

Church Planting Movement Consultation/Seminar

Ashland City, TN, September 6-7, 2006, Notes by Jim Egli

In early September Missions International, hosted a small seminar with Victor John one of the key people in the Church Planting Movement (CPM) that is bring millions of people to Christ around the world.

Participants:

- Ed Krueger, mission executive for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in California. His team members have a goal of planting 17,000 churches in California by the year 2017—the 500th anniversary of Luther’s reformation.
- Doug Mann, a pastor at Belmont Church in Nashville, TN.
- Jasson C., Tanzanian Lutheran church planter in Nashville, who—besides working in Nashville—is working with his synod in Africa to launch a church planting movement to reach 1,000,000 people in Tanzania in the next 10 years in an unreached people group of 8,000,000. Already they are in the initial stages of this and they are seeing some dramatically different results from their past experience, and are beginning to see hundreds of people come to Christ—sometimes almost entire villages.
- Jeff & Todd, a couple of pastors from Grace Center in Franklin, TN.
- Jason Dail, a Lutheran Church planter in Murphysboro, TN.
- Jim Egli (me!), Small Group Pastor at the Vineyard Church in Urbana, IL.
- Dwight Marable, Director of Missions International, based in Franklin, TN. Dwight hosted the event at the lovely Missions International Retreat Center near Ashland City, TN.



Session 1—Victor John’s Story

My family was Christian and I met Christ myself when I made a commitment to him at age 16. The CPM movement we are involved in has seen over 1.5 million people baptized. They are in over 30,000 churches. The last six years we have begun reaching out to Muslims and have seen 15 imams reached and 1,000 Muslims baptized. We are having worship services in three mosques. We see a lot of miracles. We see healings and deliverances. I have also seen people raised from the dead. About half of those who come to Christ come because of a healing or miracle. The rest come because of the influence of a friend or relative. We are now reaching out to two new people groups in the north and one in the south of India. We have a lot going on but we have a lot of help. I spend 60% of my time in India and I am now spending 40% of my time helping churches in other countries—to-date about 40 countries. I am married and have three daughters. We are currently living in Sweden where my wife is from.

When I was a young man, I was entering Nepal with some Bibles and as I entered they threatened to imprison me for having Bibles with me. I began smuggling Bibles into Nepal and started lots of small groups, but I had no idea that these groups could be considered churches. I started working in India with Operation Mobilization. We distributed tons and tons of literature, but then I realized that this was somewhat futile because most people could not read. I went to seminary and pastored a church for ten years. Then I was invited to attend a meeting to devise a strategy for reaching the Hindus. The main speaker, however, did not show up. But there were two American mission strategists, one of them being David Watson. They had identified a group in northern India of 90 million people as unreached. I could give them more information about these people because it was where I was from. It was actually several people groups who shared a common language. This part of India is actually where the Buddhist faith started and it was spread from there. Other major religious and political movements also emerged from there. The area was known as the “graveyard of missions.” I was working there with the Swedish Baptists who were considered very successful because between 1910 and 1980 they had begun 28 churches and reached about 2000 people. But at that point the Christians had a siege mentality. They were cut off from the people around them and missionaries were no longer allowed to enter the country and they had not trained locals to take up where they left off. In some ways I could have relaxed, because I pastored a church of 500 people and had it made. But I saw the thousands of people around me walking into hell. I knew that there were so many unreached places and 99% of the people in our part of India had not heard the gospel. I felt totally helpless because no one else was concerned about this and the mindset of others was “nothing has happened here and nothing will happen here.” The only one there to encourage me was my wife. It was challenging to do surveys and to do strategy for evangelism because my pastoring involved a lot of time.

We tried lots of different things—the *Jesus* film and evangelistic preaching—and we got decisions but it seemed to lead nowhere. We had no aims, objectives or goals.

We started doing prayer walks with YWAM at 4am in the morning when the Hindus were getting up and walking to the Ganges. We did this for two years and saw nothing

happen. I began to think that perhaps that others were right—that nothing was going to happen.

