

# **TO THE ENDS: THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN THE SYMPHONY OF MISSIONS**

Kayla Stevens

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For centuries evangelicals have taken part in a beautifully difficult symphony of multiplying disciples who in turn multiply churches. Within the last several years, a new type of missionary role has emerged in the realm of church planting, bringing with it both fruitfulness and hesitation concerning missions identity. The role of the facilitator in a cross cultural context seeks to empower local believers to equip nationals to multiply indigenous churches as part of a church planting movement. While some view this role as conflicting with pioneer church planting, it seems more fitting to view the incorporation of this role as an additional movement in the symphony of the missions strategy within church planting.

Symphonies are long, complicated pieces of music that incorporate various levels, crescendos, and harmonies, intertwining in such a way as to hear both individual melodies as well as an all encompassing drama unfolding at the hand of the conductor. In the same way, different movements within modern missions intertwine and build upon one another, working in harmony at the Conductor's instruction to accomplish His mission.

The task of the facilitator missionary plays a key role in the mission's symphony of church planting in developing indigenous church multiplication that is organic in nature, reproducible, biblically sound, and leads to the empowering and equipping of indigenous disciples of all nations. Facilitator missionaries are integrally connected to international church planting in aiding indigenous believers to equip others in a contextually appropriate way to grow

in authentic discipleship and indigenous reproduction that in turn multiplies growing disciples to reach the nations.

The role of facilitator within international church planting looks differently for various contexts yet contains four key fundamental values. First, facilitators begin their work with local believers in an area.<sup>1</sup> Unlike a pioneer church planter context which begins with tilling the soil and sowing the seed of the gospel in an unreached and unengaged area, facilitators enter into a culture where the gospel is already being taught and believers are growing. Second, similar to pioneer church planters, the facilitator's role seeks to empower local believers and equip them through discipleship in such a way as to send them out to disciple others who are faithful.<sup>2</sup> Their focus and vision reaches beyond enabling local Christians to equipping others to facilitate change.<sup>3</sup> In multiplying disciples, these indigenous believers multiply disciple makers who in turn plant indigenous, gospel saturated, and contextualized churches.

Thirdly, facilitators work primarily behind the scenes in a mentor role instead of a prominent role within the community. "The church planter must surrender the desire to have "up front" ministry. His or her primary role is behind the scenes, equipping others."<sup>4</sup> Unlike pioneer church planters, the facilitators' main task in apostolic church planting is not in leading essential ministries connected to church planting, but facilitating and overseeing nationals who lead and train others. Lastly, facilitators seek to equip nationals in such a way as to leave as soon as possible, teaching them to take part in the symphony immediately and then moving forward to facilitate indigenous believers in other areas. David Garrison comments that "rapidly growing church-planting movements place a high priority on training local lay leaders who provide the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Steffen, *The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 48.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2.

<sup>3</sup> A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 207.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 99.

pastoral care for the movement of churches.”<sup>5</sup> In such, facilitators take part in this role by training lay leaders with a clear end in sight of moving forward in partnership, but not dependence. Facilitators seek to engage in the melody of church planting movements by equipping believers from behind the scenes to step forward in obedience and Biblically lead others towards multiplying indigenous churches.

Biblically, the intertwining melodies of church planting movements are illustrated throughout scripture and incorporate many of the ideologies concerning the facilitator’s role in church planting. In the backdrop of the book of Acts, a majoritively E-1 and E-2 cultural context<sup>6</sup>, one begins to see the pressing need for facilitators within church planting movements who in turn move outwards to multiplying churches in surrounding areas.

One instance of this role taking prominence is in Acts 9-13 with the church plant in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas model the heart of church planting in sharing the gospel, equipping believers towards obedience, and moving forward to other areas. In Acts 11:19, following the persecutions of Jerusalem, believers spread to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Being sent out to the believers in Antioch, Barnabas saw their faith and purpose. Barnabas now brings in Paul, and as a team they teach, encourage, and disciple the new church at Antioch for a year. In 13:1-5, Luke explains that this newly formed church, after being taught and disciplined by Barnabas and Paul, has established prophets and teachers in Antioch to lead the church. Moreover, the Holy Spirit then sets apart Paul and Barnabas to leave this newly established church and press forward to Seleucia, Cyprus, and Salamis to proclaim the gospel.

