

Introduction: Why movements matter

Let me tell you why movements matter to me. I walked away from my faith in my late teens and early twenties. It didn't take long for my life to unravel. I wasn't happy with God, and I wasn't happy without him. I didn't think living as a Christian was possible. Then along came an Australian guy called Bill Hallam. He'd come to know Christ on the hippie trail between Amsterdam and Delhi through a ministry called Dilaram founded by Floyd and Sally McClung.¹

I was impressed with Bill. There were times when I wanted to throw him out of my house because of the hard things he had to say, but I knew he loved me and I knew that Christ had changed his life. I hoped my life could change too.

I gave up running from God. Six months later I'd saved enough money to travel from Australia to Holland and join Dilaram. It was the late 1970s. I ended up on the "Ark" in Amsterdam. The Ark was Dilaram's discipleship community located on two large houseboats on a canal behind the central railway station.

There I learned how to experience the love of God in prayer and worship. I learned how to communicate the gospel to travelers from all over the world. I saw broken lives restored by the power of the Word and the Spirit in the context of a discipleship community.

There was Jean Claude, a deserter from the French Foreign

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Legion who had come to faith. I was there the day Interpol came to arrest him. I shared a room with two former members of the Irish Republican Army, both new Christians. One eventually turned himself in and went to prison. I remember Dave, a six-foot-five-inch Scotsman and “rage-aholic,” waving a hammer in front of my face and threatening to kill me. There were people with backgrounds in homosexuality, prostitution, Eastern religions, and drugs. Every year around forty of them came to faith and began the journey of discipleship.

I didn’t know it at the time, but Dilaram was a movement. It began when God called the McClungs. Floyd was in India with Youth With A Mission when he passed a beggar on the street and realized the beggar was a young Westerner who had fallen on hard times. There were thousands of hippies on the road from London to Delhi. Many were searching for truth but instead got dysentery, hepatitis, and addicted to drugs.

Floyd and Sally set up the first Dilaram House in Kabul, Afghanistan. They took in ill and drug-dependent hippies, nursed them, talked to them about Jesus, and saw many come to know him. Soon Dilaram Houses were established in London, Amsterdam, Kathmandu, and Delhi. Many of the workers for these houses had come to faith through Dilaram.

I never forgot the lessons I learned through my time with Dilaram; I discovered the love of God, the call to discipleship, the power of the gospel to change lives, the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance of prayer and Christian community, and God’s heart for the nations. These lessons became part of me and have guided me ever since. I also didn’t mind meeting Michelle, the Australian girl I would eventually marry, in Amsterdam.

God uses missionary movements like Dilaram to remake people and to make history. That’s why they are important to me.

What I would like to do is help you understand the dynamics of missionary movements by telling the stories and reflecting on the lessons they can teach us. I’d like to help you get in touch with

the dreams God has given you to make a difference in the lives of lost people living in a broken world. I believe God can use these stories from history, from our contemporaries, and from around the world, to encourage our hearts, strengthen our resolve, and teach us about how he works through his people.

If you want to be a disciple of Jesus and if you want to make disciples, this book is for you.

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Before we move on we should clarify what a movement is. In a general sense, movements are informal groupings of people and organizations pursuing a common cause. They are people with an agenda for change. Movements don't have members, but they do have participants. The goals of a movement can be furthered by organizations, but organizations are not the totality of a movement. A movement can have leading figures, but no one person or group controls a movement. Movements are made up of people committed to a common cause.

Think of the environmental movement. Where are its headquarters? Where is the organization or leader who controls this movement? The reality is the environmental movement is composed of an array of interconnected leading figures, organizations, and participants. They may not all agree on the precise nature of their goals and methods, but they share a common cause.

For good or for evil, movements make history. So much of history is the result of the clash of movements vying over their conflicting visions of how the world should be.

Religious, cultural, and political movements shaped the last century. Wars were waged over nationalism, communism, and Islamic fundamentalism. The civil rights movement, feminism, environmentalism, and the gay rights movement set the social agenda. A well-kept secret is that Pentecostalism, broadly defined, was the largest and most expansive movement of the last century.

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Movements are characterized by discontent, vision, and action. Discontent unfreezes people from their commitment to the way things are. Movements emerge when people feel something needs to change. If the vacuum created by discontent is filled with a vision of a different future and action to bring change, then a movement is born.

Movements change people, and changed people change the world.

What Jesus started

Jesus was the first missionary. He didn't start an organization, he didn't write a book, and he didn't run for office. What Jesus did was to found a missionary movement that would one day span the globe.