We knew that there was a lot of demonic bondage there and that if we moved into new work that there would strong opposition and power encounters. And, indeed, sometimes people would throw stones at us or perhaps someone would start manifesting with their hair raising up or their tongues sticking out and hanging way down. Or perhaps people would start yelling at us telling us to leave. But it was not the people, it was demons.

We were concluding that what we were doing was not effective because it was taking us a lot of time and it was very demanding and draining and the results were minimal.

The Person of Peace Concept

David Watson was very helpful. He introduced us to the “man of peace” concept in Luke 10. But how do you find a person of peace? They don’t have a sign hanging outside their house saying “a person of peace lives here”! We began to understand the principle that the man or woman of peace is the person who God has prepared as an entrance point into a community. In India—and perhaps any culture—you need someone to introduce you to the community, like the woman at the well in Samaria. The person may or may not become a Christian themselves, but they are the doorway in.

Sometimes they are the people who ask more questions after we preach or after we show the *Jesus* film, or perhaps they are the people that defend us if there is opposition.

What is Discipleship?

We also realized that we needed to change our approach. We were wasting our time discipling Christians to be strong or to stay believers. But we began to see that the disciples were simply people who were following Jesus, even if they weren’t believers yet. Jesus’ disciples didn’t really understand who Jesus was at first, it was only later that they got the revelation of who he was. So we realized that actually discipleship often precedes conversion.

Discipleship does not follow baptism. It should lead to baptism. Our ministry should follow Jesus’ own patterns. Every time we do things differently, we get in trouble. If you were writing the 29th chapter of the book of Acts what would it look like? We have complicated it.

Discipleship and how you do church should be simple and natural. You should not need an expert like me or Dwight. It flows. I know this is true—that you don’t need experts—because people are planting churches in my area who really have no qualifications. You might ask someone: “How many churches have you started this year?” He might reply, “It has been a bad year. I have only started 25 churches.” Or someone might say, “It has not been a good year. I have only baptized 120 people.”

The man of peace concept was pivotal to our whole strategy. We recognize them in different ways. Perhaps it is someone who wants prayer for healing or someone who is inquisitive.

Because we are working in villages where everybody's business is everybody's business, we have tried to minimize the visibility of outsiders. So we turn everything over to locals as soon as possible.

Prayer is pivotal to the whole movement. Sometimes people are praying through the night. I visited one of these meetings last year. The presence of the Holy Spirit was so evident that people would bring sick children and they would be healed just by God's presence there, even without any special prayer.

What is Church?

Another mind shift took place in our basic approach. Our strategy had always been to bring people to the building, to "church." What does "church" mean? What does it mean to us? What does it mean to others? Is our concept based on the Bible? I had to confess that I did not know what "church" meant.

Ed Krueger: I am having to unlearn 35 years of how we have been doing "church."

Jeff: Perhaps it is changing from a mechanistic to an organic way of understanding church.

Victor: Our past model of "discipleship" was knowledge based. But Jesus said in John, "if you don't love one another, you can't be my disciple." So the Bible has an obedience paradigm of discipleship rather than a knowledge framework. Discipleship is NOT teaching people information but teaching them to obey Christ in every area of their lives.

What is church? Perhaps we need to ask, "how many people do you need to have 'church'?" If we want to know if there is a church in a new area, we ask simply: "Is there a leader?" And, "Is there a group of people that meet regularly?" If there is no leader or they are not meeting, we can't consider it a church. If there is no leader they are not going anywhere, they are just a blob. A leader always attracts people to himself or herself. We see the first definition in Acts 2: "a group of baptized believers with a leader who meet to worship, teach, pray, take the Lord's supper, who meet in obedience to Christ and leave in obedience to Christ." This is not difficult to explain to people.

If people have scripture in their heart, then they have God's heart and their heart is for missions.

Doug: How do you emphasize obedience without people understanding it legalistically?

Victor: We emphasize obedience to Christ, not obedience to church laws. We emphasize obedience in family life and work life and all areas of life.

When you do things right it has a ripple effect and naturally reproduces itself because it is built into their DNA?

Session 2—Creating Culturally Relevant Churches

Research plays a very important role in church planting because every community and place is different. When my children were small it seemed like they were given the same medicine—a red syrup—no matter illness that they had. But mission work is different. What is the community that you are trying to reach? How many people are there? What are they like? What are your goals?

