

Steve Smith with Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake, 2011).

Steve Smith and Ying Kai are both career missionaries with the IMB, having spent most of their service in East Asia. At present, Smith is an Affinity Strategy Group Leader and is pursuing a doctorate degree, having previously pastored a church in California and facilitated a church planting movement (CPM) among a formerly unreached people group (UPG) in East Asia. Kai, who also has served as a pastor, is the initiator of one of the largest CPMs in the world. For each man, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* is his first published book.

“T4T,” which stands for “Training for Trainers,” arises from the Kai’s experience in catalyzing a CPM in and around a very large East Asian city. Smith is insistent to highlight that T4T is a process for discipleship, not just for evangelism. Throughout the book, Smith chronicles the process Kai developed in expanding and nurturing a CPM. Ying Kai peppers his own first-hand testimony throughout the book. Both writers share numerous stories. This protects the book against vague abstractions. It squarely aims at giving missionaries and pastors practical principles for multiplying churches and trainers; it is not meant to be a theological treatise. Published by WIGTake, the tone and shape of the book largely follow that of *Church Planting Movements* by David Garrison, who also added the foreword to *T4T*.¹ The book divides into three sections: foundations, the process, and application.

Part One of *T4T* is the smallest of the three sections. Largely, the authors appeal to testimony from their own ministry experience and their knowledge of CPMs around the world. Smith tries to arouse the reader’s attention by listing various numbers of new believers and churches started through the T4T process. It is admirable to see biblical citation scattered throughout Part One, however, there is little concentrated theologizing or exegesis to defend what follows later in the book. The argument largely relies on Acts and various parables told by Jesus. Although *T4T* uses “kingdom” language, seeking to “understand the ways of the King’s reign” (66), there is no interaction with the Scripture or theologians to discern the meaning of God’s kingdom in the biblical context. Consequently, the writers open themselves to the charge of employing biblical language out of context. Accordingly, the reader is puzzled to see Smith suggest that one should not follow Jesus’ “model of discipleship” but rather choose Paul’s, since Jesus used “a *pre*-Pentecost rather than a *post*-Pentecost model” (77; emphasis his). Further, Smith translates John 16:8 to say that the Holy Spirit is “*attacking* lost people” (75; his emphasis). From the perspective of Scripture, these questionable readings distract and undermine an already thin Scriptural defense of T4T. Positively, Smith is sure to point out that T4T is merely a single tool among many; thus, it should be judged accordingly. The section wants to instill hope, even expectation, in readers that a CPM is possible in their context “because of the nature of God” (82). However, it would be helpful to make more prominent what is only stated in a footnote, namely, virtually no CPMs happen without *some* already existing national believers (72).

¹ Since the book *T4T* seeks to describe the methodology, also called “T4T,” I will not distinguish them except at times by using italics (*T4T*) for the book.

Part Two emphasizes that T4T is a process, not a formula. It stresses obedience as the fundamental goal of discipleship. Other concerns, practically speaking, are minimized, even if not intentionally. Core principles include reproducibility, accountability, vision casting, and giving trainees the chance to practice passing on what they hear. In view of 2 Tim 2:2, Smith and Kai do not want merely to raise up Christians or pastors; they want to train trainers. Yet, overwhelmingly the measure used to assess maturity, throughout the book, is evangelism: Is the person being obedience to share the gospel? The stress on number and rapid multiplication leads the authors to some telling conclusion. When talking about the 7 core parts of the T4T process, Smith suggests that if time runs short, the trainer should cut out or minimize those aspects which are most characteristic of a “traditional Bible study” (150)—pastoral care, worship, and the new (teaching) lesson. Other than the closing prayer, there is nothing distinctly Christian left in the remaining parts. With respect to content, T4T wisely proposes believers become familiar with a few key topics very early in their Christian life, such as bible study, prayer, and the church. On the other hand, Smith writes, “Lesson one is the gospel” (53), yet in section two, the gospel is actually a very small part of the lesson. Most of the time is spent on vision casting and giving a bridge *to* the gospel. For the most part, the authors assume the “gospel” without extensive discussion; for them, the “gospel” is about how individuals get saved (215ff).