Several elements of this account predominantly speak to the facilitator’s role in church planting movements. One of the most obvious correlations is that Barnabas encounters Christians

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era in Missions Begins,” in *Perspectives On the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 349.

at Antioch. The initiation of his ministry in this area forms around persecuted Christians from Jerusalem and the local believers at Antioch. Working in a C1 and C2 context, Barnabas joins them in sharing the gospel with others.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Barnabas reaches out to Paul, who had been converted a few chapters before.<sup>8</sup> Together, Barnabas and Paul teach, disciple, and equip leaders of this new church for a limited amount of time before being sent out to other areas to proclaim the gospel. In this case, Paul and Barnabas resemble a facilitator's role in teaching and equipping Christians before moving to other areas. They model discipleship and train in such a way as to incite growth in godliness and obedience to reproduce indigenous disciples. Through the empowerment of the Spirit and faithful obedience to the gospel, the word of God spreads through the indigenous church outward to other areas by the facilitation of Paul and Barnabas' teaching and equipping of believers.

As demonstrated above, the facilitator's role within the symphony of church planting remains imperative in contributing to the Great Commission by equipping indigenous disciple makers who in turn plant indigenous churches. In such, part of the facilitator's imperative need in church planting movements results in developing contextual and reproducing disciples who equip local believers. J.D. Payne rightly assesses that church planters do not ultimately long for church planting movements, but disciple making movements.<sup>9</sup> A facilitator's end vision is ultimately to equip leaders to make reproducible disciples who lead and multiply indigenous churches. This development focuses a concentrated amount of time on disciple making in terms of passing responsibility and leadership forward to the local leaders.

Church planting facilitators focus a specific amount of time on indigenous churches that seek to reproduce without the need of a foreign missionary. In such, facilitators press upon

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 11:22-26.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 9:30.

<sup>9</sup> JD Payne, *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 120.

church leaders to facilitate organic multiplication from within, and not from an outside leader.<sup>10</sup>

In doing so, facilitators encourage from the onset an element of contextual indigeneity, not allowing the gospel to be seen as foreign and separate but inculturated and for all peoples.

Contextualization is a twofold communication of the gospel. It incorporates both an outside-in mentality of a foreigner coming into a cross cultural context as well as an inside-out and up mentality of the gospel being inculturated within a particular people group, projecting both outward to other areas and upward in exultation and worship to God. Facilitator missionaries begin by concentrating their efforts on equipping indigenous leaders who will contextualize the gospel to reach their neighbors in C1 and C2 contexts. In contributing to church planting movements, facilitators equip with the purpose of not focusing on themselves, but upon organic churches multiplying outward without foreign dependence that in turn reproduces on its own.

Concerning the area of authentic discipleship in rapid multiplication of churches, facilitators urge believers to obedience based discipleship that immediately puts the gospel into the hands and responsibility of new believers. Although many of these believers start out young in the faith, Curtis Sergeant paints a vivid example of obedience based discipleship that speaks to young Christians. Like ducklings following a mother duck, he argues that disciple makers do not have to know every aspect of discipleship. “They just have to be one step ahead of another duckling.”<sup>11</sup> Seeking to teach immediate obedience to the Word and knowing their time is limited, facilitators intentionally seek immediate growth and obedience to the Word. In referencing 1 Corinthians 3, Lesslie Newbegin comments,

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<sup>10</sup> William Smith, “Can Short Term Teams Foster Church Planting Movements: The Greatest Blessing Is to Train Others to Start Churches,” in “January-February 2012,” special issue, *Mission Frontiers* (January 1, 2012): page nr., <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdfs/34-1-Story-of-STM.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Curtis Sergeant, “Planting Rapidly Reproducing Churches,” Church Planting Movements: Best Practices from Across the Globe, churchplantingmovements.com (accessed March 19, 2013).