How would you define the gospel? I had a lot of learning to do. I was educated and active but I had trouble giving a simple definition of the gospel. It took us a while to figure this out. We were unlearning and then relearning. We now say the gospel is one word. It is *relationship*. It is the same way with other key things. What is church? If we do not have a clear picture or if the picture is complicated, we won't be able to replicate it.

Even so, the culture is different in different places to just as different families look different but they are still families. So different churches should look different and have different personalities.

So if you are involved in church planting and want to see a local church planting movement begin, you must understand the local community. In the past we saw that our Christian culture always created alienation, because it always forced people to do things in a way that was unnatural.

But then our goal changed. When we decided that we wanted to plant churches that planted churches, we realized that we must create churches that are culturally relevant.

For example if I bow my head and fold my hands and change my tone of voice when I pray, that is exactly what the next generation of believers will do. Our Christian culture is so ingrained, however. It is like it is chiseled into us. I realized that I needed to plant the Bible into people and let it create its own shape in a form that could blossom in that environment.

This was especially true for me when I began working with the Muslims. I was already a very successful church planter with the Hindus, but the Muslim culture is entirely different. So we had to start over and again let the Bible take root and let it take the shape that was appropriate in that culture.

I became a Christian in the 1970's and I had long hair and bellbottom pants and when I came to Christ, people did not believe that I was a Christian. [Jim: His story sounds like mine. I had no idea there were Hippies in India!] Other Christians thought that I needed a hair cut because they confused cultural issues with the gospel.

We do not try to change the Muslim culture but simply to introduce Jesus into their culture. In this way the number of imams following Jesus has multiplied.

If you look at the book of Acts, you will see that the gospel works in a better way when it is brought to the family instead of the individual. If it is brought to the community it is even better.

So we decided to focus bringing the gospel to the family instead of just the individual. People told us that this would take much longer. We have found that it takes from six to eight months to reach a family.

So we are using the individual—the person of peace—to reach the family and then using the family to reach the community.

Dwight: We are in a similar situation in this country as you were in yours. Our church is at a distance from our culture and the culture is moving further away. How do we become culturally relevant?

Victor: Our churches used to have a lot of rules. You must do things this way or you are not doing it in a Christian way. For us some of the issues revolved around rituals surrounding life passages—birth, marriage and death. There are certain things that actually are demonic or evil in these rituals, but other things are simply cultural.

For example, for many years Christians taught that cremation is wrong and burial is right. However, in India, only the Muslims bury. Must we insist on burial? If so, we will need land and that will slow our church planting movement. So we decided that cremation was fine, but certain things in the rites should be avoided. If you look in the scripture there are actually no rules about what to do with a dead body.

There are also no rules about what to do when someone is born or what to do when someone is married. But there are guidelines about how to raise a child or how to honor your marriage. Why are there not rules and stipulations or rituals for these important life passages? Because the Holy Spirit knew that the gospel must go to all cultures and that these things would vary from culture to culture.

For example, in the Hindu culture weddings are very colorful and festive. In the Christian tradition the bride is to wear white. The problem with this is that in the Hindu culture the only time a woman wears white is when she is a widow. Where does this tradition of a white dress come from? Is it from the Bible? No. So we are not bound to it.

If we insist that people leave their culture, then we will have very few converts. It is the message that is important not the method.

Todd: Let's discuss a very basic question: Why should we even be concerned about church planting?

Victor: How many people live in your community?

Todd: 40,000 people live in Franklin.

Victor: What if all of those people came to Christ tomorrow? How many pastors would you need? How many people can you pastor?

Doug: Maybe 14.

Victor: Let's say you can pastor 100 in an American church. You need at least 400 churches.

Do you believe in the Great Commission? Do you believe in evangelism?

What happened when 3,000 people repented in Acts 2. They needed to be placed into churches, into relationship. And these churches birthed churches.

Reproduction is the nature of things. If there is no reproduction, you get stagnation.

Jeff: What is the difference between duplication and reproduction. You said we should not duplicate.

Victor: Every community is different, even if people are shopping at the same WalMart and eating at the same McDonald's, the people are different and you must reproduce things rather than duplicate things.

