

What is the #NoPlaceLeft Movement and Why it Matters

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After nearly forty years as a missionary in Southern India, Lesslie Newbigin returned to his homeland of the UK in 1974 to find himself to be a missionary there as well. While he had been ministering the gospel to a people far from God in India, his countrymen back “home” had undergone seismic cultural shifts ushering in a post-Christian era with unique challenges of its own. Thus, the repatriated Newbigin was once again learning to speak a “new language” and to interpret a “new worldview”. His missionary career wasn’t over. Instead, it was taking on new beginnings in a land that had in many respects, lost its familiarity.

Newbigin’s story resonates with me for many reasons. Although I didn’t live for decades overseas, I have spent a great deal of time ministering in South Asia over the last twenty years. Unlike Newbigin, I have kept my feet in both worlds (the US and South Asia) simultaneously for most of that time. Every time I would hear those words, “Welcome home Mr. Robinson” uttered by an Immigration officer, I knew familiarity was just on the other side of those airport doors. Or was it? Each time I traversed the globe something was unsettled in my own repatriation. I would spend weeks, sometimes a month or more, living with unbridled intentionality in places where I had grown accustomed to living as an observant learner. Overseas I would always make the most of every opportunity to evangelize, make disciples and train leaders. But when I got home, it was possible to wake up and forget that I was still on mission. I wrestled with whether or not to try doing here what I was constantly doing overseas. Would I be effective? Would those simple, biblical models be reproducible in my own context?

Eventually I reconnected with several friends that had served overseas long-term and, for various reasons, returned to live in the US. One of those friends, Jeff Sundell, started seeing some success in his home context, reaching those far from God and coaching them to make reproducing disciples. Jeff had coached both missionaries and nationals in South Asia to not only make reproducing disciples, but to plant reproducing churches. And now this brother was being used by God to catalyze similar movements in our post-Christian Western context. He wasn't the only one applying those missionary methods here. And soon a virtual movement was afoot via what has become known as the #NoPlaceLeft Coalition. *#NoPlaceLeft is a voluntary network of individuals and existing churches devoted to co-laboring in God's Harvest through prayer, evangelism, intentional and reproducing disciple making, gathering new believers into new or existing churches and equipping leaders for exponential engagement until there's no people or ethnic group, city or population segment lacking access to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:23).* This was a movement that I, and many others, had been praying for.

In this edition of Global Missiology, I have invited several people who have been involved in the #NoPlaceLeft movement to share from their knowledge and experiences. One of the architects of many aspects of the vision and tools shared in the coalition is a brother named, Nathan Shank. Nathan had served under Jeff's leadership in South Asia for a season, but in a very short time became a catalytic leader in his own right. Nathan helped put ideas and methodologies to paper authoring "Four Fields of Kingdom Growth". Shank has contributed one of our Featured Articles for this edition entitled, "NoPlaceLeft – Strategic Priorities for Mission". Shank lays a solid biblical/theological foundation for the priorities that have become central to the movement in every context.

The second of our Featured Articles is by an American pastor, Aaron Colyer, who has wrestled with the implications of a #NoPlaceLeft strategy on the legacy church he leads in Roswell, NM. Aaron's humility and insights are quite encouraging as he shares how empowering catalytic leaders and sending them out from his congregation has actually served to create a leadership engine within his church. If you're a pastor, or member of a local church in the West, we think you'll find Colyer's article to be extremely beneficial.

In our Contemporary Practice section of the journal I have three very practical articles. The first flows naturally from Colyer's article and is entitled, "Apostolic Leaders: A Common Misconception of the #NoPlaceLeft Movement". Dr. Dave Miller served on staff in a legacy church model but has more recently implemented a #NoPlaceLeft strategy planting a network of small catalytic churches in the Oklahoma City area. Miller has found that often his pastor friends write such a catalytic movement off because of assumptions that are most often misguided. Miller asserts that the Western Christian landscape must not fear the biblical concept of apostolic leadership in our context. Next in this section is a very helpful article by #NoPlaceLeft practitioners/coaches Chuck Woods and Carter Cox. These two men give a brief summary of the concepts and processes they utilize in both personal implementation and coaching of networks here in the US. The last submission in this section doesn't deal directly with a #NoPlaceLeft strategy, but instead looks at the broader concept of engaging in marketplace ministry in a Romanian context. Cameron Armstrong, Jeff Cardell and Țara M. co-authored "Vocational Witness in the Romanian Workplace: Realities and Responsibilities", an article partially based upon case studies among Romanian Christians attempting to live like missionaries in their vocational circles of influence. The questions and concerns raised in their article are very similar to those being faced by the everyday missionaries across the #NoPlaceLeft Coalition.

Finally, this edition concludes with two pertinent book reviews. Both Steve Addison and Elbert Smith are cited often throughout the #NoPlaceLeft network because their respective books lay both biblical bases and practical out workings for the movement's foundational principles. Appropriately, both books are reviewed by men working in or with the #NoPlaceLeft Coalition. Justin White is the coordinator for the movement in the Raleigh-Durham, NC area and Robby Christmas is a North American Mission Board missionary in South FL, home to one of the most developed networks.

As always, we hope that you will enjoy the issue. But most of all, we pray that you'll be challenged to labor in the power of the Holy Spirit until there is truly no place left – meaning the gospel has saturated the culture and reproducing disciples are being made to the 4th generation and beyond!