# EKBALLO

**SPECIAL EDITION**

# THE JOURNEY TO EVERY TRIBE

Building a Sustainable
Mission Among the Unreached

# EKBALLO

### THE MAGAZINE OF TO EVERY TRIBE

### TO EVERY TRIBE'S MISSION

To Every Tribe exists to extend the worship of
Christ among all peoples by mobilizing the church,
training disciple-makers, and sending missionary
teams to plant churches among the unreached.

### WHAT DOES EKBALLO MEAN?

*Ekballo* is the Greek word for propel, thrust out, and fling.
It is the word for send out used by Christ in Matthew 9:38
and the word used for cast out in Matthew 10:1.

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# THE JOURNEY TO EVERY TRIBE

## Building a Sustainable
## Mission Among the Unreached

**BY DR. STEVE LESTON**

*President & CEO of To Every Tribe*

# INTRODUCTION:
# MISSION TO THE UNREACHED

Bringing the gospel to the unreached is a motivating factor for all missionaries. When we consider the billions of people in the world who have no churches, missionaries, or ministry in their community or region, it stirs many of us to get on a plane and go to them!

Ralph Winters in his 1974 address to the *Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism* (a missiology conference) introduced the notion of the "unreached." Since then, many mission agencies and missionaries have changed their strategy from managing mission stations to sending missionaries to plant churches among the unreached. That conference was a game changer for missions. In 1974, the idea of reaching the unreached was largely a foreign concept. Today, it is not only common, it has in many cases become a litmus test for churches to decide where they will support and send their missionaries.

There is, of course, much debate about the exactness of the number of unreached peoples in the world, but regardless of what the numbers really are, the truth is there remains billions

# UNREACHED PEOPLES

**7.6 BILLION** People in the World

**3 BILLION** People live among over

**7 THOUSAND** unreached people groups and

**1.6 BILLION** are completely unevangelized

## RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

**2.3 BILLION** Christians of which

**748 MILLION** are Evangelical Christians

**1.7 BILLION** Muslims

**1.1 BILLION** Hindus

**979 MILLION** Non-Religious

**488 MILLION** Buddhist

**671 MILLION** in Ethnic Religions

**103 MILLION** Other or Unknown

Sources: joshuaproject.net, census.gov, aboutmissions.org, peoplegroups.org, grd.imb.org, & grd.center

> "...there remains billions of people without access to the gospel and thousands of regions in the world with no healthy, reproducing, indigenous churches."

of people without access to the gospel and thousands of regions in the world with no healthy, reproducing, indigenous churches. For this reason, the Lord has sent out thousands of people to the nations to bring the gospel to the unreached.

It might be helpful to define the term "unreached." For some, this is a new term, for others, this term is well known. The working definition we have for "unreached" is: "A people group with their own region, language, culture, and customs that has no church that can reach their own people with the gospel without outside help."
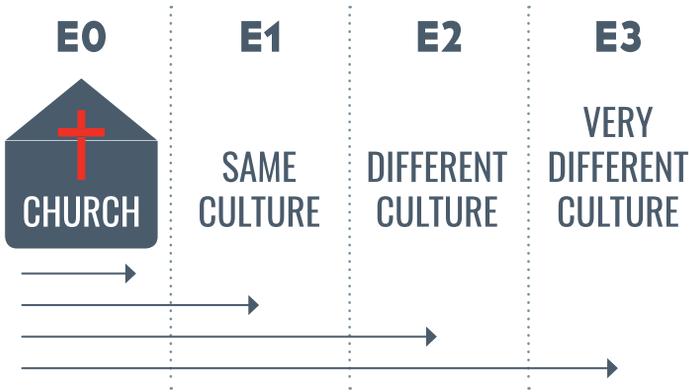
Some like to use a percentage to identify an unreached people group, suggesting that if two percent or less of the population are believers, then the place is unreached. Others look at the capacity of any believers or churches in that region to actually make a kingdom impact. At To Every Tribe, if we look at a community or region to work in, we ask ourselves one question: is there a church that has the capacity to reach this community and surrounding communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ without outside help? We are not looking at percentages as a criteria for determining where we send. Instead, we are looking at the capacity of the peo-

ple themselves to carry out the work of the Great Commission. If there is no church able to do this, then we would consider that place unreached and would consider sending a missionary team to plant churches.

