

A lion is lying on a sandy beach at sunset. The lion is the central focus, looking towards the right. The background shows the ocean and a bright, golden sunset sky. The text is overlaid on the lion's body.

Taming McGavran's Lions: New Church Growth Metrics for Ordinary Christians in an Age of Suspicion



Donald A. McGavran: Father of Church Growth and Multiplication

*Understanding Church
Growth*

Determine Fruitfulness: Statistics

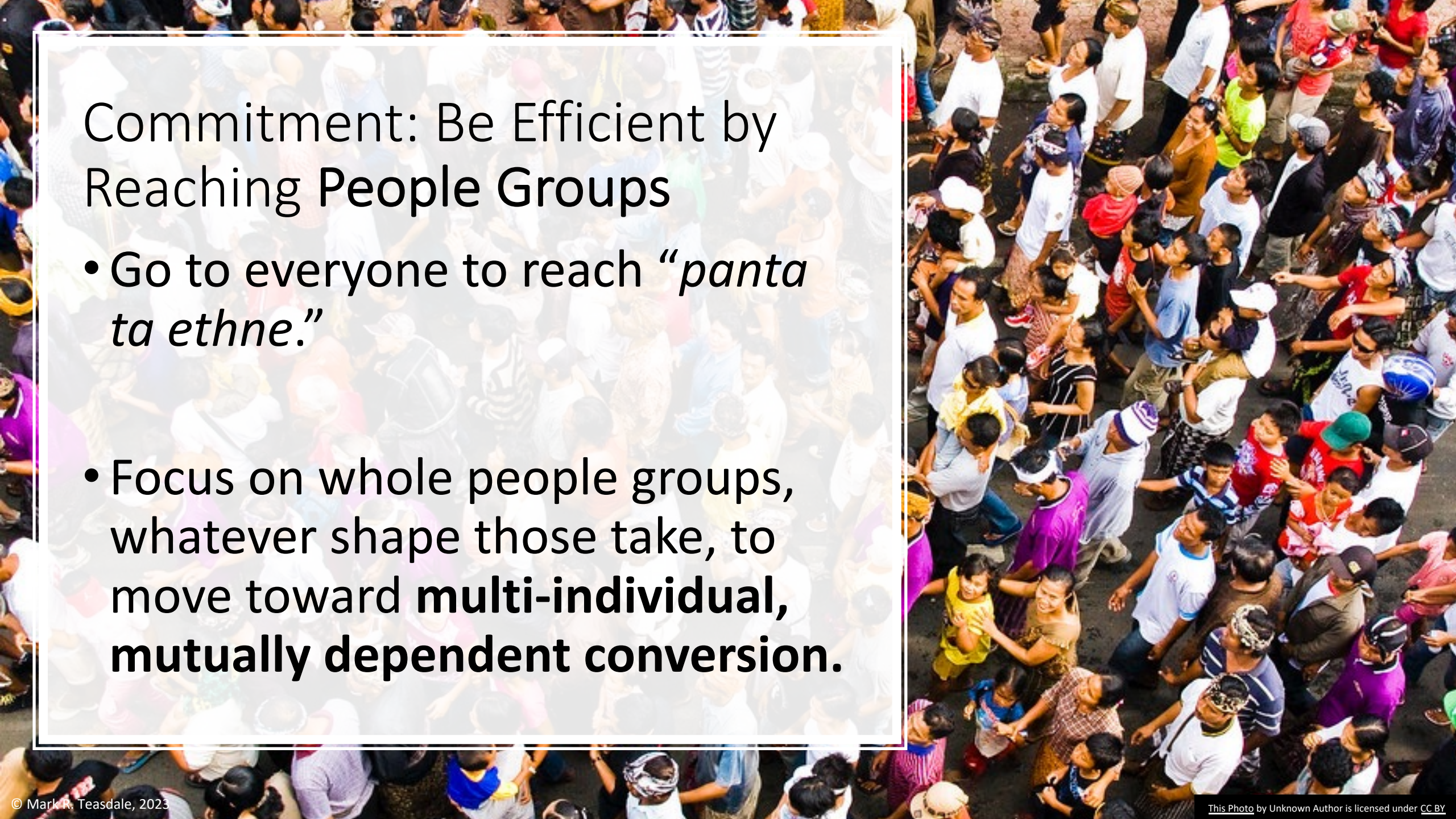
Make use of statistics to measure past growth and analyze the reasons for it, but only use data that is helpful with the mission!

- **Field total of Christians**
- **Homogeneous unit total of Christians**
- **How people came to the church (conversion, transfer, biology)**
- **Family analysis – who is related to whom via marriage or blood**
- **Number of “baptized responsible members”**
- **Membership of individual congregations**
- **Numbers under each specific worker (pastor, missionary, etc.)**

McGavran's Passion: Make Disciples (Converts)

- This is the mission given by Jesus and what should animate us.
- No one should face a Christless eternity.