Ed: What are we thinking when we think "church." Is there relationship and accountability? Perhaps we are needed to change our basic concepts.

Jasson: As a church planter I had people coming to my church and they wanted our church to be like their previous church. I had to tell them that we are here to reach the unreached, if you want certain church things you should find a different church.

Victor: Our goal is that people become like Christ. We must keep this goal clearly in mind.

Lunch

Over a lunch of Subway sandwiches I learned from Victor that he has three daughters who are 22, 20 and 18. He moved to Sweden six years ago for several reasons: first, his mother-in-law has been very ill and needing the help of his wife, he felt like the leadership in northern India could grow more if he was no longer present, and as the movement got larger and larger, he and his family were in personal danger. He didn't mind being in personal danger but he was concerned for his children. Living in Sweden also allows him to travel more.



Afternoon, Session Three—Rethinking Church & Discipleship

Before lunch Doug, Jeff and Todd left and it was just the Lutherans, Dwight and me for lunchtime and the afternoon.

I want to give you another example of how we need to change our thinking. I was taught that Sunday was the Lord's Day. However, in some of our areas, Sunday is their market day. It is when they buy and sell and socialize. How could we take that away from them? I had to change myself. Could people meet on Monday? On Saturday? A few of them wanted to meet in the market after business ended. By removing artificial barriers like that we could get the motion necessary to create a movement.

For example, I have a friend who is working with Rick Coffin the Vineyard church planter in Delhi, India. They are reaching Nepalese people who are migrant workers in the city. They have concluded that the best time to do church is at 10:00 at night after people get off work.

Jasson: Can we create church planting movements in other places, places like North America.

Victor: You cannot and should not duplicate what we are doing. But the principles apply elsewhere. You must apply the principles in order to free the gospel to fulfill God's purposes.

There was a time when people were raising money to support Christian workers. But when you give money to locals immediately it creates a distance between them and others around them and it ends the multiplication of leadership because the funds cannot be generated to multiply ministry. So you must think through how you start things. If you ever start giving support then you are in big trouble and you have started something that you cannot stop. What if we had started that way? I would now have thousands and thousands of people to support. I raise money for training leaders but not for salaries.

Ed: What if we were interviewing you when you started instead of now twelve years later.

Victor: I was determined and knew that we had to change what we were doing. I started by calling a meeting of thirty people. I expected David Watson to come but he failed me and wasn't there. It was difficult and people were very skeptical. The only person there that encouraged me was a born again Catholic priest in his vestments. He listened to me. He said, "I have building I have funds but I don't have people. You have shown me how to get people." He remained Catholic and now has 10,000 people in his parish.

Ed: So you were by yourself, but you knew you had to do this. You were determined.

Victor: Yes, I had done my research and knew what had to be done. I also continued to network and build relationship with the initial core people.

Jason: How did you support yourself?

Victor: I had resigned from my pastorate but had some support from a mission team called "Asian Partners." The research enabled me to get the key components in my mind about my community. As I began to learn about these people and learn their language, they began to respond to me. When we had translated the New Testament, I did a press conference and made a big deal out of this. I wanted to see what response I would get.

The Indian government responded with a lengthy article one week later saying that the local languages should be discouraged.

I learned that an Australian lady had written a grammar in 1952 but I could not find her or find the book. One day someone invited me to meet someone and they took me into a room and here was this lady. She was making her last trip to India. I ask her for a copy of her book and she gave me her last copy and gave me permission to republish it. When we republished it, two universities began offering master level programs in the language and Bollywood began doing movies in the language. People began to see that we were on their side and that they did not need to leave their culture to become Christians.

We did other things that endeared us to the people. We taught about AIDS and other problems from a Christian perspective without preaching per se. This opened people to see that we were salt and light.

Jasson: What questions were you looking at in your research?

Victor: I was asking: Who are these people? What do they think when they hear "God"? What do they believe about sin?

Ed: How did you keep yourself strong in these earlier days?

Victor: It was very difficult. I had my team. I had my wife. There was and still is high accountability. I still tell people to confront me in any area where they feel I need correction. My wife has always been right beside me. I also had outsiders who gave me accountability and valuable insight.