It was Winters who reawakened this basic concept of missions and challenged the church to embrace this approach to missionary work. Two helpful illustrations that came out of Winter's 1974 talk are very simple measurements called the *E-Scale* and the *P-Scale*. These scales help demonstrate the cultural distances between the announcers and hearers of the gospel and what it requires of each to move toward each other. In other words, when a missionary crosses a culture to find the unreached, there is a gap between the missionary and the local person. Winters wanted to measure that gap and did so with these two simple scales.

The purpose of the *E-Scale* is for the missionary to gauge the cultural distance that they must cross when engaging in gospel work. The greater the gap the more that must be done to close that gap. Pioneer missionary work is a work through which the missionary is crossing from their own culture, with the Christian roots that they have, into a brand new culture, with no Christian

# E-SCALE

| E0 | E1 | E2 | E3 |
|----|----|----|----|
| CHURCH | SAME CULTURE | DIFFERENT CULTURE | VERY DIFFERENT CULTURE |

**E0** **EVANGELISM** takes place within the church to people who already attend and/or participate in a local church.

**E1** **EVANGELISM** takes place outside of the church, but to people within the same culture. This includes evangelizing people who are not part of or participate in a local church, but have similar culture and worldview to those that do. This would include outreach to neighbors, family members, and others within your community.

**E2** **EVANGELISM** takes place in a different culture. This is reaching out to those who may or may not speak the same language but have different backgrounds. An example of this would be evangelism done in the context of a migrant community. In this context, someone from a different culture has moved to the culture of the believer so a large portion of the culture crossing was already done by the non-believer.

**E3** **EVANGELISM** takes place when the message of Christ is taken to cultures very different from that of the believer. This entails a missionary leaving their home country and moving to a people group of a completely different culture that has no understanding or grounding in the gospel. This is reaching out to those who have never heard of Jesus or who have been inoculated to Christianity by overexposure.

# P-SCALE

| P3 | P2 | P1 | P0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| VERY DIFFERENT CULTURE | DIFFERENT CULTURE | SAME CULTURE | CHURCH |
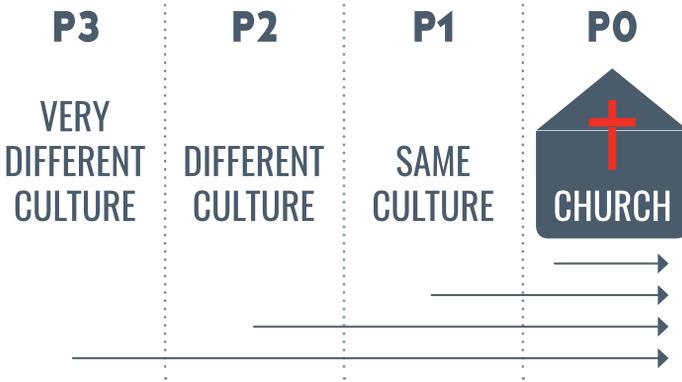
**P0 PEOPLE** are those who become believers in the church and already possess a basic understanding of what a new life in Christ calls them to become.

**P1 PEOPLE** are those who understand the basic tenets of the church and could "fit in" at a local church with some small adjustments. They don't know or use the church vocabulary, yet are generally familiar with the church life as they have had some exposure to Christian teaching in various settings such as weddings and funerals. However, they do fit within the same cultural framework of many of the people who attend a local church. Therefore, the call of the gospel is not totally radical.

**P2 PEOPLE** are those who, in order to belong to a church, would have to give up much of their cultural identity. Becoming a Christian will require a significant loss of friendships and possibly family ties. These are people who must cross barriers of culture, race, and identity in order to join a church and need help to do this from other believers.

**P3 PEOPLE** are those whose only understanding of the gospel and church have come from the missionaries that have been sent to them. They do not understand what goes on in a church and, therefore, are slow to participate. The most obvious and easy to understand examples of P3 are indigenous tribes who speak a language that has no Christian words, meanings, or ethical ideas or concepts. They come from a world where they have no understanding of the concept of "doing" church.

> **"Since pioneer church planting requires both the missionary and the new believer to cross cultures, we must consider this when beginning a missionary venture into a pioneer setting."**

roots. This kind of work is very difficult and requires someone who knows how to enter into this context and is willing to be a learner.

