



FIVE ESSENTIALS IN CHURCH PLANTING

BY: THE SEND NETWORK TEAM

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
PRIORITIES	7
CHURCH	24
PASTORAL COUNSELING	42
PREACHING	59
TEAM	75
CONCLUSION	93

INTRODUCTION

Before you were a Gospel minister you were a human in need of the Gospel. And long after you stop being a Gospel minister, you will still be a human who relies on the Grace of God to save you from yourself.

The title of church planter does not automatically recreate you into a being without frailty, weakness and sin. If anything your calling amplifies this reality to, often, a soul-searing volume.

But let's face it.

Many days it's a struggle to understand our need for and to live out of God's Grace provided for us, despite us. We feel we've accomplished so much or so little that we begin to feel solely responsible for our successes and even what we might call our failures.

It becomes easy to get so bogged down in the good activities of ministry that they become only activities, activities that we think will grow or save our ministry.

Church planters are doers. We love plans, action, the successful execution of a vision. This is a godly characteristic. However, when we begin to execute our vision and fail to believe the truth of our need, we have grown to big and our God too small.

That's why while this book is a practical reflection on the realities of ministry, it's also an admonition to you and me about our need to believe God and what He says about us, our calling and Himself.

We are His creation, called to reflect His glory for the sake of His name among all the nations.

But as we live out this calling in the context of ministry, we must echo the words of Paul about sinners: "among whom I am the chief." And turn daily and moment-by-moment to our Father to be strong in our weak moments.

This book is borne out of the experiences of a weak man turning to a powerful Savior who has kept His promises.

The Send Network Team

PRIORITIES

The Same Sad Story

We've all heard the story, one way or another. A pastor or ministry leader has a moral failure. The senior pastor had an affair with his secretary. The president of the ministry was caught embezzling money. One of the most trusted leaders in the community betrayed the trust they had built up over the years.

We've all seen the news stories, even the more extreme and unforeseen ones. Most of us have probably even known personally a church leader who failed morally. We've felt the pain and heartache, the shrapnel that attends these travesties.

We look at these virtual train wrecks, and we think, "How in the world did this happen? How did he go from that person to that person?"

All of these instances tell the same sad story. The story of indwelling sin, idolatry, misplaced affections and priorities.

One thing is certain in response to the "how did this happen?" question. It did not happen overnight. The pastor did not go from in love with Jesus and walking in the Spirit one moment to sleeping with his secretary the next moment. The leader did not go from walking in sacrificial, gospel-motivated generosity one moment to sticking his hands in the money jar the next. That simply doesn't happen.

What, then, does happen?

Drift.

A hundred tiny, seemingly harmless decisions.

Staying just a little later at the office. Refusing to spend consistent time in the Word. Your prayer life growing cold. Taking yourself out of community and accountability. Telling white lies. Taking that second or third glance.

In short, the heart grows cold to Jesus and warm to sin.

Paul describes this very thing in Galatians 5. Those of us in Christ have our sinful flesh nature that is still alive in us, but we also have the Holy Spirit. These two natures are at war with one another, and the fruit we bear is dependent upon which nature we are feeding and walking in.

Read Galatians 5:16-25. What things does Paul list as works of the flesh? Do you see evidence of any of these in your own life?

What things does he list as works of the Spirit? Do you see evidence of any of these in your own life?

Moral failures do not come out of nowhere. They come from a gradual turning of the heart to the desires of the flesh, a continual turning away from the Holy Spirit and His conviction of our hearts. They come from denying the satisfaction that is ours in Jesus and looking for happiness elsewhere.

It follows, then, that staying connected to Jesus is achieved by continually walking in the Spirit and submitting the desires of the flesh to Him.

“For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace.”

Romans 8:6, HCSB

“Christian ministry changes people. It can make us far better or far worse Christians than we would have been otherwise, but it will not leave us unchanged.”

Tim Keller

Priority #1: Your Spiritual Health

Relationship With Jesus

Nothing in ministry is as important as your relationship with Jesus.

That bears repeating:

Nothing in ministry is as important as your relationship with Jesus.

Why is this true? Because your ministry flows out of your love for Jesus. When your affections for Jesus grow cold in ministry and you don't repent of your sin and pursue Him, you walk down a dangerous road.

Of course, spiritual dryness is often caused by unrepentant sin, so the first step we need to take is to ask the Holy Spirit to point out any areas that we need to repent. We can go beyond that and ask our community

if they see any unrepentant sin in our lives. We should not expect our relationship with God to feel right when there are sin issues in our lives that we have not submitted to Him.

However, there may also be seasons of dryness in your walk with the Lord that may not be the direct result of unrepentant sin. Regardless of the cause, when your heart grows cold the temptation is to avoid time with the Lord, but that is the most harmful thing you can do. Rather than running away from prayer, Scripture and community, draw closer to those things. Feast on them more.

When you are cold, you draw closer to the fire—you don't pull away.

Here is how Tim Keller puts it:

“When you speak to God about your dryness, rather than avoiding prayer times, it reminds you of your weakness and dependence upon his grace for absolutely everything. It drives home the importance and preciousness of your standing in Christ.”

In one of his books, C.S. Lewis answers the question: “What do you do if you know you’re supposed to love someone but you don’t?” He says that you don’t simply sit around and try to muster up love for them. Instead, you think about what you would do for them if you did love them, then go do those things. Eventually, as you do this you will come to love the person.

This is a brilliant insight into our relationship with the Lord. When you don’t feel the warmth of relationship you know you should feel, what do you do? You don’t just sit there and wait—you seek Him, serve Him and draw near to Him. You ask Him to point out any unrepentant sin in your

life. You do everything you would do if your heart did feel that passionate love for Him.

“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

James 4:8, HCSB

How is your relationship with Jesus currently? Are there any areas of unrepented or unconfessed sin that you need to bring to Him?

What do you tend to do when your relationship with Jesus grows cold? Do you avoid time with Him? If so, how should you react instead?

The Battle For Your Heart’s Affections

Lots of things in this world will battle for your heart’s affections over the course of your ministry. Idols will rise up in your heart and attempt to steal away your love for Jesus.

Many of the stories of moral failure stem from some type of idolatry—

you can see it clear as day in what happens. A pastor trades love for Jesus for the love of sex, along with a deeper sense of comfort or approval that comes with it. A leader trades love for Jesus for the love of money, along with the deeper sense of control or power that he looks to it to give him.

An even more tricky but all too common scenario is ministry idolatry. Pastors, missionaries and leaders succumb to this idol when they derive their sense of worth and value from their ministry efforts rather than from Jesus. This can be deceiving, primarily because ministry is a good thing, right? It's harder to see this idol, and in some ways that makes it even more dangerous.