The whole point of the passage is that they [new believers] had no right to behave like babies. When a group of adult men and women turn from idols to serve the living God, accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, they do not thereby forfeit their right to be treated as adult.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, too often missionaries remain in high ranks of leadership and, whether purposefully or unintentionally, perpetuate an understanding of control. Consequently, indigenous groups can turn to the foreigner for spiritual leadership and guidance instead of one another. Inversely, indigenous churches often depend too much on missionaries and in turn remain passive in not taking responsibility of the Great Commission.<sup>13</sup> In such, the facilitator role provides an important element to church planting in aggressively seeking immediate Biblical obedience.

The very nature of the facilitator's role challenges believers to obedience based discipleship, immediately obeying scripture and teaching it to others. "Each of us, including a brand new follower, is ready and responsible to lead others to Christ. Everything we receive we have an obligation to pass on to others."<sup>14</sup> This mentality stems from biblical obedience, maturity, urgency, and responsibility of both the local church in going and sending. Facilitating obedience of local leaders refuses to allow constant consumers who sit and listen, but never live out their faith in obedience.

Curtis Sergeant insightfully comments that reproducing disciples leads to reproducing churches as a matter of obedience.<sup>15</sup> Within the melody of church planting, facilitators provide a crescendo of urgency in obedience to the great commission and great commandment in rapid multiplication of obedient disciples who multiply indigenous churches.

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<sup>12</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (London: International Missionary Council, 1958), 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> William Smith, "Can Short Term Teams Foster Church Planting Movements: The Greatest Blessing Is to Train Others to Start Churches," in "January-February 2012," special issue, *Mission Frontiers* (January 1, 2012): page nr., <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdfs/34-1-Story-of-STM.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Curtis Sergeant, "Planting Rapidly Reproducing Churches."

Imperative within church planting movements, facilitators also incorporate an element of discipleship that stirs a vision of a transfer of responsibility. A key model to this approach, developed by David Garrison, shapes the outward application of how facilitators can implement discipleship that is reproducible and Biblically based within church planting movements. The MAWL approach (Model, Assist, Watch, Leave) seeks to turn the mission over to local leadership.<sup>16</sup> In such, facilitators keenly focus upon an exit strategy before entering their cross cultural context.

Tom Steffen's similar strategy in *Passing the Baton* urges foreigners to refuse to substitute pastoral roles for apostolic church planting roles.<sup>17</sup> Entering with a clear exit strategy in mind encourages the foreign missionary to implement obedience based discipleship and teach multiplication in such a way that empowers local leaders and then demonstrates how to send others out. Paul and Barnabas illustrate this by being sent out by the church in Antioch.<sup>18</sup> Because of this framework, facilitators keep the end vision in sight of equipping those who will in turn multiply disciples in the same way. Like teaching someone to ride a bike, it is not only impractical, but embarrassing for the teacher to continually model and assist and never allow the student to ride down the street by himself.<sup>19</sup>

A crucial and often overlooked element of teaching is learning when to let go. Facilitators must transition from leading with the melody to softly playing an underlying harmony in the background. However, part of knowing a facilitator has done his or her job correctly is watching as indigenous leaders take over and the facilitator's days of equipping fade into encouraging from afar. Their job is always temporary and their vision is always clear. Facilitating leaders

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<sup>16</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond: Office of Overseas Operations International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), 44.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting That Empowers* (La Habra: Center for Organizational and Ministry Development, 1993), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 13:1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Curtis Sergeant, "Planting Rapidly Reproducing Churches."

remains at the forefront of that mission. Within church planting movements, facilitators not only empower and equip leaders and encourage obedience, but also exit in such a way as to continue to model obedience to the mission.

Opponents to facilitator roles within missions raise many major contentions that are important to wrestle with in light of church planting movements. One weakness to the facilitator's role in church planting is facilitating a particular agenda or communicating the gospel in such a way that the facilitator incorporates his or her own ideas into leadership.<sup>20</sup> Facilitators, who enter an area with a specific Western agenda in mind and have a clear end in sight, fall prey to the temptation to facilitate their own ideologies of how things should be done rather than entering the culture as a learner. They seek to reproduce themselves, rather than the gospel. This danger can lead to a wrongly contextualized gospel, confused leadership, or syncretism.