The second scale that Winters developed is called the *P-Scale*. This scale is similar to the *E-Scale* but in reverse. It measures the cultural distance a person must travel after they profess faith in Christ. The Bible calls Christians to live differently in this world. The distance you are from understanding the ethics of Christ determines the distance you have to travel to walk in your newness of life.

The *P-Scale* helps us understand the distance a new convert coming out of a truly pioneer, unreached setting needs to cross in order to conform to the image of Jesus and live and serve in the body of Christ. At a *P3* level the culture itself makes it difficult for a healthy church to exist or to conduct a Christian way of life. The missionary must carry the weight of biblically defining how the gospel and church are to shape our way of living which will be completely counter-cultural for the people.

With Winter's work as a backdrop, I want to take the lessons learned from these scales and apply them to a process of pioneering an unreached area with the goal of doing evangelism and making disciples that leads to a healthy, reproducing, indigenous church. In short, I want to lay out To Every Tribe's approach to reaching into *E3* areas to help the people of that area become disciples of Jesus and self-identify as a local church.

Since pioneer church planting requires both the missionary and the new believer to cross cultures, we must consider this when beginning a missionary venture into a pioneer setting. We cannot assume that we can just get on a plane and "do" ministry just because we want to do it. These cultural gaps must be recognized and addressed in our work. The following strategy is a way of easing into a culture and building an infrastructure that can help both missionaries and new converts cross cultures and establish churches. This involves the first two phases of pioneer church planting, *Arrival* and *Trust* (see page 23). This process starts with the *progressive entrance*.

# PROGRESSIVE ENTRANCE

Planting a church in unreached regions of the world involves more than simply evangelizing and then forming people into a group that will one day self identify as a church. First, church planting among the unreached involves the missionary stepping out of their culture into an E3 culture. Second, it requires helping people move from their P3 position towards the church. The new believers have to deal with all of their cultural issues and struggle through all of the difficulties that this transition brings in order to learn how to follow after God.

Consider how hard it was for the church in Ephesus to understand that the Jews and Gentiles were one in the eyes of God. The cultural baggage of enmity between the two was great. It was important for the Apostle Paul to not only proclaim Christ, but to stay there for three years in order to go house to house to establish the believers. Then, he left Timothy behind to help them form the church. Finally, he wrote the book of Ephesians to help them get over the cultural baggage that they brought with them in regard to living as one body—both Jews and Gentiles. We have an entire book of the Bible written to address that issue—even after Paul, Timothy, and the Apostle John were there ministering to them. The ministry of Ephesus shows how much nurturing, training, equipping, and time is involved in doing P3 discipleship.

As a missionary becomes aware of an unreached place, it does not mean that a door is automatically opened for that missionary to enter that location or that they even know or understand how to make first contact. Many of the unreached places of the world remain unreached because they are closed to outsiders living among the people. This is a reality that missionaries have to consider, not to give up and go home, but to be able to address it with wisdom and patience.

With barriers like these, how does a missionary go to an unreached place in the world to evangelize, make disciples, and plant churches? I believe this is best accomplished by entering an unreached area with a strategy of *progressive entrance*. Progressive entrance is when a missionary enters a place using progressive steps which are strategically put in place in order to build the necessary relationships, infrastructure, and partnerships that will help the missionary engage an unreached people group and leave behind a network that can support and sustain the work after

"Planting a church in unreached regions of the world involves more than simply evangelizing and then forming people into a group that will one day self identify as a church."

the missionary is gone.

Progressive entrance enables the missionary to set-up a support system for the work that gives the missionary credibility in the open communities of the region in order to open doors in the closed communities. When pioneering an unreached region there is infrastructure that needs to be put into place that typically does not need to be put in place in reached areas. When ministry begins in the open communities, it sets the table for entrance into the closed communities. I want to develop this thought a bit further to underscore the importance of progressive entrance.

If I were to plant a church in Houston, Texas, there are existing supports in place for me that I would depend upon. For example, there are Christian publishing companies and bookstores where people can purchase Bibles and other Christian literature. There are Christian radio stations where people can be edified by listening to teaching and music. There is access to conferences, concerts, and lectures that can feed people. In addition, as the church planter, I would have access to other churches that have developed programs and resources that I could use for my work. In short, there is a huge support system in place for a church planter in Houston that does not need to be built from scratch.

