

February 2013

## What Jesus Started

Joining the Movement Changing the World

by Steve Addison (IVP Books: 2012)

A Book Review by Jack De Vries

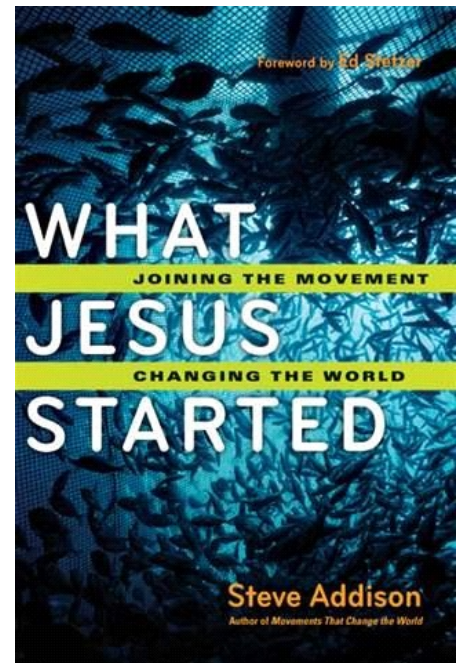
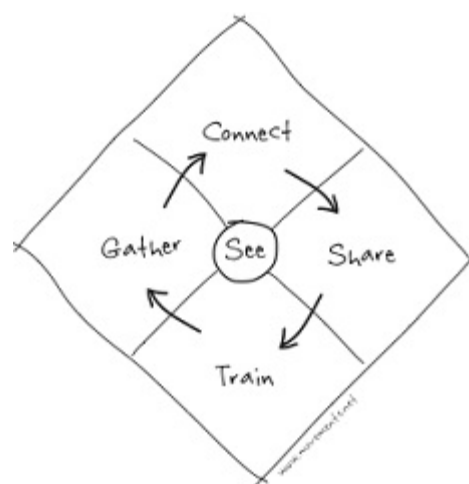
**M**ovements! Recently, among Christian evangelicals, we hear more talk about movements than about programs – and Steve Addison, in his latest book *What Jesus Started*, has joined in this conversation. Again! His earlier book, *Movements That Change the World* (Missional Press: 2009) is in many ways a preamble to this latest book. Both books describe, as Addison points out, the movement Jesus began, a movement to change the world, inviting the reader to play a part in this movement.

I find this emphasis on “movement” quite helpful in thinking about Christians, the church, and our mission in the world. “Movement” suggests going somewhere. We’re not staying put. We’re moving. And “movement” also suggests something big, something beyond a person, a church, a community, a culture, even a country. Ever since I read David Garrison’s book, *Church Planting Movements*, I get excited about how God is redeeming a lost world. We’re moving - we’re going somewhere. And the gospel opportunities are legion – all over the world. It’s not so much about our movement – but about God and his mission in world.

When Addison talks about “the Christian movement” he is thinking about a “missionary movement.” He writes: “Missionary movements communicate the truth about God and salvation to others. They teach

followers a new way of life that accords with that truth. The purpose of a missionary movement is that people accept the message, they begin to follow Jesus, share him with others, and form new communities of faith that become partners in the spread of the gospel.” (16) Addison goes on to describe what this movement looks like by examining the life of Jesus and the early church and identifying six activities or elements of the Christian movement Jesus started (see diagram below):

1. See the end
2. Connect with people
3. Share the gospel
4. Train disciples
5. Gather communities
6. Multiply workers



There is much I like about *What Jesus Started*. Addison gives a thorough, if not an exhaustive, overview of the gospel ministry of Jesus, the early church (Acts and Paul), and into the church of today. He identifies each of the six elements of the Christian missionary movement in the life of Christ, the church in Acts, the ministry of Paul, and the church today. If you want an accurate and informed history of Jesus' ministry and the early church, you need not look any further than *What Jesus Started*. While the information is not novel, the way it is presented is. Beginning with Jesus and on through the church of all ages, Addison shows how all six activities of the Christian missionary movement are active. And throughout the book Addison gives current examples where we see individuals and Christians connecting, sharing, training, gathering, and multiplying.

At various points throughout the book I found myself highlighting key ideas. For example, "Jesus didn't wait for people to come to him. He walked from village to village looking for people – on the road, in the marketplaces and synagogues, in private homes and in public places, by the lake and in the Temple, at a wedding feast and at a funeral, at a banquet with sinners and a meal with Pharisees. Wherever the people were, Jesus went. The good shepherd was looking for lost sheep." (29) Jesus connected with people. He went out seeking. A challenge to us all to go and do likewise.

