

Movement Implications For Missions In A Covid Crisis

Previously posted on the 24:14 ministry blog¹, this essay was replicated with permission on the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission's website, September 28, 2020.

In this article Dave Coles compiles stories from the grassroots, where the gospel is being shared in a 'whole of life' way by members of Disciple Making Movements. In the midst of the most trying circumstances, God is being glorified through the generous obedience of His people.

The whole world has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Different nations, areas and groups have been hit in different ways. A single virus has brought a wide range of results and responses. While fear and self-protection dominate many hearts around the globe, God's children in Church Planting Movements are responding by looking for ways to manifest God's kingdom in this challenging situation. As the saying goes, "we are all in the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat."

Movement leaders from various parts of the world have shared some of the responses God's people are seeing in their respective locations. My compilation of these accounts are as follows...

A leader in Africa says: "People are thinking about their neighbours intentionally—both physical and spiritual needs." A leader in South Asia shares: "We are feeding as many as we can because Jesus fed the needy; then we tell them that Jesus also gave spiritual food and ask if they want spiritual food. I've never seen so many people coming to faith as they are during this lockdown." Another leader describes the sacrifice of some, in order to bless others: "At present we have 30 people giving out food by sacrificing one meal a day."

This approach of open-handed blessing in the name of the Lord is bearing gospel fruit in many places. Another leader in Asia says: "We have started 35 new house churches since lockdown and fed about 3,000 people. Many of them came to Christ and we plan to do follow-up after the lockdown even as they disperse to other provinces. We are encouraging believers to bless neighbours, pray for them, and visit in small numbers. Every house church has taken initiative to bless their neighbours. Almost every day, believers are going out, and (at the time of the report) have shared with 4,000 people, and 634 have believed."

Again, from South Asia: "Our national partners have done a great job identifying opportunities to meet needs and delivering food. They have also taken every opportunity to share the gospel and have seen numerous salvations across the field."

There have even been a few baptisms in spite of the lockdown! The food distribution is opening a natural opportunity to share the gospel and follow up. Our leaders have been extremely careful and conscious of local restrictions on social distancing and in many cases have received special passes from officials to deliver food."

Another Asian leader reports: "Many of our leaders have been serving and making food for their neighbours, without us telling them; they were willing to share and saw the need." He adds: "We need to focus on discipling people; it is very easy to get [positive responses] right now but we need to feed them with the word of God."

Movement leaders are seeking God's wisdom for opportunities—not only for the present crisis, but afterward as well. One African leader says: "We are learning to be creative in moving forward and responding to the crisis by using all the opportunities to reach those in our area. We are praying that we will be well-prepared for the harvest when the crisis ends." Another adds: "Big challenges produce big miracles. We are planning out what God wants us to do after the crisis ends. There is a huge opportunity."

God is also using the crisis to connect movements with others in new ways. One leader reports: "In the past, churches with buildings didn't like Disciple Making Movements. Now these churches are being forced to the house church model and are asking us for help. We are out almost every day to help those leaders keep engaging their people. We are training them how to do house church."



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Another shares: “We have been given greater access to media by the government. In most places we don’t have internet, but we can do a teleconference with seven people. We meet with all of them every two weeks, and they meet with each other every week. We have a Bible study that can be shared over the phone.”

These are just a few of the ways movements are responding to COVID-19. We praise God for how He is working through His people to show His glory in the midst of this pandemic. The reality of God’s kingdom is being made manifest in very practical ways through these difficult situations. Here are some extended testimonies of ways the Lord is working...

One leader reports: “Recently our team found eleven Muslim families living without food. They were very surprised when our team brought them bags of food. After receiving the food, one man said, ‘Are you guys men or angels sent to us? For the past three days we have had no food. We were going hungry and nobody came to help us.’ Later, as the relationship developed, we began to share the gospel and the love of the Lord Jesus. Now six of the families are in a discipleship process, and we hope they will accept the Lord soon.”

From Southeast Asia: “Before we distribute the food we have packaged, we pray first, so the Lord will show us the right people to receive the food packages. We have received several testimonies of spiritual fruit [God has brought from this ministry]. For example, Mr. D had been a devout Muslim, but since we have been ministering to the people, he has begun to open his heart to receive the gospel message. When my wife read a WhatsApp message describing their situation, she immediately contacted Mr. D and asked him to come to our house. The next day he came to the house and began to tell me his situation. For three weeks, he had received no calls for his job. He was already experiencing economic hardship, even unable to buy milk for his child. When we handed him the package of staple foods (plus milk and vitamins for his child), he was very touched, and cried while thanking us. During that interaction, my wife and I shared the gospel message and told him that the blessing he had received came from Isa al Masih (Jesus Christ). After a while, Mr. D became more open and willing to put his trust in Jesus. We led

While we praise God for his work in these places, we note that tremendous difficulties remain in many areas. Challenges include lack of resources, fear (in some areas making it almost impossible to talk to people), government barriers, and difficulties in receiving outside aid.

However, as the above stories show, the Lord is working in and through his children in movements, to provide for and bless those in great need. Often, out of their own material poverty and spiritual riches, they are sharing with others, for the glory of Jesus and the advancement of His kingdom. In this way they imitate the active faith of the Macedonian believers described in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Their poverty wells up in generosity, to touch others for the glory of God.

him in prayer, and he is now one of the people we are following up.”

From Africa: “We want to distribute food to 2,000 [focus group] families (2,000 families = 12,000 persons) in the next month. We have already trained 500 families of Muslim Background Believers from that group, who can visit 1,500 families around them to bring them food and share the gospel with them.”

From West Asia: “Families who have received the food and supplies have shown deep gratitude. One family even asked if they could share what they’d received with others. They’ve referred others who are truly needy to the believers who delivered the food so that they can also receive help. Their eyes are being lifted off their troubles, to consider the needs of others. The believers who have distributed the food have been able to explain to the families that the living God, who hears their cries, is the source of the provision. They have been intentional about beginning relationships with those who have received the food and plan to follow up with those who have expressed interest in getting to know God. Their faith and the faith of those who hear about this work has been greatly strengthened. They’ve grown in compassion for the needy and have learned to work with others on the team to take action to meet physical needs.”

From other places in Central Asia, South Asia, and East Africa (where we cannot give specific locations and details, for security reasons), we are seeing tremendous response to various services. In some places, the believers are giving water where people did not have access to drinking water or water for washing. In some areas they are providing sanitation supplies (masks, soap, antiseptic, etc.) to help impoverished people who have to choose between buying food and buying masks. In one village, God specifically led a small team to bury the bodies of some people who had died from COVID-19, whose families and fellow villagers refused to bury them due to fear of infection. The team knew it was a health hazard, but God told them very specifically to do this, despite the rejection and fear. As a result, many of the families of these people wanted to know why they had done this, which resulted in a large number of people coming to faith.

Footnotes:

1. <https://2414now.net/2020/09/17/covid-19-and-movements-part-1-2>