What happens when a missionary goes to a remote location and those resources do not exist? Years ago, I did ministry on an island with no access to Christian bookstores, Bible conferences, pastors conferences, or even ministry resources to help me. I had to build that system and infrastructure so that not only could I get the help and support I needed, but also the church

being established would have it so that they would flourish after I departed.

In the New Testament, as the church expanded, it depended upon the relationships and resources of other churches to help it grow and flourish. Leaders were sent from one church to another, donations were deposited into funds to help support people, and the body worked together in partnership to advance the gospel (read 1 Corinthians through Philemon to see this in action).

How does a missionary build an infrastructure in a remote location that allows for credibility, support, and ongoing help after the missionary departs? The answer is by utilizing a progressive approach to reaching a region. The progressive approach is based upon building into three different ministry tiers in a certain order. These tiers can provide what is needed to eventually move to the remote community to make disciples and plant churches. This allows for an eventual exit with confidence, knowing that they will continue to be supported after you are gone.

## THREE TIERS

When aiming at an unreached area to plant a church, we have found that the most effective strategy includes a three tier approach. Planting a church in the remote location alone does not provide all that is needed for those new Christians to survive in a healthy long-term way. We want to make sure that the overall structure of our mission field includes all three of these tiers in order to effectively reach a remote location and ensure their continued growth and maturity.

*Platform Community* - This serves as the base of operations that will receive

# THREE TIERS



REMOTE COMMUNITY

NETWORK COMMUNITY

PLATFORM COMMUNITY
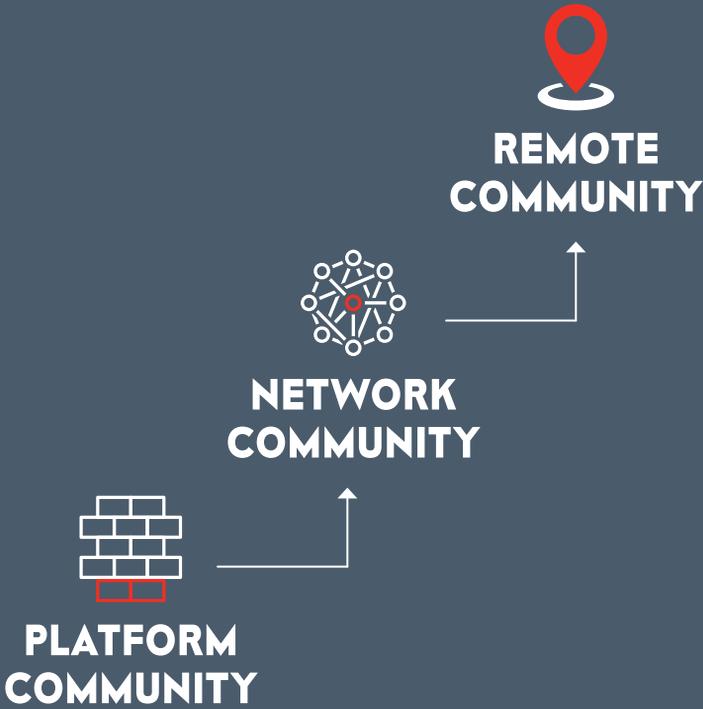
missionaries, care for missionaries, and nurture the newly planted churches in the remote, unreached location.

*Network Community* - This is a community where the missionaries can evangelize, make disciples, and gain cultural knowledge. This is also where they build the relationships necessary for gaining access to the remote community.

*Remote Community* - This is the unreached community. If you reach into the remote community with the support of the platform and network com-

munities, you are now bringing partners from the region that will help you with the outreach, disciple-making, and church planting. In addition, this allows the missionary to keep pressing forward in their work to connect the platform, network, and remote locations. It also allows for a more confident exit strategy knowing that the newly planted church in the remote location has a support system in place.

What I want to do at this point is to unpack all three of these tiers to discover the benefit of a progressive entrance.
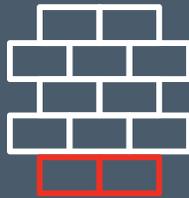
# PLATFORM
# COMMUNITY

A platform community is a key city that services the remote community. It is the location that people from the remote community might go in order to obtain goods and services such as medical, legal, and governmental.