Commitment: Be Efficient by Reaching People Groups

- Go to everyone to reach “*panta ta ethne.*”
- Focus on whole people groups, whatever shape those take, to move toward **multi-individual, mutually dependent conversion.**

Process

Find **bridging people** (who are native to the context and are Christian), train them toward **spiritual maturity** and **send** them to others.

As indigenous Christians believe, they should be **trained to go to others** in order to **multiply** churches and to make new disciples.

Beware the Lions!



McGavran was concerned about the church becoming distracted by faulty thinking or secondary concerns related to mission.

The Lion of Faulty Thinking: Excuses for Not Growing

- People aren't interested in our message
- We can only grow in spiritual maturity or numerically through conversions; not both at the same time.



The Lion of Secondary Concerns

- We must avoid resistance both in the church and outside the church to be effective witnesses.
- We are concerned with people's immediate needs (physical, economic, social, political). To address this is enough.



Pragmatism
leaves the door
open for a more
holistic
approach

McGavran cites five exemplars at the beginning of the book, three were organized around social activities.

- Educational Mission in partnership with the government
- Medical Mission
- Employment in partnership with the government

McGavran's multiplication process depends on converts being disciplined to become bridging people to their indigenous cultures

So, this suggests we can...

Allow all activities (including social, etc.) as long as their effectiveness is measured in terms of bringing people into Christ's salvation.

Form people into spiritual maturity as part of an effective evangelistic/disciple-making ministry.



While Watching out for the Persistent Lion:

Fear of evangelistic proclamation

- Manifests in: _____
 - Lack of spiritual conversations
 - Lack of call for repentance and transformation
 - Emphasis on the socially acceptable acts of outreach
 - Emphasis on internal discipleship formation

We Can Do This with Some Updates to McGavran's Thinking

Passion

From

No one faces a Christless eternity.

To

Everyone participates in the abundant life of Jesus Christ now and eternally.

Commitment

From

Reach a people ignorant of the gospel.

To

Address a Western culture that is skeptical and suspicious of the church.

Process

From

Find and disciple bridging people.

To

We become the bridging people so that our spiritual maturity grows as we reach out to others.



What New Metrics
Can We Create to
Evangelize Today?

*The Metrics of
Abundant Life*



I came that they
may have life, and
have it abundantly.

- John 10:10b

Aspects of Abundant Life

Standard of living

Physical needs met

Quality of Life

Emotional & relational needs met

Eternal Life

Forgiveness of sin & assurance in
the face of death



of times pastor has spoken about evangelism

of ways the church has invited people from the community to attend it

of times the pastor of the church has set aside time to be available and listen in the community around the church

of ways the church has listened to the needs of people outside the church

of programs set up by the church to meet the immediate needs of people in the neighborhood

of new visitors to a church event

of new visitors to a church event who were followed up with

of new church visitors who returned

of people who made a new decision to become disciples of Jesus Christ

of people whose standard of living the church helped improve

of people whose quality of life the church helped improve

Tames the Lions, Keeps Mission

Lion of faulty thinking (that we cannot grow) by making formation about not just piety but inviting people into Christ's abundant life.

Lion of secondary concerns (that emphasizes social engagement over evangelism) by declaring and demonstrating that abundant life through Christ begins now and stretches into eternity.



Participating in Abundant Life

Receive it and
Share it

Decision and
Formation

Present and
Eternal

Contextual
and Constant

Communal
and Individual

Gathered and
Scattered

Tracks the Most Fruitful forms of Evangelism

Individuals and congregations can see what the most effective ways of engaging with the people around them are. This provides critical feedback for how to pray, train, and use resources for outreach.



CONGREGATIONAL

Goal 1

Gather people to experience abundant life communally

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Goal 2

Grow in abundant life through formation as disciples

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Goal 3

Be an agent of abundant life for the community and larger world

A Theology and
Measurement
for What Is
Already
Happening

Scott McConnell,
“How Evangelism Has
Been Stirred among
Growing Churches,”
Outlook, Sept/Oct 22.

- Equipping people to be everyday missionaries
- Elevating the role of groups
- Amplifying opportunities to serve

Kevin Harney,
“Preparing for a Future
Harvest: 10 Essentials
to Leading a Local
Church Evangelism
Movement,” *Outlook*,
Nov/Dec 22.

“One of the greatest
disservices we have
done in the local church
is to create a growing
chasm between
discipleship and
evangelism.”

Obedience to the Whole Commission

Be disciples – we need to obey “all he has taught us” by being stewards of all that God has given us, using it in mission.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” – Matthew 25:19

Make disciples – we are to invite people to participate in the abundant life by converting and maturing in Christ.

“Make disciples of all nations .” – Matthew 28:19