

Seeds and Seed Projects

By Bob Moffitt

Seeds are one of the word pictures Jesus used in Scripture, and they have great implications for service. In fact, we have designed something called “Seed Projects,” based on two important principles we learned from seeds.

Principle 1: *Seeds have great implications for service—especially as they illustrate sacrifice.*

The first and most important principle about seeds comes from Jesus’ prediction of his own death: “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24). Seeds illustrate sacrifice. They die in order to do what they were created to do—produce fruit. They are small but, when they die, they produce great multiplication.

One of my favorite illustrations of this comes from India, where I had the privilege of teaching a group of pastors. One was from a very poor rural area, where he and his congregation lived as an oppressed minority. He knew his church needed to demonstrate God’s love to the people among whom they lived. After our conference, he returned home and asked the women of the church to look for needs among their Hindu neighbors. The next Sunday, the women reported that several of their Hindu neighbors had only one sari (dress). Since it was summer—very hot and humid—the women needed to wash their saris after every day of hard work. Those who had only one sari had to stay indoors while their sari dried in the sun. The pastor asked how many women in the congregation had three saris and would be willing to give one to a Hindu neighbor. One by one, the women of the congregation raised their hands. The next morning, the women from the church visited their needy neighbors and gave them saris. The Hindu women were deeply touched. Some even asked the Christian women to pray to their God for their unborn babies. This sacrifice impacted the Hindu community—and the church people, who realized they were not as powerless as they believed.

I have often wondered. Would the impact be different if a Christian NGO had come to the village and distributed free clothing to everyone? The gift would have been larger. It would have met a greater physical need. But I doubt if an NGO would have nearly the impact that was made by the few saris that were sacrificially given by the church women. What came from the Christian women represented real sacrifice. Small seeds, when they represent sacrifice, have great influence. When our demonstrations of God’s love are sacrificial, I believe the impact will be far greater than if our service comes out of our surplus. “Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground . . .” In fact, I believe that the impact of service is most often proportional to sacrifice—the less the sacrifice, the less the impact; the more the sacrifice, the greater the impact for the Kingdom.

Principle 2: *It is God who brings the harvest. We obediently plant the seeds, but it is God who brings fruit.* Jesus reminded us that the impact of our service is not something for which we can take credit: “I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor” (John 4:38). God is already at work in the hearts of those to whom we minister. Whenever there is an impact for the Kingdom, the credit belongs

to God—not to us. The apostle Paul wrote: So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor” (1 Corinthians 3:6-8). The purpose of our service is the expansion of Christ’s reign—the will of God, done on earth as it is in heaven. The objective is the extension of the Kingdom, not numerical church growth.

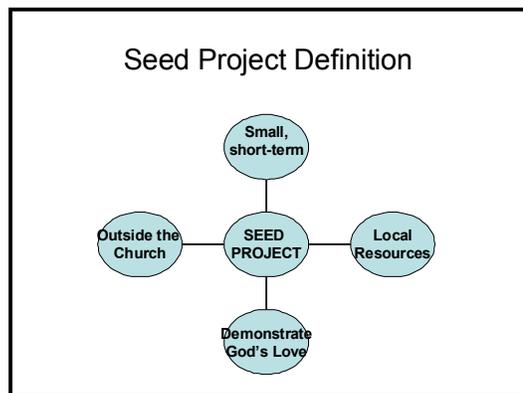
Based on these principles, we have discovered a way to demonstrate God’s love in a community—Seed Projects. Seed Projects are small projects in which churches sacrificially use local resources to demonstrate the love of God and Christ. Seed Projects are done by small groups in the church—by families, home fellowships, cell groups, Bible studies, and Sunday School classes. (Small demonstrations of God’s love, when done by individuals, are called Disciplines of Love, which is discussed in another lesson.)

I could tell you story after story about how God has blessed the sacrificial obedience of local congregations as they have done Seed Projects! Instead, please visit our Web site—www.harvestfoundation.org—to see hundreds of Seed Projects stories from around the world. (Select “Stories”)

Purpose of Seed Projects:

1. To use a simple, effective and proven tool to help a local church to begin to demonstrate God’s love to people outside of the body of Christ.
2. To enable local churches to be proclaimers of the gospel in deed.

Definition: A seed project is small, short-term ministry by a local church. It is done with local resources to demonstrate God’s love to those outside the faith community. It can be illustrated by the following diagram.