Tim Keller describes the danger of ministry idolatry here:

“Here’s how this danger can begin. Your prayer life may be nonexistent, or you may have an unforgiving spirit toward someone, or sexual desires may be out of control. But you get involved in some ministry activity, which draws out your spiritual gifts. You begin to serve and help others, and soon you are affirmed by others and told what great things you are doing. You see the effects of your ministry and conclude that God is with you. But actually God was helping someone through your gifts even though your heart was far from him. Eventually, if you don’t do something about your lack of spiritual fruit, but instead continue to build your identity on your spiritual gifts and ministry activity, there will be some kind of collapse. You will blow up at someone or lapse into some sin that destroys your credibility. And everyone, including you, will be surprised. But you should not be. Spiritual gifts without spiritual fruit are like a tire slowly losing air.”

Do you see any evidence of what he’s describing in this quote in your life? Are there any areas in your ministry where you are leaning on spiritual gifts rather than on spiritual fruit?

Look up 1 John 5:21. What warning does this letter close with?

How do we keep ourselves from idols?

By remembering what we already have in Jesus.

In Christ, we lack absolutely nothing. We have all of the worth, value, comfort, approval, power and control that we will ever need. He provides for every deep desire that we have. It is only when we lose sight of that glorious truth that we begin to chase other things to fulfill our desires.

The way to defeat idolatry is not to focus on not sinning, because then our focus is still on the idol and what it seemingly offers. Like a carrot on a stick, sin attempts to deceive us and allure our affections elsewhere.

Instead, the way out of idolatry is to focus on worshipping Jesus. It's to look around and realize that you are sitting in a whole field of carrots. He has met your every need. Satisfaction abounds in Him and only in Him. Waking up to that reality and continually feasting on His goodness is the

only way to stay away from the traps of idols.

Ministry is not the prize. It will not mend our broken souls or sustain us. Idols are not the prize. They will only break our hearts.

Jesus alone is the great prize and reward.

We get Him, and He is exceedingly more than enough!

“Taste and see that the LORD is good. How happy is the man who takes refuge in Him!”

Psalm 34:8, HCSB

What idols are you tempted by? If you, God forbid, ever had a moral failure in ministry, what do you think it would be? How can you proactively resist such an outcome by feasting on what you already have in Jesus?

Sabbath

Read Exodus 31:12-17. What startling punishment does God put forth for not keeping the Sabbath?

Another integral part of prioritizing our spiritual health is keeping God’s command for the Sabbath. He is so serious about this that, in Exodus 31, he says that a person who doesn’t observe the Sabbath should be put to death.

That strikes us a little strangely, no doubt. We live in a workaholic, 24-7, always connected, always moving culture where work is valued as much as anything else. Whereas in the old days the sun went down and the only real option was to go to sleep and prepare for work the next day, electricity and technology have made it possible to work around the clock. Email and social media never take a break. Phones ring constantly.

As a ministry leader, this is the air you breathe and you will feel the constant pressure to be available to people. If you do not yet feel the weight of this reality, you soon will:

Ministry is never done.

Why?

Because people are never done. The mission is not done.

So the temptation is to never stop.

However, if you do not create healthy rhythms of rest, you will not last in ministry. God has not designed us to be robots that never stop. He has designed us with a purpose, physical bodies that need eight hours of sleep at night to remind us that we are not self-sufficient beings—minds and souls that need a break from the constant deluge of information and activity.

In short, rest reminds us of the gospel. It reminds us that we cannot do it all—that really, we can't do anything. We plant and we water, but God gives the growth—He is the one who is always at work.

“So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

The Sabbath reminds us that we are in desperate need of God at all times. It shows us that in the cross, Jesus has done the work that we could never have done, and our role is to gratefully receive it.

The Sabbath may feel like a command (because it is), but it is so much more than that. It is grace. A grace that, if neglected, will be very detrimental to your soul and ministry. We are graciously allowed to sit back and rest in the finished work of Christ one day out of the week and let our souls be rejuvenated by the truth that He alone sustains us.

Why would we neglect such a grace?

Some Practical Tips for Observing the Sabbath:

- **Mark your calendar and say no to other things.** If you do not do this, you will not observe the Sabbath with any sort of regularity.
- **Spend time with Jesus.** Good, quality, unrushed time with Him.
- **Turn off your phone, email and social media.** Or whatever else that distracts you. Be present in the real world.
- **Do things that feel restful and enjoyable.** What things feed your soul? Reading fiction? Taking a walk? Sitting by a beach? Planting a garden? Cooking a good meal? Whatever stirs your affections for Jesus—do those things.
- **Incorporate your family.** Having a Sabbath does not have to be you and Jesus at Starbucks for eight hours. In fact, for many families that is simply not possible. Incorporate your family into those things that are restful and enjoyable. Go to the park.

See a drive-in movie. Go to a baseball game. Invite another family over and cook a gourmet meal together.

Priority #2: Your Family

Daniel was a pastor for over twenty years before he realized his mistake. He led a growing church in a suburban area and even developed a regional speaking ministry that he was quite proud of. He, for one, understood busyness. He never had a moment to catch his breath, it seemed. There were always marriages in trouble that needed counseling, board meetings that needed to be overseen, sermons and speaking gigs to prepare for, not to mention the little bit of writing he did on the side for magazines.

Then one summer he went on a family vacation with his wife and three teenage children (the first one they'd been able to take in five years). Over the course of that trip, Daniel woke up to the fact that his relationship with his wife and children was shockingly cold and distant. He tried to make up for lost time, but it only seemed to make things worse. His wife cried the entire trip as he asked her questions and tried to catch up on her life. Bitterness and pain oozed out of her eyes and responses to him. He found out how rebellious his children were becoming, and that they did not respect him at all when he tried to correct them. His son even had the nerve in one particular argument to say, (along with a few expletives thrown in) "What do you care anyway? Don't you have other people to go counsel?"

Daniel had sacrificed his marriage and family on the altar of ministry. He made a tragic mistake that we hope and pray you never will.

Your First Ministry

So many pastors crumble under the weight of ministry idolatry when it

comes to their families. They believe the lie that no one else can do what they do—that every person in their flock depends solely upon them in a weird sort of power trip. Walking down this road of sacrificing whatever is necessary to feed your ministry idol is destructive to say the least.

Even as a pastor, your first ministry is your family. Someone else can indeed take over your roles in ministry. It doesn't matter how gifted you think you are—you are not irreplaceable.

However, guess what? You are in fact irreplaceable in your home. You are irreplaceable to your wife and to your children.

God has given you a job that no one else on this planet can do—to love and shepherd your wife and children as your first priority and first ministry.