In one area that I had the privilege of pioneering, the remote areas were communities that were only accessible by plane. These remote communities had no formal hospitals, clothing stores, or any other services that you would find in a city or town in the United States. The people in these remote communities all visited a central city to do shopping, get medical check ups, and connect with people from other remote locations. This central city is what I call a platform community.

Even though our heart and goal is to get missionaries to the remote community, our first step is to work with or establish a local church in this platform community. Why? The reason is that in the platform community you have the people and the resources to provide the support necessary to care for the missionaries, and eventually the church, in a remote location. In addition, you have a central base of operations to receive new missionaries, prepare them for remote living, and care for them once they are sent to a remote location. It proves to be a staging and training area for the mission work that depends heavily on the indigenous community.

When entering a platform community, the first step is to look for the existence of a local church. If there is a church that has a "basic grounding," then the intention would be to work with this church to help you launch to the remote community. Churches in the platform community serve as a resource for the work in the unreached areas. As the churches are established, they become the places that provide the personal, spiritual, and practical support for the new churches planted in the remote locations long after the missionaries have departed.

So, what does it mean to work with a church that has basic grounding? In the world of missions, you have to remember that not all churches around the world will be established in the same manner as the sending church for the missionary. Within this region, the closer you get to the remote community, you are more likely to find churches that are not as established as your church back home. What we look for is what we call basic grounding. There are four criteria that we look for in a church that we will invest in as a platform church:

1. Grounded in the Gospel
2. Grounded in the Church
3. Grounded in the Mission
4. Grounded in the Scriptures

## GROUNDED IN THE GOSPEL

What I am looking for here is the understanding that the gospel is a message about the work of the Triune God saving man through the incarnation, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a message of faith in this work and faith alone that saves man. If a church stands firm on Jesus as God incarnate, the Lord and Savior of humanity, and that salvation only comes by faith in Him, then they have a basic grounding in the gospel.

## GROUNDED IN THE CHURCH

There is no way to love the gospel and hate the church. The church is what is birthed out of the gospel. Jesus

taught us in Matthew 16:18 that He is building and expanding His church. No matter what kind of wall or gate is built against a person, community, or nation, it cannot prevail against Jesus and His church. As people place their faith in Jesus they become part of the body of Christ and they are to gather and identify as a local expression of this body. If a church understands the basic reality that they are the body of Christ, the local expression of the church universal, then they have a grounding in the church.

### GROUNDED IN THE MISSION

As was previously stated, the church exists to expand. It is not a static entity building walls of protection. It is expanding against the gates of hell. It is important that a church knows that the gospel they believe is also the gospel they must proclaim to others. I do not look for a church with a robust understanding of missions, but simply the basic understanding that the gospel is a message that must be proclaimed. As they spend time in the Scriptures, I believe that everyone's understanding of the mission will be expanded and pushed.

### GROUNDED IN THE SCRIPTURES

We are not here to listen to the words of man, but to the Word of God. 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us the Scriptures are to be paid attention to until Jesus returns. The Scriptures are the Word of God, the very truth that God has revealed to us and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. If a church adds to the Scriptures or takes away from them, then it will be impossible for us to partner with them because they will have authorities they submit to other than God. But if they

do submit to the Scriptures as their final authority, we can work with them and partner with them.

In working in this platform community, if there is not a church with basic grounding, we will need to establish either a new church or further establish an existing one. The goal behind establishing a church in this region is to establish one that has its "eyes out" on the remote location. Disciples in this platform church are made with the goal in mind to partner with the missionaries in the advancement of the gospel.

An example of this is found in Philippians 1:3-6. The church in Phillipi worked with Paul, sent him money and people, and were practical partners of his ministry to establish the gospel where no one had already done so. Paul made it a pattern to use key churches to help him move to the unreached areas. Observe the way he challenged the church in Rome to join him:

*"...and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.' This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Romans 15:20-24).*

Even though Paul wanted to go to Spain for his ministry, he did not bypass the work in Rome, but rather supported it and built it up. Why? Because

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the church in Rome was to be a key partner for him as he moved on into Europe. A platform church becomes a partner church providing the resources, people, and support for hard-to-reach areas. This is critical for the long-term success of the mission.