Another weakness of the facilitator movement that Ralph Winter highlights is that it constructs a false ideology that pioneer church planters are no longer needed and the mission is almost complete.<sup>21</sup> In incorporating facilitators into church planting movements, some would argue that this communicates that the job of reaching the unreached and unengaged is almost complete and missionaries are no longer needed to be sent to C3 areas.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the facilitator's role in exiting or being sent by that church to other areas proves contentious for those who see missionaries who exit poorly, before they should, or leave without any plans of returning. If the missionary leaves before leaders are ready to take over, the entire work may fall apart or worse, continue in such a way that is theologically inconsistent and ends up spreading a false gospel.

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<sup>20</sup> A. Scott Moreau, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph D. Winter, "The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era in Missions Begins," in *Perspectives On the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 353.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 349.



In response to these objections, one must keep several things in mind that shape the facilitator's role within church planting movements. First, the symphony belongs not to any man, woman or organization, but to the Conductor Himself. God is a missional God who seeks after His own and uses different instruments and movements in His great work. He uses various instruments in different ways to uniquely blend His symphony together. While facilitators can be susceptible to the trap of facilitating one's own agenda, their driving force when circumstances are difficult and trials come cannot resort to individual ideologies or cultural understandings, but by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to remain obedient to the Commission and faithful to the gospel.

Secondly, the mission is far from over. Although the world is changing and the gospel is spreading, there are still many people groups and affinity groups who have never heard the name of Christ. Facilitators do not try to mask this important truth or undermine it in any way. Rather, facilitators realize that one of the best ways of reaching these groups is through the multiplication of indigenous disciples who are living on mission and in obedience to scripture. In his work *The Facilitator Era*, Steffen encourages that those seeking to be facilitator missionaries should first be pioneer church planting missionaries because the people they equip must know and be effective pioneer church planters themselves.<sup>23</sup> Facilitator missionaries do not fight against pioneer church planters, but learn from them and work with them in uniting harmonies and melodies for the glory of God and the sake of the mission.

In such, equipping for the sake of being sent out never leads to abandonment, but coaching and partnership. Acts 20 demonstrates two different accounts of Paul leaving churches and being sent out to other areas, but never abandoning churches. He writes letters, sends other disciples, and visits when possible. Part of discipling others and loving them well includes

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<sup>23</sup> Tom Steffen, *The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication*, 370.

setting them up for success and giving them enough room to learn when mistakes are made. The role of facilitators within church planting movements is not a flawless or perfect model, nor is it the only model. However, through this part of the symphony, in addition with other movements and melodies, it can lead to organic reproduction that teaches others to join in the mission in obedience to the scriptures and multiply disciples who spur on church planting movements.

Within church planting movements the facilitator's role plays an integral melody that laces together with other missions' strategies. In seeing nations join in worship and move outward in obedience to spreading the gospel, facilitators equip leaders in such a way as to facilitate reproducing discipleship, obedience based faith, and contextual ownership of the gospel within a culture. Furthermore, this type of missionary communicates with clarity and strength the imperative nature of sending others out on mission. Newbigin summarizes:

Now you are the body of Christ in this village. You are God's apostles here. Through you they are to be saved. I will be in touch with you. I will pray for you. I will visit you. If you want my help, I will try to help you. But, you are now the Mission—To deny that responsibility to the young church is to do it an irreparable injury.<sup>24</sup>

In seeking the health and indigenous growth of young churches, missionaries must do everything possible to ensure organic growth and reproduction, including passing on leadership and responsibility. The symphony only ends at the hand of the Conductor. Other elements are added. Some fade to the background, but all are heard and felt through the heartbeat of worship. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!"<sup>25</sup> Until He concludes the final note, may the symphony continue, may it crescendo and strengthen, and may the voices of the nations cry out in worship and adoration of the God of all nations and peoples.

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<sup>24</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 67:2 [English Standard Version]

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