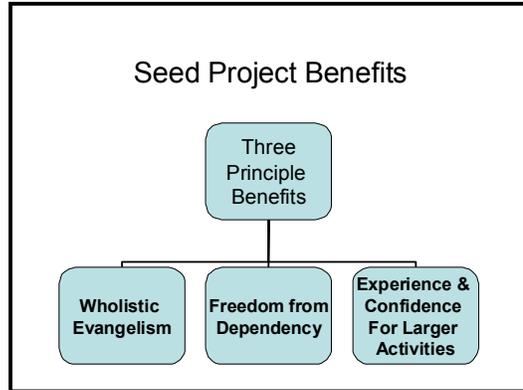


Benefits of Seed Projects: There are many benefits of Seed Projects, but at least three have emerged as most significant in our twenty-year practice of Seed Projects.

1. Wholistic Evangelism. Seed projects enable the churches that practice them to see the power that the simple and consistent demonstration of God’s love has in drawing people into the Kingdom.

Many evangelical and/or orthodox churches have experience with evangelism through proclamation. One of the problems with evangelism-by-proclamation is that it is often separated from the experience of God’s incarnational love. The biblical model is to live in such a way that those in relationship with us see God’s love and then are receptive to the proclamation of the Gospel’s content.

2. Freedom from Dependency. Many of the churches we have had the privilege of working with since the early 1980s are grassroots churches in the developing world. They are often materially poor. Their idea of ministry to physical and social needs is based on large projects, with funds coming from outside the community. Seed Projects help these churches see that God uses small, locally-resourced activities in powerful, lasting ways.



3. Experience and Confidence for Larger Activities.

After thousands of Seed Projects, we have been amazed at how these small, locally-resourced, activities have built experience and confidence for much larger activities.

Seed Project Characteristics: Over the years, we have evaluated the components that make Seed Projects effective. There are ten characteristics that appear related to achieving this kind of wholistic witness in a community. These characteristics serve as valuable guidelines in planning and carrying out Seed Projects. (They are not rigid rules, but should characterize most Seed Projects.) When we train church leaders in Seed Project planning, we ask them to see that their planned project reflects each of the guidelines, unless there is a good reason for an exception. The characteristics can be stated as follows:

1. Seed Projects are motivated by God’s intentions. Christians may often be caught in the trap of doing good works that are motivated by human compassion, carried out in human strength. Traditional projects are often undertaken when a need is seen, felt, expressed by local people, discovered in a survey, and/or when outside resources are available to meet that need. Christian ministry should be different. Christians should be compassionate people, but our strongest motivation should be a desire to reflect God’s intentions for people—above human compassion for a felt need. Seed Projects should be chosen by seeking God’s will—through praying, studying Scripture, and becoming familiar with the community.

1. Motivated by God’s Intentions	6. Doesn’t manipulate
2. Covered in Prayer	7. Outside the Church
3. Simple and short	8. Beneficiaries Participate
4. Well planned	9. Intentionally Wholistic
5. Local resources	10. God is praised

One of our early experiences was with a small, very poor, rural village in central Mexico. There were many, many pressing needs in this village. The elders of this village had become converted as a group. They retreated into the mountains to fast and pray for three days, asking the Lord what their first action should be as new followers of Jesus. As they searched the Scriptures and prayed, they believed God was telling them to do something that was completely counter-cultural—build houses for the seven widows in their village. They did just that. As the news of this action spread through the entire region, a revival broke out! Professional development strategy would have been to work on sanitation, water, health, education, or employment. But God knew what would most demonstrate His love for the

people. The leaders responded in sacrificial obedience to what they believed they had heard from God, and God's Kingdom was extended.

