will eventually result in inoculation against a genuinely effective model of house church evangelism and discipleship for the following reasons. First, I suggest that exposure to the house church paradigm through hybridized models will—eventually—be detrimental to both missionaries and to their mission field. Lay missionaries often rightly see in house churches the hope of an effective missionary model. However, if a hybridized model poses as a house church, but at its core retains a commitment to conventional church values, then they may become disillusioned and conclude, “This looks strangely similar to what we’ve already tried.” In this way they miss out on the usefulness of a truly effective model. On the other hand, spiritual seekers often rightly see in house church the hope of an organic, decentralized, and grass-roots space to experience God. But again, if a hybridized model uses the term house church, but retains the priorities and values listed above, the potential believers may be disappointed and abandon their legitimate quest.

Second, potential house church planters who, although they are open to a new model of mission work, might be deterred by the thought that “this looks strangely similar to what we’ve already tried.” An expanded explanation of this phenomenon is available on the Simple Church Global Network’s website (<https://www.simplechurchathome.com/additional-resources/>).

3. *Non-public spaces versus public spaces—the important psychological difference.* When a person walks into a grocery store, a doctor’s office, a library, a gym, a gas station, a shopping center, or a conventional church, he/she goes in with an expectation to benefit from and consume the goods offered in that public space. We call them medical services, public services, and worship services.

A public space offers a public “service” that I pay for and have a “right” to expect. After receiving the goods and services, I pay a bill, an invoice, a fee, a tax, a voluntary or required tip, or—in the church—tithes and offerings. As much as one may not like this description, it is an underlying expectation associated with public spaces. In contrast, when I walk into a private space—a home—I do not come to consume goods or services. I come to receive a gift of hospitality. I come because I was invited into a personal space. I come because of friendship. And that awareness changes everything.

4. *Children and the church.* The most surprising discovery of the past 15 years has been how significantly our Simple Church experience has benefited my own three children (now young adults).

There is ample evidence that young people are leaving the church at alarming rates, and concerned adults are grappling with the question, “Why?” Surely, there are many factors. And it would be simplistic to suggest that the house church model completely solves any—much less all—of them. But I offer several observations.

For decades, Sabbath School and Sunday School classes have helped countless children draw close to Jesus. And churches continue to provide programs, classes, activities, and social events designed to keep children connected to the church and to its mission. But children, like adults, are susceptible to the consumerism that has taken Westernized cultures by storm. As “little consumers,” children naturally ask, “Do I like it?” “Are my friends there?” “Do I like the teacher?” and “Is there a better option somewhere else?” Understandably, many churches respond by trying to improve the programs, activities, and events; but as they do, it takes only a short leap of child logic to conclude that “church is all about me”—an attitude quite opposite to mission-mindedness.

The same can happen in house churches, of course. A house church model does not fix the consumerism in hearts, but it does create a less consumer-prone church environment in several ways. As already mentioned, hospitality (whether given or received) helps to dispel the consumer mindset. Where there is no compensation for a service, it must be considered a gift. And gift-giving and receiving is the territory of relationships.

The simplicity of worshipping in small groups helps to reset expectations. House churches, with their smaller numbers of people, are unable to plan and staff events for various ages, genders, and special interests. House churches do, however, place a high value on relationships, even among people of widely differing ages, backgrounds, and walks of life.

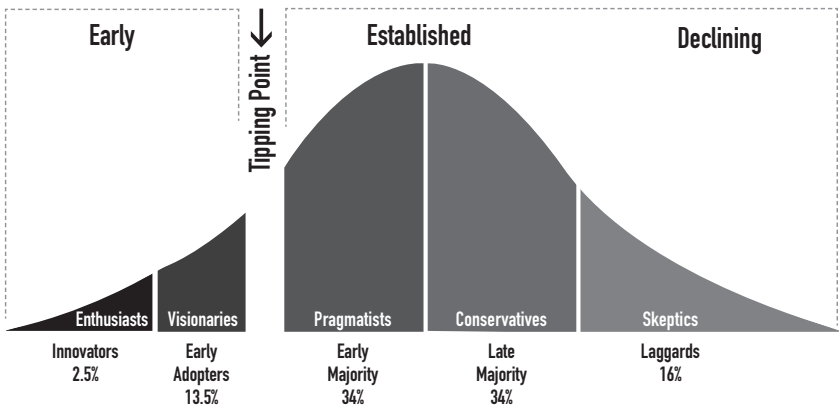
House churches have no platform, stage, or digital stage. This small difference is significant. While providing a practical way of making a speaker visible to a large congregation, the platform also subtly defines two groups—the presenters/performers and the spectators. Children are

often encouraged to show their support and participation in church by “being up front.” Some excel at this, while a large number feel more comfortable being spectators. In my opinion, both experiences fall short of the richness of participation and belonging that can happen in a humble house church circle.