Ed: Have you deliberately patterned your life after the life of Christ who had a close group of followers?

Victor: I worked very closely with my team but I have released them and they continue the work today without close supervision.

We started with a team of about five. There was very slow multiplication at first. After three years we had seen very little results, then things began to happen. The growth was then patchy. There was growth in some areas but not in others. The concepts took root with different people at different rates. After three years we had about 500 people then things began to grow dramatically. In some ways, it is amazing that it is still alive! Now it is really taking off. We try not to track it closely because we don't want people to be able to obtain the names. We have had the work audited three times. The Swedes have evaluated it once and the Southern Baptists have twice. The Baptists concluded that those who were trained by us had started 2.5 churches each. They actually discovered that more was being accomplished than what we had previously thought.

Jasson: Do you welcome foreign partners?

Victor: Yes, but only to do training, not to do evangelism. Having contact with others also helps our people realize that the body of Christ is bigger than our local believers.

Ed: Perhaps the most difficult mindset that we need to overcome to create a movement is change from inviting people to church to inviting people into relationship.

Victor: To create a movement you need people who are transformed and people that are not religious.

You need to understand that people grow in maturity in Christ when they obey. They do not grow by learning more information. They grow in relationship to Christ by growing in obedience. This is the framework that we work from.

In the past we used evangelism methods that were very foreign and confrontational. We would show up with a guitar and would start singing and preaching. Sometimes people would get beat up and felt like they were being persecuted. But actually they were not being persecuted they were being stupid!

Jason: How “charismatic” are the churches you are working with in north India?

Victor: We do not tell the church how to worship or in what ways they should be expressive. In some places the people are more expressive and then that is how the

churches are. In other places, the culture is less expressive and then their worship style is quieter. In all of these settings, however, you would sense the presence of God.

Session Four—The Seven Non-negotiable Components of a CPM, Dwight Marable

We wanted to identify the transferable principles that were at work in the diverse church planting movements taking place in Bangladesh, North India, China and Cuba. To determine this we surveyed 2000 church planters and statistically analyzed the results with Dr. Doug Grisaffe of the University of Texas.

Culture of Empowerment

The first principle is a culture of empowerment. From day one ministry is handed off. For example, in one of the China movements we found that the new converts led their own meetings with their friends from the very start. They are constantly pushing ministry out to the edge. Even though the person that brought that person to Christ is probably present at the meeting they do not take the stand.

The culture of empowerment involves several things:

- Modeling how to start new churches
- Assisting other new believers in starting new churches
- Encouraging the ongoing multiplication of churches
- Teaching people to be accountable to other Christians and to apply God's word in their daily life
- Watching over new churches and their continual multiplication

Curtis Sargent reports that typically it took three months for a church to multiply and produce another church. The shortest he saw was two weeks. (Victor says that for them the average is six months. They tend to multiply churches when they have about twenty people. Although some of their churches tend to get larger growing to sixty or seventy.)

Passionate Prayer

All church planting and evangelism involves spiritual warfare and draws spiritual opposition. Prayer under girds every successful church planting movement. People are constantly praying for the people they are reaching, for the new believers, for the leadership of the movement. Often people are meeting multiple times to pray for what is going on. Somehow in North America we need a breakthrough here. Because in these church planting movements the gospel is central, getting my personal needs met is not what is central. This seems to be more caught than taught.

Relational Outreach to Friends and Relatives

The gospel travels through relational lines. The spread of the gospel to unbelievers is not through witnessing to strangers. People are encouraged to reach their associates, relatives and friends.

Instantaneous Personal Witnesses

People are asked to immediately begin witnessing. This is pivotal to the DNA of a CPM. (Victor shared that they have begun sending missionaries to other places. The first missionaries they sent out were to Hindu Indians in Latin America. The only people working there were before were Moravian missionaries from Holland but they had gotten very little results, but soon the missionaries from India had 25 churches among those people and now they are reaching out to Indian relatives in Holland.)

The Bible is Foundational

The church planters and missionaries involved in CPM's do not legislate how people should do things. Instead, they tell them to bring their questions directly to the New Testament in order to get principles or answers there. In this way, people learn to depend on the Bible instead of on outside influences or experts.