Leading Your Marriage

Please hear this:

The church is not your bride.

The church already has a groom, and it is Jesus—not you.

If you are married, you already have a bride. Treat her like it. Jesus will take care of the church— you take care of her. If you ever have to choose between cheating your wife and cheating the church—cheat the church.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33. What instructions does Paul give us as husbands in loving and shepherding our wives?

Some Practical Tips for Leading Your Marriage:

- **Have a consistent date night.** Every week. On your calendar. Make it a priority and say no to other things.
- **Encourage her relationship with Jesus.** Talk about spiritual things a lot. Ask her how she is doing. Read Scripture together. Watch the kids so she can spend time with the Lord.
- **Confess sin to each other.** Often. Don't walk in unresolved issues or bitterness.
- **Ask her how you can better serve her.** She knows better than anyone else how you can love, shepherd and encourage her.
- **Listen to her.** When you get off track and start valuing ministry more than your family, she will tell you. The only question is, will you listen?

How can you better love and shepherd your wife?

Leading Your Children

Your children need a father more than they need anything else, and you

only have one opportunity to raise them. Please take advantage of it. Do not sacrifice your children ministering to other people.

Your children will likely not remember the sermons that you preach—they will remember and be shaped by the type of father you were in the home.

Are you representing God to your children well? Are you teaching them that He is present, that He cares, that He will listen?

Are you going to piano recitals and baseball games?

Are you showing them, by reading it to them and with them, that the Bible is not just a book you read on Sundays?

Are you praying with and for them on a regular basis?

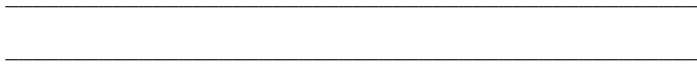
Do they see your faith on display in your home and daily life—not just in public? Do they see you repent and confess when you sin?

Because that is the type of father your children need. One that loves them, shepherds them and models Jesus for them.

“Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4, HCSB

How can you better love and shepherd your children?



Insight vs. Change

Reading this chapter may have prodded you, and indeed that is something we hope for. We hope the Holy Spirit convicted you and gave you insight into any areas of your life that need to be reprioritized.

But here’s the thing about insight—it feels like change, but it is not in fact change.

Your life will not change because you read something and thought, “Oh, I need to change that.”

You have to actually make the changes. You have to confess and repent of any areas that you are neglecting your God-given priorities. You have to make a plan to reprioritize and actually stick to it, with continual guidance from the Holy Spirit and the help of your family and church community. Paying lip service to the insights you’ve received will accomplish nothing—you have to act.

We pray that your life and ministry will be healthier and more God glorifying as a result of the Holy Spirit speaking to you on these issues.

In light of this chapter, what things in your life need to change and be reprioritized?

What is your plan for actually pursuing change? What practical things do you need to do? Who needs to keep you accountable?

CHURCH

“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose, which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Ephesians 3:8-11

“The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history.”

John Stott

Parents of preschoolers know the insanity created by the toy room. Designed to provide a safe, fun environment for kids to grow, dream, create and play, these rooms often resemble the site of a natural disaster with headless dolls, shards of coloring books and mismatched pieces of once-new toys littering the floor. Cleaning the toy room seems futile. And yet, it is vital.

Structure is essential for the room to be useful to the child’s development; however, too much structure robs the children of the joy of learning and developing.

Similarly the local church presents a church planter with dueling tensions. On the one hand, the planter will be challenged to take a seemingly random assortment of people, equipment and money and organize them in such a way that the church accomplishes its God ordained purpose of declaring the manifold wisdom of God. On the other hand, the planter will have to build systems and structures that best meet the needs of their church planting context and avoid rigid, institutional

systems that rob the church of the joy of learning, growing, creating and dreaming.

The only way to strike that balance is to have an unwavering commitment to the purpose of God’s church and the Scriptural plan by which God promises to build his church. The purpose and plan of the church provide the fixed foundation on which the church must be established. With this in place the planter is then free to creatively, intentionally and intelligently create a church system that fosters God’s purpose and plan.

Purpose

Before we seek to discern God’s purpose for the local church, let’s ask a more personal question. What is your purpose for planting your church?

What are some wrong motives for planting a church?

In one sentence define the church:

As the chief builder, master architect and cornerstone of the church, God has full right to define its purpose. Unless the motive for church planting coalesces with the God-ordained purpose for the church, it is doomed from the outset. But if it does adhere to its God-ordained purpose, God pledges His full support and sovereign provision.

What is that purpose?

Worship

The church exists for God. His glory, fame and renown are to be proclaimed through His work among His people. Not only is this the purpose for the church, but it is the purpose for all of creation. God is on mission to gather a people who would treasure him through passionate adoration and humble obedience. Christ serves as the founder of the church (Matthew 16:18), leader of the church (Eph. 2:20), and purchaser of the church by His blood (Acts 20:28); therefore the church exists to worship by bringing glory to Him (Ezekiel 36:22-23; Isa 48:8-11; Ephesians 3:10) and for declaring His glory to the world (Ephesians 2:10-3:11). As a herald, a body (1 Corinthians 12:12,27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; 5:20-30; Colossians 1:18, 24; 3:15), a bride, a building (1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:21), a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-8), and a dwelling place of God by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:18-22; 4:4), the church demonstrates the manifold wisdom of the glory of God to the world.

God's universal church, comprising all redeemed humanity from every tribe, tongue and nation participates now in the unending worship for which they were created and of which they will partake eternally with the Father in heaven. And yet, the universal church lives out its expression in local, flesh and blood congregations of worshippers who gather throughout the week to celebrate the work of God in their lives (Romans 12:1). The corporate identity of the church rests on the worship of its people who respond with adoration, submission and awe-struck reverence as the trajectory of all of life.

Mission

Right worship must overflow into a life of mission. Mission is the necessary result of worship, and when a church's worship is lacking its mission will be impotent. People captivated by the glory of God cannot keep this to themselves but live to display and declare His beauty to the world. Throughout the history of God's dealings with His people it is clear that those who are blessed by the grace of God become a means of blessing to others (Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 9:36-38; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 4:1-2, 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 6:1; Col 3:17, 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Specifically in the New Testament this mission is defined as the making of disciples of Jesus who worship Him rightly. Thus, the mission of God's people is to see the worship of God expand among all peoples. As Paul writes, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). In the church, the outward thrust of mission demands that mission be central to who the church is, and not simply on aspect of what the church does (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore the purpose of the church is to produce worshipping missionaries.

The foundation of worshipping mission provides the stable posture from which a church can be planted in any context and is a metric to evaluate

the fruitfulness of any local church.