2. Seed Projects should be covered in prayer. Through prayer, the Seed Project is identified, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The project should be done in conscious response to the commands of Jesus. It must be done in the power of Christ's Spirit—and that power comes only as we initiate and carry out our service of obedience in the labor of prayer.
3. Seed Projects must be simple and short, small and uncomplicated. The projects themselves should take no more than one or two days, though planning and preparation may take longer. Small projects have unique benefits: (a) Scripture shows that God honors and multiplies faithful, small works. (b) People grow in faith and ability as they attempt and complete small projects. Small projects allow people to fail, learn, and serve again—without major consequences. (c) Together, several small projects can make a large impact on communities. (d) Small projects provide experience for larger activities.
4. Seed Projects should be well planned. When Jesus spoke of “counting the cost,” He referred to planning as normal action for a successful project. Planning phases include preparation, prayer, writing, implementation, and evaluation. A planning tool is presented in a separate lesson, Seed Project Planning and Reporting.
5. Seed Projects are to be done with local resources. Many development plans are for projects that can only be completed with outside resources. Outside resources can be helpful, but the timing and conditions in which they are provided are key. If the local church has not learned to sacrificially invest its own resources in ministry before it uses outside resources, local powerlessness is reinforced and local initiative almost always is more difficult in the future. Outside resources are best used when the following conditions are in place: (a) People have demonstrated willingness to sacrificially use their own resources. (b) Outside resources are not a substitute for local resources. (c) Outside resources cause a multiplication—not addition—of local resources. (d) People understand that God ultimately provides resources.
6. Seed Projects do not manipulate. They should reflect God's heart of compassion for brokenness. They are not a way to manipulate conversions or win souls. Seed Projects give us the opportunity to obey Jesus' command to unconditionally love our neighbor, regardless of the response. Of course, we fervently desire to see the lost come into a personal relationship with Jesus and, consequently, see our churches grow. However, if conversion and church growth are the principal motives for our obedience, then our efforts become manipulation. Jesus never manipulated people. He healed them because addressing physical needs honored and reflected his Father's heart. Some of those he healed responded by acknowledging Him as Lord and others did not, but Jesus did not withhold ministry, even when He knew there would be no spiritual response. Jesus knew that only one of the ten lepers would respond, but He healed all ten.
7. Seed Projects are directed toward those outside the church. Ministering to the needs of those inside the church membership is good and necessary, but Seed Projects are designed to help churches demonstrate God's love to those *outside* the church. We are light and salt in the

world, not only in the church. We serve community members because we are obedient to Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

8. Those who benefit from the Seed Projects should also participate in them, as possible. When those who are being helped are involved in the process of planning and helping, they have the dignity of participating in their own healing. Doing things for people who are capable of participating—but are not involved—is paternalism. In fact, we are foolish if we do not utilize their first-hand knowledge and concerns about the problems. People who benefit and participate in a ministry project also have a greater sense of ownership—they are more likely to use, maintain, and improve it.
9. Every Seed Project will have a primary impact area, but Seed Projects are to be intentionally wholistic including a plan for impact in each area. When the nature of a Seed Project is social or physical, it is common that the mechanics of the activity become so intense that a spiritual emphasis and/or other areas of emphasis are forgotten—usually by oversight, not by intention. In each Seed Project plan, it is essential to ask if and where each impact area should be included and then intentionally written into the overall plan.
10. A Seed Project should bring glory to God, so God is praised. Just as thoughtful planning is important, so is thoughtful evaluation—but by Kingdom standards. Evaluation tools are presented in a separate lesson, Seed Project Planning and Reporting. The primary evaluation standard is who gets the credit. Is it those who do the project or God? It should be the One who calls us to love our neighbor – God.

Three Principles for Long-Term Effectiveness: Doing one isolated Seed Project is a good way to start demonstrating the love of God to a broken world. However, these three principles will help to provide the most impact in one community.

1. Seed Projects should be balanced. They should be designed to express God's concern for all areas of human need. A paradigm we use for service is Luke 2:52. The four categories of Luke 2:52 are wisdom, physical, spiritual and social. As an example, church members in Carapita—a barrio in Venezuela—intentionally structured Seed Projects to reflect the Luke 2:52 categories.

- **Wisdom:** Church members gave lectures about drug prevention at a public school. They were invited to return to provide additional lectures.
- **Physical:** Twenty-five members of the church joined community members in repairing toilets, the electrical system, desks and a sewage ditch for a public school.
- **Spiritual:** The church organized multiple approaches to evangelism out in the community.
- **Social:** The church repaired a basketball court

Three Principles for Long-term Effectiveness

1. **Balanced** – Ministry in all areas
2. **Focused** – Balanced ministry to the same community
3. **Ongoing** – Repetitive ministry lifestyle over time

and organized community-based basketball games and competition. This activity healed division between two groups of young people.

2. Seed Projects should be focused. The same people need to see God's concern for them in all areas. A local church doing focused ministry would not meet physical needs in one community, spiritual needs in a second community, social needs in a third community, and needs for biblical wisdom in a fourth community. The church would be ministering with balance, but the beneficiaries of its ministries would see God's concern demonstrated in only one area. Focused ministry demonstrates God's concern for each kind of need to the same people.
3. Seed Projects should be ongoing—a lifestyle of ministry. Demonstrations of love should not be something that happens once or twice a year. God's love should be a part of the continuous ministry and way of life for individual Christians and for their churches over a period of time.

We have seen an important correlation between these concepts and effective wholistic ministry. Yet, even if all of the guidelines are properly carried out, the Seed Project will not advance the Kingdom of God if it is not led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Do not assume God's guidance and empowerment. Actively and intentionally seek it! May His Kingdom come and may His will be done—in the community of your local church.

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