From my own experience, I have had to help a missionary in a remote location get out of their community rather quickly. Things were tense and we needed to get a missionary family out. We were able to contact the partner church in the platform community and they were able to help with extraction. The platform church then provided the missionaries with a place to stay until things cooled down and they were able to go back. This kind of partnership is essential to long-term church planting ministry.

It is important to reiterate that to establish this kind of church you do not need to start one from the beginning if there is already a church in the region that is willing to work with you and has the basic groundings mentioned earlier. Due to the societal significance of the platform city to remote locations, you will oftentimes find churches in these regions. If the Lord allows you to work with an existing church, I would recommend working with that church rather than attempting to plant one from scratch. In saying that, it might actually take longer to get the church in a place where it can reach its full potential as a partner church, but it is better to partner than it is to compete.

I cannot emphasize enough that the first step in establishing a long-term work in an unreached pioneer location that will have what it takes to reproduce over and over again is to have a platform church in a platform community. In the course of developing this relationship, as a missionary, you will also be working on developing churches and leaders in what we call *network communities*. This is the next step in the journey to the remote community.

NETWORK
COMMUNITY

In addition to building a platform community, it is important that the missionary find what are called network communities. A network community is not necessarily a location, but a network of churches and individuals where ministry is currently happening or able to happen rather easily. This would be a community that could be classified as "reached". Why conduct ministry in a place that is technically reached? When you work in a network community you are doing ministry that allows you to accomplish three things.

### DEVELOP CREDIBILITY

First, it allows the missionary to develop credibility within the region. In many places of the world gossip travels fast. If a missionary is conducting some type of children's ministry and it is successful, the news of that ministry often travels to the remote location. As it does, it prepares the ground for the missionaries arrival. In Joshua 2:10 we read about Rahab telling the spies who have entered Jericho that fear and terror have come upon the people of Jericho because they had heard about what God had done to the Egyptians. Even though this is a context of judgment, the reality of news spreading out from one location to another was true back then just as it is today. Working in a network community allows the remote locations to hear of you and to gain a level of trust and understanding of what you want to do before you get there.

### DEVELOP INDIGENOUS PARTNERS

Second, it allows the missionary to develop local indigenous partners for the mission. The essence of a network community is that you work in places where there are already works going on but are still in need of development. What you are looking for are indigenous pastors in need of training and young unestablished churches that need help setting things in order. In other words, you are looking for areas where God is at work and where you can help nurture that work along. As you work alongside the pastor, you get a chance to help unleash the ministry, do outreach, learn the culture, and, most importantly, develop some local advocates. A local advocate is an indigenous person who can help you and intercede for you as you need it.

There was a time when a missionary was working in a remote communi-

"Working in a network community allows the remote locations to hear of you and to gain a level of trust and understanding of what you want to do before you get there."

ty and the local chief was making life hard on the missionary. We were able to contact an advocate we worked with in a network community and they were able to talk with the chief and help us find a place of resolution. Having that advocate was essential. Had we not done the work in the network community we would not have had that advocate, and that advocate served the missionary in a way we, at the agency, could never have helped. If we had not done ministry in a network community where people in the region saw our work, ethics, and motives, we would not have had the respect of others in the region to help us when things got tough.

Working in a network community is important because many of the unreached areas are hostile to the gospel. Finding an area where gospel work is going on, joining that, and offering your help to nurture it, allows people to see that you are there to bring hope, life, and peace.

## DEVELOP CULTURAL ACQUISITION

Third, working in a network community also helps the missionary learn about the region they are serving. This is a place where mistakes can be made and there are some protections set up so the mistake does not undo a lot of work. It also allows the missionary to gain local insight and knowledge. There are people in these networks that have been to the remote locations and they have insight and understanding that you need to learn.

I remember talking to a man in a network context asking him about an idea I had to reach a remote area. I was convinced that my plan would work—it seemed to me to be biblical, sound, logical, and Christ-centered. When he heard it, he said it was bad. He said that my idea would not come across as opening doors to talking about God and the human condition. Instead, I was coming across as arrogant and speaking like an expert on the lives of other people. Even though what I wanted to accomplish was biblical, my approach would appear arrogant. I was so grateful to hear this insight and was then given help by this man to repackage my content in a way that came across as humble rather than arrogant.