Obedience & Accountability

Discipleship is not seen as a body of information to be conveyed but as patterns and principles of living to be modeled and imitated.

Church Planting to New Peoples and Areas

There is a high value and continual focus on how to reach unreached peoples and areas. This fuels the continual growth and expansion of the movement.

Thursday morning—How does this thing start?, Victor John

Here is how you do a church planting movement. You enter a community and build a relationship with the people. You need to serve people and meet their needs. Then build friendships and begin making disciples. Once you have disciples then start a small group. Within the small group find those who can make disciples. Then begin churches in other communities.

Ed: What is this supposed to look like for me? I already have a church, baptisms, small groups. Now what am I supposed to do? I am sure the church I have is not what you envision, however.

Victor: What is a disciple? You need to find others and build relationship with them and find people who want to be like you. Then you begin to disciple them. When someone says, "I want to be like you." Then you start a series of Bible studies with them, and share your testimony when it is natural. You must turn disciples into disciple-makers as soon as possible.

In a traditional church we deculturize people. We have found that if you do not place accountability on new disciples that within the first 18 months or two years, the person becomes sterile. The person's fruitfulness for their entire life is determined by the initial months of their life in Christ. You must challenge people and not make the gospel cheap like it is just something to meet their personal needs.

Ed: How do I form a church in my world?

Victor: I can't tell you but you need to do but I can tell you that you must follow the basic principles. It starts with relationship. But it cannot end there. You also must share the gospel. How soon do you share the gospel with someone you are befriending? As soon as possible. You might even tell them that you got to know them to share the gospel with them. If they respond, then you ask them to do the same thing with two other people. You ask to meet them and their friends once a month. You are glad to meet them. You get to know them and their families. You are guiding people into congregating.

Jim: What do you do to disciple this person? Are you using a gospel or material or are you just piecing something together?

Victor: It depends on what that person needs. If the person is an agnostic, you start by talking about God as a creator and build from there. If they have been in the church at some point in the past you begin at a different place.

You guys are filtering "church" through your denominational lenses. You can't think of church like you have in the past.

It really comes down to loving God, loving people, and working hard. This is really all we are doing.

Jim: My wife discipled a Chinese woman named Rose a couple of years ago. They worked through 1 John and the woman came to Christ and her marriage was restored. It was wonderful but it did not extend beyond that. What you are saying that when Rose was being discipled that my wife Vicki should have encouraged her to disciple two others. Is that right?

Victor: You are right. Why didn't your wife do that?

Jim: She didn't know to.

Victor: The reason she did not do that is because no one had done that with her. If someone had done that with her, she would have naturally done that with others. If she had done that with her friend Rose, then Rose also would have naturally done it with others and the same thing would be continuing on today. Obedience is something that is taught. It is something that is modeled.

Foundational to all of this is that discipleship is something that you do with unbelievers not something that you do with believers.

Ed: Where do I start with my alcoholic friends?

Victor: It is fine to work with alcoholics or homeless or orphans, but you cannot start a movement there because these people don't have relationships or networks. You can

reach people like that and that is commendable, but that is not where you begin if you are starting a movement.

When people come to Christ, you might ask him, “Who are you thinking of sharing the gospel with?” Or, “Who are you going to meet with as I have been meeting with you?” We make the gospel too cheap. It is costly and we need to give it with accountability.

Jim: Do they take offerings in the churches in the movement?

Victor: Yes, they give money or many of them give rice. Some of the local workers are supported in this way or they are supporting those working in new areas.

Jim’s Take

Our meeting ended about 11:00am on Thursday morning. Here are some of my thoughts.

The time with Victor messed up all my definitions of “church,” “disciple” and “discipleship.” I can see that the most pivotal thing about what Victor was saying was what discipleship is.