The linchpin of T4T methodology is found in dividing the training time into 3-thirds. The first third is for accountability, fellowship, and worship. The second third focuses on teaching content. The final third of one’s meeting time is mainly spent practicing teaching each other what they were just taught. Much can be learned from this division of labor, particularly having a consistent time when people can discuss possible application and accountability with one another. Readers will have to agree to disagree on exactly how rigidly to enforce this division. For example, must the third-third consist in specifically practicing teaching, or might other forms of obedience, besides evangelism and teaching, require other discussions? One of the weakest parts in T4T training is the absence of instruction regarding interpretation. The acronym that is suggested is more oriented towards application than understanding. Simply asking the question “What is the passage saying?” (135) is no help at all. After all, trainees are never told *how* to answer that first and most critical of questions, *from which* any application derives.

The book’s subtitle and introduction look forward to a “rerevolution” akin to the earliest church. It is a credit to the authors to instill the hope that God might accomplish today what he has done in the past; they are right to correct unwarranted pessimism. The drive to motivate readers may however be the reason for one of the book’s lowest points. Smith asserts that Acts informs us of 6–7 CPMs (170–71); however, he also claims a CPM must have four or more traceable generations of planted churches (176). Obviously, Acts simply gives us no reason to assert that those streams of churches had planted other churches to the fourth generation.

Finally, Part Three addresses numerous questions related to applying T4T. From this reader’s perspective, it seems Smith lays the greatest weight on vision casting (which is the first topic discussed in a section also talking about gospel bridges, gospel presentation, and forming churches). The value of this section is that it forces the church planter to give concentrated attention to those factors that affect churches’ “DNA” for multiple generations. It is easy for leaders to lose sight of the future. Indeed, such vision should clarify a church’s priorities and methodologies. Only one chapter (Ch. 16) is given to actually forming a church; this is admitting

ironical for a book aiming to catalyze *church* planting movements. Nevertheless, what is said there and in the following chapter on leadership development is constructive. It answers a number of concerns others have raised about qualifications of a pastor in a rapidly growing movement. This section probably represents Smith's most serious engagement with the Bible, focusing on the differences between 1 Timothy and Titus, in light of their separate contexts. No doubt, that makes it one of the most helpful in rebutting criticisms against T4T. Nevertheless, there remains a subtle de-emphasis on the role of a pastor in a local church. The stress given to self-feeding (223) juxtaposes the surrounding silence of the pastor's task of teaching, which is quite clearly evident in Scripture. Furthermore, more exegetical attention is needed respective to the timing and appointment of elders. Though Paul may well have appointed new believers who were only "weeks-old and months-old," yet, this statement as it is overlooks the fact that these new Christians most likely had Jewish proselyte backgrounds. This detail would certainly affect the selection process of new elders.

Because T4T is not content driven, but rather guided by a number of core values, there is great potential for its being used in numerous contexts. This would require a great deal of adjustments and reemphasis. Smith and Kai's single-minded orientation for evangelism, numbers, and rapidity are not essential to T4T *qua* T4T. Obedience or application, for example, need not be reduced to setting the goal to "witness to five people a week" (90). Since the book largely emphasizes organization and communication principles, those who want to develop a more holistic ministry can still benefit from Smith and Kai's counsel. In its most basic form, T4T is a catalyst for new believers. It is very possible that Kai and others would have great suggestions to improve the process beyond the initial 6 lessons offered in the T4T methodology.

T4T resembles other works in line with the church growth movement. Readers will find similar things to comment or criticize in *T4T* as in other pragmatically oriented proposals. Regardless of how one critiques Smith and Kai's approach, missionaries will gain a number of common sense suggestions and encouraging stories. These elements should give the missionary greater awareness of the big picture. Even if one disagrees with the particulars as to how the authors apply T4T, a theologically sensitive reader can still learn the importance of methodology in determining or directing the health of churches for generations to come. Rather than being formulaic, as some might charge against *T4T*, its optimism and testimony to the complexity of CPMs should alert readers to be creative and critical in establishing holistic patterns of ministry, which do not merely produce converts who train other converts, but instead disciples who truly are new creations glorifying God in the way they eat or drink or whatever they do.

This book is important for missionaries to read, if anything so that they can be aware of a common philosophy and model of ministry accepted around the world. *T4T* will spur a number of helpful questions about missionary practice, which is something many other more theological oriented books do not do. For sure, Smith and Kai's book should not be a foundational text in formulating a comprehensive missiological strategy. There is a real danger that readers may get swept away by the assurance of testimonies and statistics rather than trusting in the sovereign God who promised Abraham offspring from every nation, more than could be counted, "as the stars of heaven and as sand that is on the seashore" (Gen 22:17, ESV).