Imagine that you meet the owner of the world's greatest shoe factory who, in his kindness, agrees to take you on a tour of his factory. You arrive at one of the best facilities you have ever seen, park in a spot specifically assigned to you, are greeted by the kindest greeters the world has ever known. The owner greets you outside and proceeds to show you his top of the line equipment, meticulous workers and even his office with a view. Obviously impressed, you spend hours mesmerized by the sheer prowess of this shoe factory. And yet one thing is missing—the shoes.

Unless the owner can show you some shoes, all the beauty, refinement, polish and brilliance are lost. The success of a shoe factory is measured by its production of shoes.

In like fashion, the success of a church is measured by its production of worshipping missionaries. Therefore, there does not have to be a false dichotomy between the number of people attending a church and the maturity of those people. God desires many worshipping missionaries passionate about the gospel. This is what God values, and it must be what the church strives to create.

Without a purpose, the structures of the church may usurp or supplant the foundation of worshipping mission; when this happens, these structures will misdirect the life of the church, at best, or kill it at worst. The local church must be tethered to worshipful mission, or she is setting up her own destruction.

What scorecard will your church plant use to measure success?

How will you know if worshipping missionaries are being produced through your church plant?

How will you ensure that your church plant knows its God-given purpose?

Plan

Purpose propels a plan. Without the purpose no plan matters, but with an authoritative purpose, a church planter can lead his church to develop a plan that fosters that purpose. For worshipping mission to happen, the leaders of the local church must see to it that they create a church culture that ruthlessly equips people for the this task. Clearly, structures and systems in the church are not the most important factor. And yet, effective systems provide the church with a means for producing worshipping missionaries. Thankfully the Scriptures provide the church with the plan God has for the production of missionary worshippers.

A biblical plan fuels the production of worshipping missionaries.

Life Transformation

The only way worshipping missionaries will be produced in the local church is for the work of the gospel to bring about genuine life transformation (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 12:1-2). In this way the church is increasingly conformed to the image of Christ under the Lordship of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:16). Ultimately it is God's goal that the Word and the Spirit would "purify for Himself a people of His own" (Titus 2:14). However, the church will not simply drift towards life transformation. In fact, it will drift towards sin and idolatry. Therefore, the church does not simply need structures that provide it with more information. Rather, a pastor must work towards creating organic environments that allow for the Spirit to work among His people. These environments find ways to tap into the deep well of resources that the Spirit has provided for the transformation of His people: time in the Word (Hebrews 4:12-16), silence and solitude (Matthew 14:23), prayer (Matthew 6:7-13; 1 Thessalonians

5:16-18), fasting (Matthew 6:16-18) and others. This leads to hearts that produce the fruit of the Spirit from a place of authentic transformation rather than mere religious conformity (Gal 5:22-23).

How will you promote life transformation in your people?

How will you know if transformation is happening?

Loving Relationships

Worshipping mission is forged in the context of genuine relationships with other believers. As a reconciled community, the work of the cross not only reconciles people to the Father, but also to one another in the context of the church. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22,

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are

being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Biblical community in the church is a gift of grace and a primary means of fostering worship. Only in genuine relationships with other believers can the multitude of one-another commands in Scripture be practiced, as believers learn to live in harmony and love one another well (John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 3:8-9; 1 John 3:16; 4:7-12). It is easy for people to claim to love the church and yet fail to love the real people that make up a singular church. And yet it is in the struggle of relationships that idolatry is exposed and worship is fostered. In and through this diverse community one is able to form deep, transparent, authentic relationships with other Christians within the church for the purpose of mutual growth, encouragement and care (Genesis 2:18; Proverbs 1:7; Matthew 18; John 13:34, 17:21; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 12:27; Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:3; 5:1-27; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 John 1:6-7).

How will you promote loving relationships among your church plant?

How will you infuse these relationships with missionary DNA and protect them from becoming introverted?

Word Proclamation

The Word of God must be central to life transformation of people and their loving relationships with one another. In astounding grace, God provided His church with His Word, which serves as the authoritative means of disclosing Christ and promoting worship. Thus, it must not be neglected. Certainly the Word must be proclaimed during the weekly corporate gathering the systematic teaching of the Scriptures. In the host of activities that press upon a church planter, he must not neglect time in the Word, meditation and study and skillful proclamation.

Feasting on the Word is vital to the health of the church. And yet this must not be the only means by which the Word is communicated. The Word must be infused into the ongoing daily conversations of the people of God in the context of loving relationships. The church is fueled by the ability and willingness of the congregation to feed one another on the Scriptures. Finally, the Word is proclaimed through the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism functions as the front door to the gathered church and is the outward means by which one acknowledges their inward trust in Christ, repentance from sin, faith in His finished work and union with Christ. The Lord's Supper is that ongoing meal of the gathered saints in which they commemorate Christ's death and renew their commitment to Him and to one another (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). These acts serve to enhance the proclamation of the word through gospel pictures.

How will the Word shape the life of your church plant?

What decisions do you need to make concerning the practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper?

Meaningful Partnership

These loving relationships in the body form the genuine community of the local church. There is significant difference between attendees of a local church and those who have wholeheartedly embraced the mission of the church and are partnering with its work in the world. This partnership is vital for the church to maximize her effectiveness in the world.

This can happen in two ways. First by having a clearly-defined process for church membership, the church can clearly distinguish the sheep who have been entrusted to its care. Particularly in our day when church shopping and consumerism often contaminate the church, it is vital that a church take an aggressive stance on defining itself as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Church membership provides a way in which regenerate men and women may be united to the church, under the care of her pastors, for the sake of worshiping mission in the world (Hebrews 13:17). It also happens by working to pursue and restore those members who are living in known sin.

While all people sin, the mark of true worshippers is a repentant posture towards sin and an active pursuit of Christ. Thus, the church must have meaningful ways of pursuing those entrenched in sin and

who are unwilling to repent in hopes of their repentance and restoration (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5). Combined, meaningful church membership and loving pursuit of the wayward serve to identify the church in the world as worshipping missionaries.

How will your church implement membership? At what stage in church planting will you do this?

How will you handle sin in the body?

Gift Utilization

One of the chief means of meaningful partnership with the body is the utilization of the gifts of the Spirit. God has uniquely gifted His people to serve to build up the body and produce worshipping missionaries (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Since the Spirit has given gifts to all believers, these gifts must be used for the common good; when they are not used properly the entire body suffers. The diversity of gifts given by the Spirit makes for effective ministry in the church. The production of worshipping missionaries is not solely the job of the pastor but is the responsibility of everyone indwelt by the Spirit. Pastors must not be satisfied with a large

percentage of the church failing to utilize the magnificent gifting they possess by the Spirit but must fan into flame the gifting of the Spirit—both inside and outside of the walls of the church.