For us in established or “traditional” churches, discipleship is something of an afterthought. We have our buildings, we have our small groups and our children and youth programs and then we think, “Oh, yes, we need discipleship too. People need to grow. We need to offer some great classes.” Of course the dilemma with this has always been that our “discipleship classes” are attended by the people who already know the most and are the most committed. We miss the new believers and unbelievers and we pull our core people together so that they spend even more time with one another than they are already doing. Somehow we know that something is wrong and that something must change but we don’t know what. So we improve our classes and we add new offerings and rearrange things but underneath we are uneasy (at least I am!) because we know that things really aren’t working like they are supposed to and that if we are honest we don’t know how to “Go and make disciples... teaching them to obey all things.”

We are doing a good job of preaching, teaching, organizing—and some wonderful things are happening!—but in the back of our minds, and sometimes in the front of our discussions, we wonder how we are really to fulfill the great commission in a way that multiplies itself and creates a movement and truly changes people’s lives.

What I saw with Victor is that he was actually in a very similar place 12 years ago. He was pastoring a good church that others admired, but he knew that something was fundamental wrong and that something needed to be radically altered. He knew that God wanted to do something much larger but he struggled to know what needed to change.

I think that the most important thing he taught me and got me beginning to rethink is discipleship. He talked about a church where discipleship is actually the heart of the church. This challenges me deeply because Jesus told us to go and make disciples. He did

not tell us to go and start churches. Jesus himself also launched his ministry in Mark 1 by calling disciples at the very onset. It was front and central to his ministry.

Because Victor's churches begin with discipleship and their goal is continually to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples, following Christ and reproducing his life is at the center of all they do. When they start churches they are forming them out of groups of disciple makers. How can they not thrive and multiply?

Something else that Victor said in passing was also profound. He said that we must take our definitions from the Bible and that when we fail to do so we are always in trouble and messing things up. He said that when we let our Christian culture or traditions shape our definitions we always complicate things and make things ineffective. For example, "what does the Bible call a group of baptized believers with a leader meeting in a home?" Over and over again it calls these groups "church." We have allowed this to be redefined.

I am not saying that we need to change everything or that we need to do things exactly as Victor's movement does. In fact, he was saying that we should not duplicate what they are doing but instead we should profoundly rethink things ourselves—as they had to do—as we apply the Biblical principles in our own culture and our own communities.

Close but No Cigar

Another thing is also on my mind as I am pondering all of this. Relational discipleship of new believers has been something that Vicki and I have been involved with in some significant ways over the past 10 years. As I related in one story in discussion with Victor, one of the last women that Vicki spent lots of time with was actually an unbeliever at the onset of the process, just as Victor was commending. But we did not immediately get the people we were discipling to disciple others. We were like the person trying to win the cigar at the fair by swinging a sledge hammer at a lever sending a weight towards a bell. Often the contestant sends the weight flying toward the goal but it doesn't ring the bell and it's declared "close but no cigar." This is what I think has happened. Cool things have happened—we have seen wonderful personal life change but there was not mobilization. It kind of ended there as people then entered our church programs.

The power of discipleship was also illustrated for me in the past year. My pastoral intern is Rosalie Zachary. Last year at the onset of her internship, I told her that one goal I had for her was that she learn how to do relational discipleship. So with my encouragement Rosalie began meeting with two friends and taking them through the little Bible study book that Ralph Neighbour and I wrote called *Beginning the Journey*. In my weekly meeting with Rosalie we often discussed how this was going.

This small assignment that I gave Rosalie turned up being the most profound experience so far of her internship and several new leaders and two new small groups have emerged directly as a result of this little discipleship experiment. In addition, as a result of this Rosalie also has been enthusiastically training mentors and pairing them with new Christians.

But somehow until now I failed to see how pivotal this little relational discipleship assignment was in what has happened through Rosalie's internship and how it created significant leadership multiplication. Again, we still need to redefine discipleship but even the small ways we have done relational discipleship, have pointed to its power even if we remotely begin to get it right.

Finally, I want to point out that Victor emphasized that prayer is foundational because advancing the kingdom involves spiritual warfare. Again this means changing our basic way of doing things. The cool thing with prayer and discipleship is that once new patterns are set everything is built into the new DNA and naturally multiply!

Thanks for reading all this and for joining in the adventure of praying and aligning ourselves more and more with God's awesome purposes! If you want to do more reading on the CPM movement, you can pick up the book *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*, by David Garrison.