Jesus did not only connect with people and share with them the good news; he taught them the reality of being a disciple: "He taught them what it means to express their love in concrete acts of obedience." (44) Addison goes on to list and expound on seven commands Jesus expected his disciples to follow and to teach others to obey:

1. Repent and believe the good news
2. Baptize them in the name of the Triune God
3. Love one another as I loved you
4. Do this in remembrance of me
5. Always pray and do not give up
6. Give and it will be given to you
7. Go and make disciples of all nations (see pages 44-46)

Addison, at a later point in the book, shows how these five commands of Christ were applied by the early church in the training of disciples. (see pages 86-89)

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**Disciple people to  
conversion, don't  
convert people then  
disciple them.**

- David Watson

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All of these activities of Jesus were directed at building communities of disciples. "The kingdom is about God's rule; the church consists of those people who have come under his rule. The goal and intention of Jesus' ministry was the formation of a missionary movement that would make disciples and multiply communities of his followers throughout the world." (51)

Addison concludes his look at the ministry of Jesus by telling the story of Jeff Sundell and his ministry among Tibetan Buddhists in northern India and Nepal. Jeff knew he could not reach all these people on his own, so he learned to ask five questions:

- How do I enter an unreached region and connect with people?
- How do I share the gospel?
- How do I make disciples who disciple others?
- How do I form groups in the community that will reproduce?
- How do I develop and multiply leaders? (55)

These are great questions to ask – not just in India or Nepal, but everywhere Christians desire to increase the impact of the gospel.

Chapter after chapter Addison explores how the early church and the apostles engaged in the mission Jesus gave them. But as the

Luke leaves the story of the early Christian movement unfinished, the movement continued. "The gospel would spread unhindered and bear fruit throughout the inhabited world. By leaving his account unfinished Luke was reminding his generation, and future generations, that they inherit the mission Jesus gave to his first disciples. Their mission has become our mission." (159)

I have a deep respect for Steve Addison, his heart for the gospel, and his passion to see communities of Jesus' disciples multiplied everywhere. He speaks as an Australian, he knows our culture, and he can speak into our culture, and spur on the Christian missionary movement down under. The exhaustive implementation guide at the back of the book will assist people to put the elements of the Christian movement into action. As Addison writes: "This guide was written for those who want to follow Jesus and to have him teach them to catch people, make disciples and multiply communities of his followers." (199) The guide can also be downloaded from Addison's website: [www.movements.net](http://www.movements.net).

There is one criticism I have of this book, and it begins with the title: *What Jesus Started*. Addison makes the comment early in his book, "The Christian movement was something new in human history." (16) The page before he writes: "A missionary movement was something totally new in human history." (15) Now I guess it makes sense that "without Jesus there would be no Christian movement." But then Addison goes on to say that "Jesus is the founder and living Lord of the movement that bears his name." (15)

Here is the issue: did Jesus really start the "Christian movement"? Did Jesus even start

a movement? Did it all start with Jesus? Did the *missio dei* (mission of God) begin with Jesus? The New Testament? Pentecost? I believe that our Triune God was engaged in mission even before the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8). God's movement toward people is seen throughout Old Testament history. The church did not begin after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus into heaven. The church already existed long before Jesus' incarnation. We are correct as a

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## The missionary movement did not begin with Jesus; it began with God.

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church to confess with the Belgic Confession, "This Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof." (Art. 27) It was not that Jesus started something totally new. Jesus simply reminded his disciples and us that our Triune God is on mission to draw people to himself, and as God's people we join God in that mission to be salt and light in this world, a light to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:6; Matthew 5:13-16).

In *The Missional Church in Perspective* (Baker: 2011) Craig Van Gelder points out that within the Western tradition of the church, "a Western view of the Trinity can lead to a *functional modalism* where the works of the three persons of God become separated from one another." (54) When people speak of the *missio dei* the tendency then is to begin with Christology and an emphasis on the example of Jesus as the model to be emulated. Instead of beginning with the incarnate Christ and the New Testament, a better approach in the missional conversation is to look at the whole of Scripture. As we look at the Bible's grand story of the people of God we see that at every stage God's people exist for the sake of God's mission to all the people of the world. The missionary movement did not begin with Jesus; it began with God – our Triune God.

I am sure the missional conversation will continue, and it does us well as Christians and

churches to engage one another in these conversations. But may the final word be that of Scripture – Jesus’ call to us his followers to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Triune God, and teaching them to obey everything he has commanded us. May we not only see this great commission as our gospel calling, but may we actively engage in this mission. Addison has helped us see this pattern in the life of Christ, the early church, and how it is replicated among Christ followers the world over. May we connect with unbelievers, share with them the good news, teach them to obey everything Scripture teaches, gather believers together into community, and multiply workers in God’s harvest field. May we join in the movement that is changing the world – the *missio dei*.

### About the Author

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**STEVE ADDISON** and his wife, Michelle, lead MOVE, a mission agency devoted to training and deploying workers who multiply communities of Jesus’ disciples everywhere. Steve is the author of *Movements That Change*

*the World: Five Keys to Spreading the Gospel*. He blogs at [www.movements.net](http://www.movements.net).