Finally, and most importantly, Simple Churches are missionary endeavors. Without this commitment, I believe the previous characteristics would carry relatively little weight toward keeping children’s hearts close to God and his end-time people. When asked what it was about their experiences in Simple Church that had strengthened them, our young adult children mention being “all-in,” doing mission as a family, living it as a lifestyle, making personal sacrifices, discovering up-close how desperate is people’s need for God, and seeing firsthand how the Gospel changes lives.

Three Unanswered Questions

1. *Will a movement work in Westernized cultures?* This is the million-dollar question. In 2021 I spent ten days with leaders of No Place Left and 24:14, two Christian vision-sharing communities for the support of disciple-making movements. Those I met with are currently working in the United States, but key leaders among them have spent decades in non-Westernized cultures leading very large movements. During our time together, I asked one key leader whether he thought movements would work in Westernized cultures. His answer was very insightful. He picked up a marker and began to draw a bell curve on the whiteboard. Sectioning off the beginning of the bell curve, he said, “We have been working in the U.S. for only ten years. But if movements can be likened to a bell curve, we have passed the 2.5% innovative phase and are into the early adopters. We have no idea, however, whether we will be able to cross the tipping point and see movements at the scale in Westernized cultures as we have seen in non-Westernized cultures.”



2. *Will hybrids between conventional church and house churches work?*

Much of the drive for hybrids is an attempt to get the best of both worlds without losing institutional control. But hybrids are likely a temporary phase—one in which movement practitioners do not see much promise. Most hybridized models are promoted by conventional church leaders who are trying to harness the growth of movements and place it under the umbrella of institutionalized church structure.

What we are observing is that the spoken and unspoken values, success matrix, and goals between conventional church paradigms and movement paradigms are so different that, although they may appear to work for a time, hybrids do not gain long-term traction.

What will likely develop are dual-operating systems, similar to the parallel and cooperative operations of a business/institution and its skunkworks (Kotter 2014). Unique to these systems is their ability to accomplish the *same mission* without being encumbered by existing policies and expectations—spoken or unspoken. As stated on the Lockheed Martin Skunk Works web page, “Our team of dedicated engineers and scientists assume *it can be done*.” (Lockheed Martin Web page). And for those operating under the Great Commission, an even deeper conviction is that *it must be done*. What will it take?

3. *When will a movement of primitive godliness begin?* Many years ago, I was introduced to this quote,

Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His word. Many, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time to prepare a people for the Lord’s second coming. The enemy of souls desires to hinder this work; *and before the time for such a movement shall come, he will endeavor to prevent it by introducing a counterfeit.* (White 1911:464, emphasis mine)

From a research perspective, notice what is said and what is not said: First, “among the people of the Lord”—this revival is not limited to a specific denomination. It includes people in any denomination and people outside of a denomination. This synchronizes with the Revelation 14:12 concept of God’s people as “saints” (KJV), “people of God” (NIV), “God’s holy people” (NLT)—whose only common identity is that they “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (KJV).

Second, “many will separate themselves from those churches.” Any churches. The qualifier is descriptive: “in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His word.”

Third, “many . . . will gladly accept those great truths.” Notice it does not say people will become members of a denomination or switch denominations. It says, they “will gladly accept those great truths.”

Fourth, especially notice the phrase, “*and before the time for such a movement shall come.*” Could it be that God’s end-time prophetic grass-roots movement has not happened yet? Could it be the best is yet to come?

Takeaway: As encouraging, challenging, and surprising as the past 15 years have been, with questions for the future still unanswered, we must faithfully press on.

What We Have Learned About the Future of “Church”

If Western Europe is any indicator, the future of “church” *as we currently know it* in the United States is not hopeful. In addition to the church trends mentioned above in What We Have Learned About the Church Attendance Crisis, consider the church-scape painted by these statistics:

First, pre-Covid 83% of churchgoers tell researchers they have never heard of the Great Commission or do not know what the Great Commission is (Barna 2018: para. 3).

Second, pre-Covid the majority of Christians never shared the gospel (Earls 2019: para. 1).