How will you equip your people to know their spiritual giftedness?

How will you deploy the diverse giftings of your congregation for the building up of the people of God?

Servant Leadership

The church must be led by worshipping missionaries who provide a servant model for what it means to “love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” God has appointed the offices of pastors and deacons to serve as active conduits of grace to their congregation and serve them faithfully (Acts 20:17-38; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). As they do, servant leaders see it as their primary responsibility to equip others to the task of worshipping mission. Paul makes this point clear when he writes, “He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as

evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). Pastors must guard against becoming a dispenser of religious goods and services but must seek to identify, train and deeply invest in the giftedness of the people whom he serves. This will force a decentralized model of leadership in which those in positions of influence humbly give themselves away for the sake of others (Matthew 20:20-28; 1 Peter 5:2). Through empowering people, the pastor creates a mobilized congregation equipped with the tools necessary to produce worshipping missionaries (1 Corinthians 4:1; Philippians 2:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Godly leaders use their relational influence to enhance the function of the church, develop effective leaders and produce multigenerational discipleship (Titus 2:1-10).

How will your church plant be led?

As a church planter, how will you equip the saints for the work of the ministry?

Targeted Sending

Finally, the church must provide structures that ensure the mobilization of resources and the intentional sending of missionaries to plant churches, pastor existing churches and reach the nations (Genesis 12:1-3; Psalms 45-49; Is 6; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:12-15; Ephesians 2:19-22, 3:7-12, 4:11-16, 5:22-32; 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1). The church functions like kudzu –always expanding and difficult to stop. This task must not be haphazard. Rather, the church and her leaders must develop targeted strategies to impact certain contexts with the gospel rather than diffusing their influence by spreading it too thin. This happens on several levels.

Locally this happens through meaningful church partnership with other churches in the city to extend the influence of the gospel beyond the reach of individual congregations. It also happens through church planting, as existing churches develop processes by which they can groom leaders, target geographies, deploy manpower, and launch effective, autonomous local churches. And it happens through international missions, as worshipping missionaries are mobilized to the nations to reach those without access to the gospel. In this way the systematic work of the church moves from the church plant to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Galatians 1:6-9; Philippians 1:5; Colossians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8) and participates in the work of bringing the gospel message to every tribe, tongue and nation until Christ returns (Revelation 5:9).

How will your church plant prioritize church partnership, church planting, and international missions?

How will targeted sending assist the church in producing worshipping missionaries?

Promise

The terrain of this chapter has sought to establish two principles:

1. God's purpose for the church is to produce a community of worshipping missionaries.
2. God has a plan for the production of missionary worshippers that must be applied in any context.

And yet, there is one missing ingredient. God also has a promise for his church. He pledges that He will build His church and nothing, not even the gates of hell itself, will be able to prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). As the church conforms to the purpose and plan of God, it can be assured of the sovereign provision and protection of God. The church does not go at it alone. The presence of the Spirit goes in the church and ensures that it will accomplish the purposes for which it was created. This must fill the church with supreme confidence in the faithfulness of God. If God has been faithful to redeem His people by providing a Messiah, the church can rest assured that He will be faithful to produce worshipping missionaries

in our day.

PASTORAL COUNSELING

Counseling Gone Wrong

In an old MAD TV skit, Bob Newhart plays the part of a counselor sitting down to talk with a woman dealing with a deep-seated irrational fear of being buried alive in a box. After a few pleasantries, the woman tells him the fear and he is unsurprised. He tells her that he has two words to free her from this bondage to fear, so she gets out pen and paper, ready to receive her freedom.

When he finally speaks, the two words are anything but freeing. “Stop it,” he says.

“Stop it?” the woman asks, obviously confused.

“Yes. STOP IT!”

He goes on to explain that going through life afraid of being buried alive in a box must be terrifying, so she should just stop it. The humorous ending to the skit comes after she pushes back at his attempt to help her and he tells her that he has ten words for her this time, surely to help her. Then he yells:

This satirical look at counseling gone wrong is certainly funny, but sadly because the mistake made by Bob Newhart’s character is not unheard of.

Have you ever received any type of counseling that focused entirely on external behavior, sounding like a more complicated version of “STOP IT!”?

Unfortunately, there are those who equate pastoral counseling as a glorified version of Bob Newhart's character, voicing that people simply need to "stop," "quit doing that," or "try harder." Oversimplifying change does no good, because as the lady in the skit knows, it is not so easy just to "stop it"—otherwise, she would have already done so.

Behavior Modification vs. Heart Change

Pastoral counseling that is centered entirely on behavior modification is sadly ineffective. Focusing on behavior is a tempting option for pastors, for a few reasons:

- It is the most visible and measurable part of change.
- It can indeed indicate true heart change.
- It is easier to focus on than the heart.

Because of this, many pastors and ministry leaders focus almost exclusively on external behavior in a loving but misguided attempt to help the person change their destructive behaviors.

Take, for example, accountability. Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

We'd all likely agree that accountability is a good thing. However, although it is a good thing, it is certainly an incomplete method of producing true change.

Chris is a young church planter. He's been meeting with Parker, a college student who is addicted to pornography. Parker was convinced that his addiction was bad for him and wanted to be free from it, he just had no idea how to actually get to freedom. He felt like a slave to it.

When they first started meeting, Chris went over all of the practical things that Parker needed to do to restrict his access to pornography.

He started with putting filters on his computer and phone. That didn't work because Parker figured out a way to get around the filters.

The next thing they tried was giving up his personal computer. As difficult as it was for school, it was worth it. Parker packed it up and drove it to Chris's house, and even handed over his iPod. That helped for a while, but Parker eventually found a way around that too—he realized that he could access the internet elsewhere.

Chris was distraught, feeling totally helpless. He was coming up against a harsh truth:

Accountability does not produce true heart change.

Accountability, along with other techniques focused on behavior modification, is like building a fence around a bull. Will it keep the bull in the fence for a little while? Probably. Will it keep the bull in the fence forever? No way.

You absolutely need to build the fence around the bull, and many times that accountability is the first step necessary. When our hands are so busy grasping at idols, accountability can serve to tie up our hands and give us space to turn our attention to our hearts.

But you can't stop at accountability. You have to dig deeper to find out why the bull is angry. What does he want? What is the heart really after?

In your personal spiritual growth, how has behavior modification come up short? Have you felt the inadequacy of depending solely on accountability for change?

Getting to the Heart

Read Luke 18.18-27. What do you notice in this passage about Jesus' method of counseling?