It is in the context of the network community that the missionary learns about where they are working, how to engage it, and how to communicate in the lens of becoming "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22b). This is valuable time of "on the ground" research. If it is possible, it is during these times that you can take some of your network leaders and visit the remote community in order to find ways to build trust so that, when the door opens to live in that location, you have a grounding to work from to be able to share the gospel with the people.

## LOCATION

The location of a network community is any community in proximity of both the platform and remote location where some type of indigenous work is going on. If there is no place like that, then it is important to find a place that has a high receptivity to your presence and start working there. You might need to create the network ministry.

A key characteristic of a network community is that it is a place that already has an openness to the gospel and a

"Working in a network community is important because many of the unreached areas are hostile to the gospel. Finding an area where gospel work is going on, joining that, and offering your help to nurture it, allows people to see that you are there to bring hope, life, and peace."

fairly good impression of Christians. As we move from a platform to remote community, network communities will form the bridge between the two.

To Every Tribe is working in a region to reach some remote communities in a very dangerous part of the world. We have made contact with several pastors and church leaders in a city close to the remote communities. These leaders have become network partners with us in the mission of seeing a healthy, indigenous, reproducing church emerge. They have also taught us a lot. In one case we had a housing issue in the remote location. The insight that they gave us as to how to solve this problem became invaluable to us. The network is so helpful because it provides for us partners, guides, and cultural interpreters. In addition, by working with them we are able to gain credibility within the remote communities.

## A WORD OF WARNING

In all of the words spent talking about the benefits of a network community, there is one word of caution that has to be put on the table. It is important that you do your research before you get involved with a network mission. Almost everywhere in the world there are groups that do not get along. Before you get involved you need to understand the relationship between the remote location and the place you want to serve. In some situations you could be working in a place that is the enemy of the remote location. If that is true, then you could be hurting your chances of getting into that location. This is why it is important that you do a cultural analysis of the region to understand the dividing lines among the various groups within the area. I cannot underscore this enough.

# REMOTE
# COMMUNITY

T he remote community is the unreached location. It is what I like to call "the prize". It is a location that is often geographically isolated, resistant to the gospel, and a place that you cannot just show up and live. Often you need to have a reason to be there and approval from the community's leadership. Not all remote communities are this way, but many are and you have to be prepared for that setting when you try to engage unreached people with the gospel.

The remote community is a place where the missionary is to go spend time moving through the *Phases in Pioneering*, doing evangelism and making disciples leading to healthy, reproducing, indigenous church. Because this work is intense, I will only give you an overview of the work that is to take place in the remote community. This work is developed in detail in the December 2017 issue of *Ekballo* magazine, *Phases in Pioneering*.

As I have reflected on how God has moved in the work in which I have participated over the years, I have observed the Lord moving me through eight different relational phases in doing the work of evangelism and discipleship. I view these eight phases as stages of relationships with people.

One of the undeniable realities of ministry is that there is no way to fulfill the mission of making disciples absent of relationships. It is a very relational work teaching someone to observe all things Christ has commanded. It is not a static transaction, but a dynamic relationship requiring discernment to understand when someone is weak, faint-hearted, or rebellious (1 Thessalonians 5:14). It requires an understanding of the way people think, how they process the world, and how they understand God. It also takes time for the missionary to understand the culture well enough to be able to offer truly meaningful discipleship. Relationships do not come quickly; they take time. We must understand where we are in relationships with people so that we can invest and grow at the pace God allows us to move. Ministry moves at the speed of relationships.

When we cross a culture and move to a location to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to an unreached or unengaged people group, we must take the time to build healthy relationships. These relationships are where trust forms so that we can move from the gospel to maturity in Jesus to the formation of a local indigenous church to the sending of people to repeat this process somewhere else.

I see this work occurring through eight relational phases. As already stated, these phases are spelled out in greater detail in the December 2017 edition of *Ekballo* magazine, *Phases in Pioneering*. But for the sake of understanding the work we are doing in a remote community, it would be helpful to give an overview of the *Phases in Pioneering*.

## PHASES IN PIONEERING

*Arrival* - Showing people you are there and you care, and taking the time to serve the community by coming alongside them to live in their world and to serve them as you do.

*Trust* - Building trust between you and the people through your actions and conversations.

*Spiritual Conversations* - Taking the time to understand how people process God, religion, and spiritual things.

*Gospel Conversations* - As the Lord opens doors, sharing the whole gospel, taking the time to show how Jesus deals with our shame and guilt and has overcome the evil that is in the world.

