

City Movements in Post-Christian Contexts: Oslo, Norway

About: What does a city movement look like in a post-Christian context? It's all about going slow, building trust among leaders, and thinking long-term.

Podcast Notes:

Can you tell us a bit about your background?

My name is Joakim Magnus and I grew up north of Oslo, Norway. I call myself a “brainwashed missionary kid.” My parents worked with Youth with a Mission in northern Europe so I grew up in a mission context. I graduated from high school, served with the army, and traveled around the world for several years even going to a Bible school in Australia.

When I came back home I got sick with chronic fatigue and spent four or five years in bed. My brain worked but my body did not. I studied during all of those years.

I told God, “Until you heal me, I’ll study.”

When I got better, I moved to South Africa to study the Bible, surf, climb, and I even met my wife, Elyse, who is an American.

Elyse and I questioned how we were going to use our life. I am a history, English and religions teacher but I knew from the age of six that God was calling me to fulltime ministry.

We started Youth with a Mission in Oslo, but it was not something we originally wanted to do. For me, it felt like being a prophet in your hometown. It wasn’t easy. I wanted God to send me somewhere else in the world, but He said, “No, you’re supposed to do it here. Do it in Oslo.”

We’ve been leading this for six years now.

*Our mission is to “Train everyday
disciples to change the city.”*



God made clear we weren't starting a new missionary work but that we were to be about changing the city. This was a starting point for me to think more about the theology of the city.

The most exciting thing we've been doing is a Bible study for people who don't have time to go to Bible school. We've been running this for six years. There were 600 people who wanted to do it this year—so many we had to turn some people away. There are 530 young adults who have signed up for this summer. It's just fellowship, eating and the Bible for two hours.

Two years ago I got a random email from someone I didn't know. They were asking if I wanted to be a part of planning a conference in New York on city transformation. Long story short, I prayed about it and said yes. I brought 12 leaders from Oslo with me to South Africa and now we have started Beveg Byen, or literally "Move the City".

What is the culture like in Oslo? How is the church viewed in Oslo?

Oslo is the capital of Norway. Norway is a small country. Oslo is a highly educated and affluent city. It is also highly secular and post-Christian; the Norwegian State Church has also been secularized.

We did a survey in Oslo recently and learned 4.8% of the population goes to church at least once a month. That's about 32,000 people and includes the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran State Church, and all kinds of Pentecostal churches too.

The churches are not seen as highly influential. People think Christianity is irrelevant and old-fashioned. They think: "We're living in 2018. How can you think this?"



People see Christianity as a threat to their lifestyle where they live based on their feelings and emotions. Christianity is a threat to their freedom of expression.

What are ways the church needs to adapt collaborative ways of working together so that the church can survive and thrive in cities?

I think the enemy's best strategy is to get the church to be against one another—to create disunity instead of unity.

Today there are so many issues around the Bible and Jesus. When people come against Christianity in the media, unity allows there to be relationships where we can talk about these things. When there is disunity, you feel alone and it's easier for misunderstanding to happen. But when there is relationship we can say, "Wait, I know this guy, and what media is portraying is not something he would represent."

Where there is unity, we can share our struggles but also our victories.

We also need to recognize that in our culture—which is post-Christian—we need to communicate the gospel in different ways. The packaging may look different, but it is the same gospel.

That said, it's important we don't change the gospel. The gospel is the gospel and may be offensive, but we still need to preach the gospel.

Can you tell us about your experience at Movement Day 2016 in New York City? And how did it accelerate what God was already doing in your heart and in the hearts of the other Oslo leaders who went?

I have to admit, I was a little scared of going because some of the pastors who were going had been leading much longer than I had. And, I had never been to the conference before but told them that it was going to be great.

It was a great experience. God met each of us in unique ways.



We came away being reminded that we are not just pastors and leaders for our ministries, but we are for our city.

The other thing was relationship. When you go on a trip abroad with other leaders you fly together, eat together, hang out in New York City together. We all really bonded and thought: “Hey we all really like each other. We should hang out more together.”

Those relationships—that may have been the most important thing that came out of going to New York.

When we came home, we knew we needed to ask: “Why did God send us to New York together?” So, we met for breakfast and prayer and decided to meet every six weeks for breakfast and prayer and see where that would take us.

That’s where it started. Now those 12 leaders have formed the board of the citywide ministry.

That was 2016. What has happened since then? And where do you feel God leading you in the future?

- We decided to go slow (and thorough) than jump quickly to action and programs.
- Build relationships that become strong enough bridges on which we can move stuff over in the future.
- Meet and pray.
- Map the city. We did compiled research in what we called Oslo Monitor 1.0. We measured:
 - Spiritual lostness
 - Social pain
 - Cultural brokenness
 - These three components were taken from Doxa Deo in South Africa who has gone further in this.
- We arranged a first pastors’ retreat.
- We decided on four things we would do each year
 - Host a Movement Day gathering in Oslo (October 13, 2018)
 - Prayer week



- Retreat for pastors and leaders
 - Pentecost for Everyone (immigrant + white churches coming together)
- Youth in Oslo initiative over the next few years

What are pieces of advice you would give to those who are just beginning the city movement work in their city?

In the beginning I didn't dare to take the leadership that I should have taken. I was scared of the leadership. God told me that he made me a leader but that I didn't take the role he had given me.

Trust that if God has called you, He will give you what you need.

Go slow. We have business people involved who want to do things yesterday. Pastors are wanting to go a little slower. But make sure that the group is not moving beyond the relationship. Make sure the relationship is not carrying more than it can carry.

The older I get, the more important it is to be thorough—to ask, “Is this really God? Or is this just excitement?” Take time to pray.

Think long-term. We won't change Oslo tomorrow, but have a 40 year plan. Don't be in a hurry.

Get ownership. The main pastors and leaders need to feel like this is theirs. People need to think: “This is my thing.”

We move chairs at events and do this for free. We are owning it by giving our time and energy into this. Overtime you can hire someone, but for now, we are owning it personally.



Are there any last things you want to share?

City movement work is not like the American concept of franchising. City movements must be indigenous and look like their community.

How can we stay in touch with you?

[Beveg Byen](#) Facebook page. This is the Norwegian spelling for Move the City.

Links:

[Beveg Byen](#) Facebook page

[Youth with a Mission Oslo](#)

[City Changer Resources](#) through Doxa Deo Church

