

A Movement of God Among the Bhojpuri of North India

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None of us, in our wildest dreams, ever thought we would witness what was happening. We planned on establishing a single "beachhead" church where there was none. We had no plans for seeing hundreds or thousands of churches started. We didn't think it was possible in the places we were trying to reach, for they had demonstrated great resistance to the gospel. We were doing everything we could think of in hopes that something would work and at least one church would get started.

Failure

God, I can't plant churches anymore. I didn't sign on to love people, train people, send people and get them killed.

Six men that I had worked with had been martyred over the last 18 months.

I can't live in the area you called me to reach.

The Indian government expelled our

family from the country. Over 2500 miles and an ocean separated our house in Singapore from the Bhojpuri people in North India.

The task is too big.

There were 80 million Bhojpuri living in an area known as the "graveyard of missions and missionaries."

There isn't enough help.

There were only 27 evangelical churches in the area. They struggled to survive. Less than 1000 believers lived among the Bhojpuri at that time.

Take away my call. I will go back to the States. I'm good at business. I will give lots of money to missions. Let someone else plant churches. Let me go. Release me from my call.

Every day for two months we had the same conversation. Every day I went to my office, sat in the dark and begged God to take away my call. And every day He refused.

Fine. You have to teach me how to plant

churches. I cannot believe that you would call someone to a task without telling them how to do it. Show me in Your Word how you want me to reach these people. If you show me, I will do it.

This was my covenant with God. This is what started my part in His work among the Bhojpuri.

New Ideas

God upheld His part of our covenant. Over the next year, He led me through Scripture and brought my attention to things I had read, but never understood—at least in this context. Patterns emerged and new thoughts about church, making disciples and church planting came to life.

I prayed for five Indian men to help develop these ideas in North India. I met the first one at a secret forum gathered in India to discuss evangelizing Hindu peoples. They invited me to present some of my ideas. As I talked, they started leaving. One by one, two by two, sometimes five at a time, people got up and left the room. They thought I was crazy! By the end of the day, only one remained. His name was Victor John.

"I believe what you're saying," he told me, "I can see it too."

We talked long into the night and became friends. Victor became the first to help me develop these ideas. Over the next year, three other men emerged to work with me.

"Lord," I prayed, "Where is the fifth man? Where is the one we need to complete our team?"

Now, this was in the days when people still wrote letters. I got stacks of them every day. In Singapore the mailmen rode motor scooters that had a very distinct sound. I heard the mailman putter up to my gate and drop the mail in the box. That day I got a letter from someone I didn't know in India.

"Brother David," it began, "You don't know me, but I feel God telling me that I should become your disciple. Tell me what to do and I will do it." Here was the fifth member of my team. But God didn't give me the man I prayed for. You see, a woman wrote the letter I got that day.

Over the next few years we struggled as we implemented the things God taught us.

Our first church planted with this new methodology didn't happen until two years after I met Victor. In fact, the mission organization I worked for threatened to fire me each year during my annual review.

"You're not doing your job," they said.

"Give me time," I said. "We're trying something new. Trust me." And for some reason, they did.

All of a sudden, we saw eight churches planted in one year. The next year, there were 48 new churches planted. The year after that, 148 new churches; and then 327; and then 500. In the fifth year, we saw more than 1000 new churches planted!

After the fifth year, my mission organization called me. "You must be mistaken," they insisted. "No one can plant 1000 churches in one year. We didn't believe 500, but we certainly don't believe 1000!"

"Come and see," I told them. And they did. A formal survey of the work among the Bhojpuri showed that our team actually under-reported the number of churches planted in the area! Things were exploding!

And things are still exploding.

Persistent Prayer

Without persistent prayer, I am convinced there wouldn't be a movement among the Bhojpuri.

I recently sat in a room with the top Bhojpuri church planters. Each of these church planters and their teams planted at least 50 churches per year. One team planted 500 churches the year before. A research group, engaged to verify our numbers, wondered about possible common threads in what they saw in church planting among the Bhojpuri. They started asking questions to see if they could discover common elements present among church planters.