A wealthy young man comes to Jesus and asks him for spiritual guidance. He recognizes that there is something different about Him, that maybe Jesus has the answers he's been searching for.

And what does Jesus do when He answers the man? Does He give the man "Eight Steps To a Better You?" No, of course not.

Does He give him helpful hints on how to win God's favor? Not even close.

So what does He do?

Jesus goes straight for the heart.

Being the all-knowing God that He is, He reached for the one thing He knew the man was holding onto with a death grip. He knew the man idolized his wealth and the security that he felt from it. He essentially says, "Repent of trusting in your wealth for your joy and security, and instead trust me to meet your needs."

He points to a behavior, no doubt, but a behavior that will indicate genuine heart change—an act of repentance that would say “I value You more than my wealth.”

When the man refuses, Jesus looks at him with sadness (v.24). He is sad that the man is trusting in idols rather than God, that he will not trade spiritual lies for spiritual life.

We have all felt that despair, have we not? We have watched people walk away from truth and instead choose their sin, even if they know it will be their destruction.

Jesus is our example here, even in His response to the man. He doesn't waste time with a bunch of tips and advice, He simply goes for the heart. He loves the man enough to tell him the truth, and even to be sad when he refuses.

Behind Every Sin

Sinful acts always have their origin in some form of unbelief. Behind every sin is a lie. The root of all our behavior and emotions is the heart: what it trusts and what it treasures. People are given over to sinful desires because 'they exchanged the truth of God for a lie'.

Tim Chester, You Can Change

Focusing solely on behavior modification in pastoral counseling doesn't solve our issues. Why? Because our behavior is only a symptom.

Our behavior reveals what we believe.

That bears repeating: our behavior reveals what we believe.

For example, where are you sitting right now? At home? In a coffee

shop? In your office?

Do you feel safe there? Are you reading this in relative peace, not afraid that your life might be in danger? More than likely, you are.

Why?

Because you believe that you are safe and secure where you are.

But...suppose you were to receive some verified information that your city is going to be bombed in less than two hours, and that the only way for you and your family to survive is to drive as far away as possible.

Would your behavior change in light of this new belief? Of course it would—you would be in your car going as fast as humanly possible.

In light of this, what do we need in pastoral counseling?

Do we need more “Stop it!” ... “Quit doing that!” ... “Try harder and do better!”? Of course not.

Instead, we need to lovingly show people the lies that they have trusted in. We need to call them to repent and believe the truth that will set them free. Because:

Behind every sin is a lie about God.

Jesus calls Satan the “father of lies” in John 8:44. Every lie that we believe comes from the enemy and is directed toward our destruction. Paul states the matter bluntly:

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.

Amen.

Romans 1:24

This is what Parker needed to hear from Chris. He needed to hear that he was believing the lie that “God is NOT satisfying.” He needed to hear that on a heart level he was trusting in sex and lust to meet needs that only God can. He needed to hear that his deep idols of comfort and approval were met fully in Jesus.

Those were indeed the very truths that led to his liberation from pornography addiction.

This is what every one of us needs to hear, because we are all sinners in need of the gospel that sets us free from our self-induced slavery to lies.

We are complex people with complex issues¹ that can't be reduced down to simple formulas, but it is possible to generalize what lies may be behind certain issues we may encounter doing pastoral counseling. Try these out and see what you come up with:

Behavior ---> Lie

Anxiety ---> God is NOT _____.

Sexual sin ---> God is NOT _____.

Eating Disorder ---> God is NOT _____.

Depression ---> God is NOT _____.

Anger ---> God is NOT _____.

Pride ---> God is NOT _____.

Some possible answers:

¹ These issues are indeed sometimes so complex that they may need professional counseling or even medical treatment in addition to pastoral counseling.

Behavior ---> Lie

Anxiety ---> God is NOT capable of taking care of me.

Sexual sin ---> God is NOT satisfying or trustworthy.

Eating Disorder ---> God is NOT able to give me a satisfying level of control or approval.

Depression ---> God is NOT able to give my life purpose and meaning.

Anger ---> God is NOT going to take care of me or avenge the wrong done to me.

Pride ---> God is NOT worthy of my worship or dedication.

Many of these issues can have multiple roots, as again, our brokenness is very complex and idolatry is multi-faceted. Sexual sin can really be based on many lies: that God is not satisfying my need for comfort, control, approval or power. The same goes for eating disorders, and many other issues.

In light of this, it's necessary to not only dig down to the general lie underneath our issues, but to the specific lies. To ask:

- What exactly are you looking for in this behavior that God already offers you?
- What deep desire do you believe God is not meeting?
- What specific lies might you be believing about God?

The more precise we can be in helping people discern their deepest idols and lies, the more helpful we are to their ultimate freedom. This no doubt comes not from our own expertise or wisdom, but from the guiding of the Holy Spirit through lots of prayer and pleading on their behalf.

Simplifying the Chaos: Gospel-Centered Pastoral Counseling

Read Galatians 2:11-14. How does Paul confront Peter's sin in this passage? What does he appeal to in his rebuke?

At the risk of oversimplifying an often messy and lengthy process, here are the very basic steps of pastoral counseling.

1. Identify the Lie

This step may seem obvious, but its importance cannot be overstated. You can spend all of your time focusing on their behavior and outward symptoms, but unless you get to this you are simply wasting time.

Often, this is not an easy task. We humans are complex creatures with complex issues. Sometimes what looks clear on the surface may actually be very different deep down.

This stage necessitates a lot of prayer and a lot of questions. In addition to the questions mentioned above, one of the most helpful questions you can ask is simply, "Why?" Often asking why, sometimes for multiple layers of an issue, will get you closer to the root.

In Galatians 2, Paul immediately saw the lie that Peter was believing. He acted one way around the Gentiles, but when the Jewish leaders

came around he shied away from the Gentiles, because he wanted the approval of the Jews. His surface-level sin issues were favoritism and hypocrisy, but the lie underneath them was that his approval came from men instead of God.

2. Expose the Lie

Once you have prayerfully discerned the lie that the person is believing, you have to graciously point it out to them (if they do not see it already). This stage can differ greatly, simply because some people may already know the lie they are believing, while others may take months or even years to be able to see it (or admit it), even after you point it out to them.

The important thing is to graciously but firmly help them see the truth about their lie. “Your behavior reveals that you believe . . .”

Paul rebukes Peter in his sin and lovingly points out the lie that he was believing—that Jews are inherently better than Gentiles.

3. Offer the Truth of the Gospel

The only thing that will liberate us from the bondage of lies is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He alone is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”—the only possible route to freedom (John 14:6).

He alone offers true freedom, joy, satisfaction, comfort, control, power, approval, security...the list goes on and on.