Third, pre-Covid most churchgoers (53%) desired to build relationships with other believers, but not for the purpose of spiritual growth (Earls 2019: first graph).

Fourth, pre-Covid nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18-29-year-olds who grew up in church told Barna they have withdrawn from church involvement as adults after having been active as a child or teen. The void left is being filled with the religion of political activism on the right and left (Barna 2019: para. 1).

Fifth, one-in-three (33%) practicing Christians dropped out of church entirely during Covid-19 (Wang 2022: para. 3).

Some denominations claim they are the fastest growing, and indeed they may be. The fastest growing can also mean the slowest dying. But when one drills down, much of the growth comes from first-and second-generation immigration, which tends to confirm the conclusion that the indigenous Westernized Christian culture is quickly disappearing.

Takeaway: If the conventional church keeps doing what it is doing, we should not expect different outcomes.

What We Have Learned About the Rise of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs)

For me, 2017 was a game-changer on two accounts. First, I considered—and reconsidered—a career change. An acquaintance was retiring, and he had encouraged me to apply for his position. Just hours before my phone interview I received an email from a church leader in Australia whom I had met seven years prior but had not been in contact with since. His email was short. It said, “Proverbs 29:18.” So, I replied, “Why did you send me this verse?” His response was, “The reason I shared that was I felt inspired that the Lord wanted you to continue with your awesome vision of growing a house church network in the US and ultimately worldwide.” This experience became my *burning bush* experience.

Second, 2017 marked the beginning of a four-year study of religious movements. While not exhaustive, it did yield clear insights into the principles undergirding successful movements.

What is the prevailing definition of modern-day disciple-making movements (DMM)? They are fast-growing, indigenous (of the local culture), multiplying groups, made up of obedient followers or disciples of Jesus (DMMs Frontier Missions N.d.: para. 3).

Practically, this means *if*, within a short space of time (three to five years), we see at least four generations of groups, a significant overall number of groups (between 50 to 100), and a growing number of obedient disciples—There is no exact number, but likely you will see at least 500 baptized—*then*, we can say a Disciple Making Movement, or DMM, has begun. (Former Staff 2018: para. 1)

Beginning with this definition, much of my research was a quest to find the principle-based components by which disciple-making movements have operated or are currently operating. These components do not constitute a formula to manufacture manmade movements. Effectiveness in accomplishing God’s work is never by human might, nor by power, nor by advertising, nor by research—but by God’s Spirit (Zech 4:6). Only God can start a God-honoring movement. Recognizing this, however, I studied to find principle-based components to use in cooperating with him in his movement.

I discovered four principle-based components:

1. *Prayer*—a commitment to daily, fervent, old-fashioned prayer as individuals or in prayer groups. *Simple Church application*: We are supported by a global group of prayer volunteers who re-commit every year to pray for Simple Church for 15-30 minutes daily. Every week a group email is sent to highlight specific prayer items and to give updates. To be part of this, email milton@adamsonline.org.

2. *Expander Teams*—expanders are pioneering missionaries who live on the front edge of the mission most of the time. *Our application:* After 2 years of prayerful study, we recently launched www.ExpanderTeams.com. They meet new people on their turf by going door-to-door or to public spaces, raise up simple house churches, plan and present semi-annual city-wide harvest events, and facilitate weekly/monthly house church mentoring meetings for new believers as they launch new house churches in their neighborhoods. This is a revolutionary employment venture of the Simple Church Global Network. To learn more, visit www.ExpanderTeams.com.

3. *Sustainer Teams*—**sustainer teams are the missionaries (often new believers)** who launch new house churches in their neighborhoods. They are essential for keeping an ever-expanding movement from imploding. Sustainer strengths lie in the day-in-day-out work of coming alongside people for discipleship. *Our application:* Sustainer teams are our CORE teams, which begin and sustain new Simple Church locations. For over 15 years, Simple Church has shown effectiveness in training and coaching sustainers to do all the work of disciple-making in their local house churches. To access the online training, visit www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com.

4. *Convocations*—there is a long history of God’s people gathering for “holy convocations” (Lev 23; Num 28-29). These events of spiritual education and celebration were not to become exclusive (Deut 16:11, 14). In more recent history, during the Second Great Awakening in the United States, camp meetings served a similar purpose as both believers’ convocations and outreach events. *Our application:* This year, we launched our first annual Maximize My Home for Mission convention. Nearly one hundred attendees from various faith backgrounds, cultural experiences, and locations across the United States and Canada came to learn how to become more effective missionaries in today’s secular culture. Fellowship, networking, learning from each other, mutual encouragement, and inspiration to give Kingdom business our personal best were just a few of the hopes and dreams we had prayed toward in preparation for this convention. And God abundantly answered our prayers.