Jesus began his life and ministry far from the center of power. He was a carpenter's son with a basic education. He was not formally trained as a rabbi. He was without social status and wealth. What mattered to Jesus was his relationship with his Father. He spent long hours in prayer. The Hebrew Scriptures permeated his life and his teaching. He won his victory over Satan by surrendering to the Father as an obedient Son.

Jesus went from town to town demonstrating the compassion and power of God as he healed the sick and cast out demons. He was drawn to ordinary people who knew they needed God: fishermen, tax collectors, farmers, prostitutes, soldiers, beggars, and notorious sinners. His mission was to seek and to save them by giving his life as a ransom for them.

Jesus bypassed the religious and community leaders and called ordinary people to join his missionary band. He called them to be with him, and he promised to teach them how to catch people. He taught them as they traveled together by foot and by boat. He taught them as he ministered to thousands and as he ministered to individuals.

Jesus spoke to crowds in the open air. He told stories to groups over a meal. He talked to individuals alone. He communicated with power and with simplicity, trusting the Father for the outcome.

When Jesus' disciples had learned just enough to be dangerous, he sent them out with empty pockets to preach, heal, and cast out demons.

Jesus contended fearlessly with his opponents and never gave ground. He called his hearers to turn from their sin and to turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. He set his face to go to Jerusalem and die a shameful criminal's death. He entrusted his life and the fruit of his ministry to God.

God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, defeating sin and death and Satan. Just when Jesus' disciples thought the job was done and it was time to put their feet up, Jesus commanded them to go and make disciples of every nation. He did not offer them resources or a plan. He just commanded them to go and promised his presence through the Holy Spirit.

That's how the mission of Jesus became a missionary movement.

The church Jesus founded was a missionary church. Its existence and activities were an expression of its missionary calling.² Its members were fearlessly determined to win others to faith in Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah. Their mission field began at home in Jerusalem and Judea, and it extended to the ends of the earth. The goal and purpose of their missionary work was the making of disciples and the creation of communities of disciples. Disciples were people who turned from their old way of life, put their trust in Jesus, and obeyed his teaching.³

There is no other foundation for our mission than the good news of Christ crucified for our sins. Paul says the message of the cross is offensive to sinful humanity. It was offensive to Paul until he met Jesus on the Damascus road. Our mission is to proclaim the good news about Jesus in words and deeds by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The New Testament is a missionary document.⁴ The Gospels tell the story of what Jesus *began* to do and teach, and Acts is about what Jesus continued to do through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1). In Acts people were converted and gathered into new churches. The New Testament epistles were written by missionaries concerned with the spiritual growth of Jesus' followers in community and in mission. If the early church had not been a missionary church—sharing the gospel of Jesus and making disciples—there would have been no church.

Our English words “mission,” “missionary,” and “missional” come from the Latin *missio*, meaning “the act of sending.” *Missio* is the equivalent of the New Testament Greek word “apostle” from *apostolos*, meaning “one who is sent.” Jesus told his disciples, “As the Father has *sent* me, I am *sending* you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21b-22). The church as a missionary or missional movement is sent to carry on the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Alan Hirsch reminds us that, “The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus.”⁵ The church, in its very essence, is a missionary / missional movement with a mandate to take the good news of Jesus to world.

Today there appears to be some confusion over the terms “missionary” and “missional” when used as descriptors of the church. The words are identical in meaning. They refer to being sent by God into world. Unfortunately, when we hear the word “missionary” we tend to think of cross-cultural or overseas mission. When we hear the word “missional” the focus tends to be on mission in a first-world postmodern context. The mission of God knows no such cultural or geographic boundaries. There is only one missionary / missional mandate. There is only one missionary / missional church. There is only one missionary / missional movement that Jesus founded.

Mission has a threefold reality.⁶ First, there is a message: mission assumes a distinct view of truth concerning the nature of God

and the nature of salvation. Second, mission involves the communication of both truth and a new way of life. Third, the purpose of mission is conversion. People accept the message, are integrated into the community of faith, and begin to practice a new way of life—a new life committed to following Jesus and sharing the truth about him with others.

As a missionary movement, our message centers on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for our sin and is the only source of salvation for a lost world.

Second, as a missionary movement we have an agenda for change. Jesus calls all who would follow him to a new life of obedience to his will.

Third, mission involves the conversion of individuals and their inclusion into the body of Christ, which is the church, the people of God. There is no mission without the church, and there is no discipleship without the community of faith.