Being the eternal God and Creator of all mankind, He is the only true source of all our deepest needs. Looking to meet legitimate needs in illegitimate ways will only worsen our pain, and chasing after other gods will only multiply our sorrows (Psalm 16:4).

The most loving thing we can do for people is point them to that truth.

To hold up Jesus and show the spiritual riches that He offers.

Paul in Galatians 2 doesn't just go after Peter's behavior...he sees that his behavior was "deviating from the truth of the gospel"(Galatians 2:14). Peter did not need another rule to follow, he needed to be reminded of the gospel of Jesus—that all people are equally sinful and yet we are loved by God anyway.

God Is

Like we discussed above, often the lies we believe center around the idea that "God is NOT..." Obviously that means that many of the liberating truths we need to hear will center around the idea that "God is".

Tim Chester, in his book *You Can Change*, provides some helpful examples for how "God is" can liberate us:

- **God is Great...** so I don't have to be in control.
- **God is Glorious...** so I don't have to fear others.
- **God is Good...** so I don't have to look elsewhere.
- **God is Gracious...** so I don't have to prove myself.

These four categories encompass a great deal of pastoral care issues, but since our God is limitless in His qualities, the idea can be expanded to any truth about God. Every truth about God that we internalize will free us from potential lies that may enslave us.

Think about the last conversation you had with someone where you were trying to help them with a pastoral care issue. What truths about God do they need to hear?

Person: _____

Conversation: _____

God is _____, so you don't have to _____.

God is _____, so you don't have to look to _____.”

Counseling With the Gospel

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. As Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to give financially, what does he appeal to?

The importance of this cannot be overstated:

When counseling people, do not give them rules—give them the gospel.

What does Paul do in 2 Corinthians 8 when faced with the greed of the church? Does he say, “Hey you guys, don't be stingy, that's not very godly!”?

Nope, he sure doesn't. Instead, he gives them the gospel.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

He puts Jesus on display for them. He in essence says, “Jesus forsook his riches to help you when you were poor...doesn't that make you want to do the same for others?”

Beholding what is true about us in Jesus is the only thing that will produce genuine heart change.

So when counseling someone about forgiving a person that harmed them—don't give them platitudes and “thou shalts.” Do what Jesus did in Matthew 18:21-35. Tell them that in Christ, they have been forgiven for far, far more than they will ever have to forgive. Soak them in that truth, and as they see it, you won't have to admonish them to forgive. Their heart will naturally push the grace that they have received to those who have sinned against them.

When counseling someone who idolizes approval and finds their worth in what others think about them, don't just tell them they shouldn't do that. Read the story of Jesus' baptism to them, where God says, “This is my beloved Son, I take delight in Him!” (Matthew 3:17). Tell them that in Christ, God says this over them just as He does Jesus, because when He looks at them He sees Jesus.

Let the truth of the gospel break people to their core and free them from bondage to lies, sins and idols. Nothing else will set them free.

Please, don't waste your time with "try harder and do better." Give them the liberating truth of the gospel. Show them what is already true of them in Jesus. Lift up the riches that He offers them. Call them to the satisfaction found in Jesus just like the Scriptures do:

Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters;

and you without money, come, buy, and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost!

Why do you spend money on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods.

Pay attention and come to Me; listen, so that you will live.

Isaiah 55.1-3a

If we know what we already have in Jesus, we won't be tempted to buy a counterfeit of what we already possess.

Practicals

Here are some additional practical tips to help you grow in pastoral counseling.

1. Pray A Lot

Seriously, pray more than you listen or talk in pastoral counseling. The Holy Spirit is active and moving, and He is a much better guide than your intellect. You can't do this without Him.

2. When In Doubt, Be There

Many situations that arise will not have a clear-cut answer or solution. Some may be so devastating that words seem to be inadequate. Often your presence will speak much more loudly than your words, and that is totally okay. Sometimes you just need to go and sit with the person or family and just be there.

3. Read Good Books

This is a brief introduction to pastoral counseling, but there are many deep waters to drink from that will be immeasurably helpful to you as you grow in applying the gospel to life. Get trustworthy books and devour them. Be willing to read issue-specific books about the things people close to you are dealing with. Don't be prideful and think you can figure it all out on your own—learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before you.

4. Ask For Help

God has given us all different gifts and experiences, and those around us are often invaluable resources when dealing with difficult situations. You can ask trustworthy sources how they would deal with something without gossiping. Again, don't be prideful—ask for help from other pastors, ministry leaders or mature believers you trust.

5. Research Other Avenues

Gospel-centered counseling and Christian community are a must when dealing with difficult issues. However, sometimes other options for help are enormously helpful. Get to know professional Christian counselors in your area and find ones that you trust. Ask for references from other pastors. Research treatment centers for severe issues you may encounter. Make a plan for what you need to do if someone is suicidal, etc. The more you know about the options around you, the better prepared you will be

should those situations arise.

PREACHING

“And how will they hear without a preacher?”

Romans 10:14

“It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer.”

Richard Baxter

Parents desperately want their kids to excel at something. Be it dancing, singing or sports, parents work to place their children in contexts where they will succeed. The problem is that all kids are not good at all things. Some children in the band have no rhythm. Some playing sports are slow and clumsy. Some dancers should simply never dance. You simply cannot have rhythm-less musicians, clumsy athletes or awkward dancers. There is nothing worse than watching a child struggle in an environment where their skill set does not match the task.

Church planting introduces similar dynamics. Certainly there is a diversity of roles and giftings possessed by church planters, and yet, in almost every context, church planters must be able to preach. You simply can't have a preachingless pastor.

And yet, most planters feel like preadolescent boys at a middle school dance when it comes to the art of preaching. Sure their parents think they are the next Billy Graham (or if their parents are hip, Mark Driscoll), they can wow teenagers with dramatically forced movie illustrations, and the old man that sat on the front row during the annual youth sermon would always make an attempt at encouragement regardless of how bad the sermon actually was.

But now, weekly sermon preparation and delivery stares them in the

face and they find that they have vastly underestimated the challenges, fears, insecurities, and overall inadequacy they will feel as they attempt to bring the Word of God to bear on their developing congregation. Of course, there are those magical Sundays where everything lines up – preparation has been fruitful, emotions are in check, delivery comes freely, people are attentive and responsive, and visible fruit results.

However, this is often more an anomaly than the rule. And even when it does happen, another Sunday looms on the horizon. Thus, planters often find preaching daunting and discouraging despite Spirit-giftedness in this area, personalities suited for the task, and an abundance of training in the art of preaching. To assist planters in preaching, this chapter will seek to remind planters of the function of preaching while giving them some essential tools to aid in its utilization in the church planting context.