To subscribe to the Maximize My Home newsletter and be notified of early-bird registration for next year’s convention, visit www.MaximizeMyHome.com.

Two last items are worth noting regarding what we have learned about the rise of movements and the implications for a final prophetic movement of people who will keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12).

DMM DNA and Identity

The DNA of DMMs (Disciple-making Movements) include deep commitment to

Reading the Word
 Obeying the Word
 Immediate obedience
 Radical obedience
 Costly obedience
 Sharing the Word

Westernized cultures are typically void of religious persecution and therefore fail to understand immediate, radical, and costly obedience. But an extraordinary commitment to obedience forms the DNA of today's DMMs. This means existing movements are poised and ready to allow the truth of God's end-time prophetic story to sweep through them and go "to every nation, tribe, language, and people" (Rev 14:6).

Given certain parts of Christian history, when some Christians hear *obedience*, they think *legalism*. In today's disciple-making movements, obedience is rightly understood to be a love-based response from one who *has been saved*, not a means of *getting saved*. As Jesus says in John 14:15 (NIV), "If you love me, keep my commands." And one chapter later, in John 15:14, "You are my friends if you do what I command." It is all about a loving God who seeks a loving relationship with his followers, characterized by immediate, radical, and costly obedience to his Kingdom governance.

Movement identity is determined by the end vision. Currently, there is a lot of good discussion among those involved in movements regarding end-vision. This is similar, in many ways, to deliberation about mission statements and goals. But an *end-time* end vision must begin with, and ultimately be defined by, an understanding of *God's* end vision.

One of the clearest descriptions of God's end vision is found in the last book of the Bible—Revelation. To set the stage, it is important to begin with chapter 1, verse 1, "The Revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place" (NIV). Whatever we find in this book comes directly from Jesus.

As this prophetic end-time story unfolds, Revelation 14:6 clarifies that its essence is the "everlasting gospel," which is communicated, upon the authority of Jesus' Gospel Commission "to every nation, tribe, language, and people." No one is left out. All people are given an opportunity to understand and choose to be part of God's end-time story.

Those who believe God's prophetic story are *called out* by Jesus' end-time invitation (Rev 18:4, 14:12). God's disciple-making movement is invited to keep and obey the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This *is* their identity as love-motivated disciples of Jesus (John 14:15 and 15:14). And, as disciples, they are commissioned to make more disciples of the same identity—differing, perhaps, in every other way (nation, tribe, language, etc.), yet indistinguishable in their love for and obedience to Jesus.

What are people being invited to? And what keeps them actively engaged in the movement? People are invited to keep the commandments of God and have faith in Jesus, and they are actively engaged in the movement by teaching others to do likewise. As simplistic as these answers may seem, they are biblical and end-time relevant.

Takeaway: The current DNA of modern-day movements uniquely positions millions of people to embrace God's prophetic end-time movement, which is identified by God's end vision. Yet this will likely be neither defined nor confined by church structures as we know them.

Closing Thoughts

As “low trust” in institutionally based systems continues to erode into “no trust,” people are voting with their feet. The future for such systems in North America, and eventually in the Global South, will most likely continue to follow the declining Western European church trends.

With the rise of decentralized systems (a few examples being home-schooling, home birthing, open-source software, cryptocurrencies, and crowdsourcing), church leaders must decide how they will respond to house churches. Historically, church leaders have either rejected house churches or cosmetically adopted house churches in a hybridized fashion.

I believe there is a third option that is better for God's Kingdom. It is my prayerful hope that denominational entities will embrace a dual operating system and wholeheartedly recognize the re-empowerment of the laity to fulfill Christ's commission by doing *all* the work of disciple-making.

It is apparent to me that God is empowering an end-time, grassroots, disciple-making movement, neither defined nor confined by church structures as we know them, who are hearing and accepting God's end-time prophetic invitation and counting the cost of radical and immediate obedience.

Indeed, I believe the best is yet to come.

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Resources from Simple Church:

- www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com. A global house church network.
- www.ExpanderTeams.com. A revolutionary employment venture of the Simple Church network.
- www.MaximizeMyHome.com. A house church convention hosted by the Simple Church network.