*Nurture* - As the Lord provides converts, it is important to nurture the new believers in what it means to live as a follower of Jesus.

*Help* - For many converts, following Jesus can cause problems in their lives. Being a Christian can cause people to be at odds with their family, extended family, cultures, and even cause them to be killed. It is the role of the missionary to help people understand how to apply the Bible to the complexities of following Jesus.

*Discover* - Throughout the discipleship process, it is important that the missionary seeks the wisdom of the Lord to help new believers understand their gifts and their roles in the work of the gospel and the body of Christ. One of the great joys of ministry is helping people find their place in the kingdom.

*Affirm* - Once a disciple has discovered their gifts it is important that the missionary publicly affirm those gifts. In many cultures the idea of mutual submission and service is not accepted. The idea of a church, where all serve each other, is novel. We must affirm people publicly to make a way for them to serve in the church. In addition, we also must affirm the leadership in the church. As we complete the church planting process, we must appoint elders and deacons and give them public affirmation.

These eight phases are nothing new to the missions world. There are many other people who have gone before us who have made similar observations.

The distinction of these eight phases is that they do not measure activity but relationships. You go deeper with Jesus and the gospel as the relationship deepens. The focus of these phases is on how to build relationships on trust and not just the missionary's desire to do certain work.

Because these are phases of a relationship, it is possible that the Lord can move someone through these phases quickly or slowly—that is all in the hands of God. It is the role and function of the missionary to respond to these phases as the Lord moves rather than treat this like a checklist to be marched through in static order. This is where art meets science.

We can, in a scientific manner, identify eight different phases in a relationship, but the actual outworking will be a lot more nuanced. A relationship can move forward, then backward, then forward again. A misunderstanding can take place and cause a relationship to become stilted, and it might take time to recover the same ground you just covered. Therefore, it is important to understand the eight phases, but then see how God is moving you in and out of them based upon the dynamic nature of relationships as well as the complex nature of international friendships.

In my opinion, life is a vapor. And as such, I cannot think of any greater way to spend my vapor than in support of the gospel going to the remotest parts of the earth to see the captives set free and Jesus worshiped among the nations. It is worth the hard work to get to the remote locations to engage people for the sake of the gospel.

# PHASES IN PIONEERING

**1**
**ARRIVAL**

**2**
**TRUST**

**3**
**SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS**

**4**
**GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS**

**5**
**NURTURE**

**6**
**HELP**

**7**
**DISCOVER**

**8**
**AFFIRM**

# FINAL
# THOUGHTS

This strategy of progressive entrance is a way of being faithful with the time and resources that the Lord provides. It is also a way of building a sustainable work that will withstand the departure of missionaries, government changes, and even persecution. With that in mind, at any point God can, and often does, overrule our plans and approaches and works in ways that we could never have anticipated. Yet, to have an approach is critical. It gives us something to work on and it shows respect to the indigenous community. If the Lord moves things faster then I will run. But if the Lord moves things slower, then I will take the time to move slowly. This approach gives me the time and the opportunity to reflect on where things really are rather than just moving at the speed of my emotions.

A practical take home for us is that a missionary must make it a pattern to be in the Word of God and in constant prayer to be able to discern when God is moving outside the plans and strategies of the missionary. Spiritual discernment and flexibility are extremely important traits for a missionary. Being in the Word of God, being subject to the leaders the Lord has put over you, and measuring things through the lens of relationships helps the missionary to not interpret their mission in light of their feelings.

It is easy to mistake our plans and our desires for the will of the Lord. Often, one of the signs that we are doing this is when we become anxious and impatient. When we are moving at our speed and no one else is, we can get frustrated. That could be a huge sign that you are moving faster than God wants to move. At the end of the day, God is the missionary and He has a plan for the regions in which we are working. Therefore, we must engage these regions as servants of God. God is not a tool for my vision, we are tools for God's vision.

If God works in a way other than outlined here, so be it. In the meantime, I would recommend learning and growing in understanding how to progressively enter a community to do evangelism and make disciples that leads to the formation of a healthy, reproducing, indigenous church.

"At the end of the day, God is the missionary and He has a plan for the regions in which we are working. Therefore, we must engage these regions as servants of God. God is not a tool for my vision, we are tools for God's vision."

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