They asked, "How much time do you spend in prayer?"

As they went around the room reporting, my jaw dropped. Team leaders spent an average of three hours a day in personal prayer. After that, they spent another three hours praying with their teams everyday. One day a week the leaders fasted and prayed. Their teams spent one weekend a month fasting and praying.

Many of these leaders maintained secular jobs while engaged in their church planting. They got up to pray at 4 A.M. and were at work by 10 A.M.

James tells us: "The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful" (James 5:16b, *HCSV*). James was right. Just look at the Bhojpuri.

Obedience-Based Discipleship

A few years ago I sat in a room with several Bhojpuri church planters. Going around the room, each church planter reported the number of churches their team planted over the past year. When it was his turn, the oldest man in the room, about 70 years old, spoke up: "We planted 40 churches this past year."

That blew me away! I crossed the room and sat at his feet. "Brother, I need to learn from you. Teach me about church planting."

He looked puzzled and replied, "It's not hard. Every morning my great niece reads to me from the Bible for one hour—I can't read so she reads for me. Then I think about what she read until lunch. I think about what it means and what God wants our family to do. When everyone comes in from the field for lunch, I tell them what God said through His Word to our family. Then I tell them to tell everyone they know what God said to our family that day. And they do. That's all."

An independent organization surveyed the Bhojpuri a few years back. They discovered that tenth generation Bhojpuri Christians, even among illiterate peoples, were just as strong and spiritually mature as Christians from the first generation. In other words, the gospel traveled from person to person, without being diluted or compromised, to the tenth person (tenth generation).

We teach every church planter and every believer in our ministry something very simple: If the Bible says "Do it," then you must do it. If the Bible says "Don't do it," then you don't do it. We also tell them they must pass everything they learn to someone else as soon as possible—the same day if they can. This cycle of hearing, obeying and sharing develops mature believers and fuels the movement among the Bhojpuri.

We noticed an interesting side effect of obedience-based discipleship. In most

Bhojpuri churches, members from the highest to the lowest castes worship together. We never taught them about integration. Other ministries in India made caste an issue. They ended up with high caste churches and low caste churches. All we did was teach them to obey the Word. Their obedience allowed them, perhaps even compelled them, to worship together.

Obedience-based discipleship is the core of the movement among the Bhojpuri. You cannot have a movement if you don't obey God's Word.

Person of Peace

An old man sat on the edge of the road approaching the village. When he saw me, he seemed startled. He slowly stood up and came to meet me.

"Finally!" he exclaimed. "You are finally here." Before I could say anything he took my arm and pulled me into the village.

"Here is the man I told you about." He told people as pulled me along. "Here is the man I dreamed about every night for the last 20 years. My dreams told me that we must listen to everything this man tells us."

I shared the gospel and a church now meets in that village. God is at work in people's hearts, even before we walk into their lives. According to this man, God told him 20 years before that I was coming to his village. Twenty years prior to that moment, I was studying to be an engineer. I had no desire and no call at that time to be a minister or a church planter.

Bhojpuri church planters look for persons of peace—people God prepares to receive the gospel—every time they enter a village (Luke 10). They usually identify the person of peace within a few hours of entering the village. Some are obvious, like the old man in my story. Some only identify themselves after listening to the church planters talk for a while. When they find the person of peace, the church planters build a relationship with the family and eventually go to their home and start a Discovery Bible Study.

If the church planters do not find a person of peace, they move to another village. In about six months to one year, other teams come back to see if anyone is ready to hear the gospel.

Planting churches is easier if you're

working with God and the people He has prepared, rather than trying to force the gospel on people who aren't ready.

We Are Millionaires

A couple of years ago I sat down with Victor John. "I am a millionaire," he said.

"What do you mean?"

He grinned. "This year we baptized the

one millionth Bhojpuri into the Kingdom. In God's economy, that makes me a millionaire."

I couldn't stop the tears. Over one million new brothers and sisters over 12 years—over 40,000 new churches.

I had no idea that people would look back on what God did with my failure and call it a "movement." I never dreamed He would make me a millionaire. ☺