If this is what it means to be the missionary people of God, what do “missionaries” do? Eckhard Schnabel explains, “Missionaries establish contact with non-Christians, they proclaim the news of Jesus the Messiah and Savior (proclamation, preaching, teaching, instruction), they lead people to faith in Jesus Christ (conversion, baptism), and they integrate the new believers into the local community of the followers of Jesus (Lord’s Supper, transformation of social and moral behavior, charity).”⁷

We have the message of the cross. We have new life in Christ. We have a mandate to make disciples and multiply churches—everywhere. We are a missionary people.

Why we’re not all the same

I was corrupted in my first year of theological college. I discovered that church history is not just the history of ideas and events, it is also the history of movements. The church through history is in a constant state of upheaval and change, decline and resurgence.

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Christianity is a movement of movements—monasticism, evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism, to name a few. These movements can find expression in movement organizations such as mission agencies and denominations. Movements are one of the key means by which God brings renewal and expansion to the church in its mission.

Each new movement has a unique contribution to make to the kingdom—its “founding charism” or gift of grace.⁸ Monasticism modeled a deep devotion to Christ in the face of growing nominalism in the church. The Franciscans’ gift to the church and the world was God’s heart for the poor. The Reformation upheld the authority of Scripture and restored the truth of salvation by grace through faith. The Anabaptists emphasized the importance of discipleship and the believers’ church. The Moravians were an inspiration as the first Protestant missionary order. The Methodists and Salvation Army combined evangelistic zeal and holiness with a heart for the poor. The Pentecostals rediscovered the untamed power of the Holy Spirit.

Where would we be today without the influence of these movements? What would we be left with today if their contributions were erased from history? They all had their shortcomings, yet God was at work through them, renewing his church in faithfulness to Christ and his cause.

The great church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette argued that one of the indications of the vitality of the Christian faith is the emergence of new movements. The periods of the greatest vigor and expansion of the Christian faith are the periods in which new movements arise.⁹ The Christian movement is like a garden. A healthy garden is an ecosystem filled with diversity where new plants are always coming into existence, other plants are flourishing, and still others are dying and decaying. The garden lives on in a continuing state of renewal. It is through the birth and growth of new movements of churches and mission entities that God has renewed the Christian movement down through the ages.

In the renewal and expansion of the church, the breakthroughs *always* occur on the fringe of ecclesiastical power—*never* at the center.¹⁰ In every generation, in some obscure place, God is beginning something new. That's where we need to be.

Is this book for you?

If you're a follower of Jesus, you don't have to start a missionary movement. You're already in one. This book is about helping you to understand what this means and how to participate in what God is already doing.

When I wrote this book, I had some people in mind. I thought of Mark and Fiona who have seen eighteen people come to know Christ over the last year and are wondering if these people are the beginning of a church plant.

I thought of Oscar, a pastor in Kenya who has grown a church from a dozen people to thousands. Even more important, the leaders he has grown are now planting churches in the suburbs and the slums of Nairobi, and that's just the beginning.

I thought of "Pauline" in China, a young woman in her twenties who is winning her friends to Christ and baptizing them secretly in a bathtub. She has a vision to multiply small house fellowships in her city.

I thought of Wayne and his team, who go visiting door to door in their impoverished community every week, caring for the sick, praying for people in need, helping out in practical ways, and sharing the good news of Jesus. Wayne is wondering what it will take to reach this town and to send out teams into other towns.

I thought of Tim, the pastor of a large church in New York. He has a vision to see his city transformed by the gospel. He is growing leaders and sending them out to plant churches. He is partnering with anyone he can find who is willing to plant gospel-centered churches. He has a heart for the cities of the world.

I thought of Gary, who runs his own business and in his spare

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time has a ministry to high school students. Forty of them have come to know Christ. Gary can't understand why his local church leaders are not embracing this work of God. He wonders what he should do next.

I'm writing for people like these. They and others like them have also been my teachers. As I've listened to their stories and the stories of countless others down through the ages, they have become my cloud of witnesses to the God revealed in Jesus and his mission in the world.

There is no formula, and there are no ten simple steps. We are workers in *God's* harvest field. We are utterly dependent on God for our salvation and for the results of our ministries. Nothing can explain the spread of the Christian movement throughout history other than the power of God that is present in the communication of the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.¹¹

What follows are the stories and lessons of our contemporaries and of those who have gone before us. They planted and they watered, but it is God who gave the growth.



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