Truth#1 – The Word is a Treasure

Two simple truths underlie any attempt to preach and preach well. How do the following passages speak of the Word?

- Psalm 119:11-18 _____
- Proverbs 30:5 _____
- Isaiah 55:11 _____
- Matthew 24:35 _____
- Luke 8:11-15 _____
- John 17:17 _____
- 2 Timothy 3:16 _____
- Hebrews 4:12 _____
- James 1:21-22 _____

- 1 Peter 1:23 _____
- 1 Peter 2:2 _____

These Scriptures demonstrate the supreme value of the Word of God. God, in his gracious kindness, has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind through giving and sustaining His Word. This Word is a true treasure.

Truth #2 - The Proclaimed Word Reveals the Treasure

Not only that, but the proclaimed Word serves to reveal the treasure. Since creation, the revealed Word of God has been central to God’s revelation among mankind. Often this spoken Word is embodied by human agents who disclose the voice of God to the gathered community. This prophetic “thus says the Lord” serves as the foundational means by which God discloses His nature, character, and ways. What role does preaching play in the following passages?

- Nehemiah 8:7-8 _____
- Mark 1:14-15 _____
- Luke 8:1 _____
- Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:18-20 _____
- John 1:1-5 _____
- Acts 2:42-47 _____
- Acts 20:28 _____
- 1 Corinthians 1:21 _____
- 2 Corinthians 2:17 _____
- Ephesians 4:11-13 _____
- Ephesians 4:29 _____
- 1 Timothy 4:12-13 _____

- 2 Timothy 2:15 _____

Certainly preaching the Scriptures is not the only thing that church planters do, nor is it the totality of the mission of the church; but it is a central and vital tool towards the building of the church, the mission of the congregation and the worship of Christ. It has such a profound function that Paul, in his final exhortation to his protégé, Timothy, could write in 1 Timothy 4:2 to “preach the Word; persist in it...” For a pastor, there is no greater privilege, responsibility and opportunity than teaching the Scriptures; yet the church planting context creates two realities that make preaching challenging.

Reality #1 – The Word is Weighty

First, for many church planters, this is the first time they have been tasked with leading a church through the proclaimed Word. It is one thing to pull out your sugar stick sermon when you serve on a church staff and are asked to preach once every six months, often with a great deal of advanced knowledge. Not so when you plant. Now you, as a frail, sinful, naive man, will be tasked with disclosing the character, will and intentions of the sovereign, holy, omniscient, omnipotent King of the Universe to God’s people every week. Not to mention that Scripture says you will be judged more seriously for your faithfulness to this task. The weightiness of the Word is enough to cripple most men.

Reality #2 – All people are Sinful

Second, you will be proclaiming the Word of God to a gathered community filled with broken marriages, life-long sin struggles, rampant idolatry and an abundance of shrapnel from the Fall. And that will just be the stuff you are aware of. Staring at you each week will be the faces of people you love deeply and that you long to experience the life-transforming power of the Word. Sadly, many for whom you labor will either persist in their rebellion

or present temporary fruit that will not persevere.

1. In light of these two great truths and two dominant realities, how can a church planter grow and thrive in a profitable teaching ministry in the local church? To answer this question, imagine that you return to your home from a weeklong vacation only to find a valuable treasure waiting for you on your doorstep. There is no question that the gift is a treasure, and yet its usefulness and profitability will be defined by answering two questions: 1. Where is the treasure from? and
2. What is the treasure for? These questions serve as a proper inroad to rightfully understanding the act of preaching as we assess what preaching is for and where it comes from.

Preaching For Worship

The chief end of preaching is the chief end of life: worship of the true and living God. Preaching does not simply allow someone to worship, but rather it is inherently an act of worship. In the life of the church, worship does not stop when the music ends but rather crescendos as the treasure of the Word is revealed. The goal of a sermon should be to bring people face to face with the depth of their sin and the beauty of the gospel. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this. It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence...I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God.” John Piper refers to the act of preaching as “expository exultation” because of the inherent blend of exposition and worship in proper preaching. Preaching produces a life of worship when the text is presented in such a way that it engages the mind, stirs the heart and motivates the will. This type of life-transforming, world-altering worship, spoken of in Romans 12:1-2, is only propelled through a right understanding of the gospel. This

type of transformation resulting in lasting change does not come through guilt, shame or moral conformity, but only through the worship of Christ.

How will preaching for worship shape your pastoral ministry?

Preaching for Christ

As the supreme object of worship and the focus of the Scriptures, Jesus must be the focal point of every sermon (1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Spurgeon comments, “No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.” He continues, “Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, ‘there is a road from here to Jesus Christ, and I mean to keep on His track till I get hold of Him.’” It is one thing for Jesus to be talked about in a sermon; it is quite another thing for Jesus to be central. The centrality of Jesus in the act of preaching is vital in a day when man, and not God, is most often the foundation of teaching. For Jesus to be central he must be the chief actor, the object of affection and the central application of every sermon regardless of genre, book or text. Rest assured that if your sermon could as easily have been preached on Oprah’s couch as in your pulpit, then you have not preached a Christian sermon. Not only must He be the supreme focus of the sermon, but also his evaluation is the most critical evaluation that the planter needs.

How will you ensure that you teach Jesus in every sermon?

Preaching for Mission

Not only do we preach for worship and for Christ—we also preach for mission. God uses his proclaimed Word as a means of bringing conviction of sin, faith in Christ and motivation for holy living. Thus, it is the Word that is a catalyst for transformation for both believers and those far from Christ. As a pastor, the art of preaching must proceed from a heart emblazed with a desire for the lost to be reconciled to God and with a passion for believers to grow in grace and obedient transformation. Not only that, but those listening to the teaching of the Word should be propelled into the world to serve in His mission.

How will preaching for mission shape your preaching ministry?

FROM

If preaching is FOR worship, transformation and mission, it is vital that a church planter understand where preaching is FROM.

Preaching From Intimacy

First, preaching should come from a preacher marked by intimacy with God. There is a tangible and notable difference in the authority, passion and result of a sermon preached by a man who has been with God in prayer and meditation and one who has not. Without intimacy, a preacher may know much truth but lack the experiential knowledge of God that is necessary to bring the Word to bear on a congregation. Intimacy with God is the means by which the Spirit digs a deep well in the pastor's soul that overflows in his weekly preaching. In so doing, the Word of God shapes a preacher long before He shapes a sermon. Writing to pastors, Robert Murray McCheyne poignantly states that "what your congregation needs most from you is your personal holiness." More than a polished sermon, theological precision, clever ingenuity or charismatic wit, people need to be taught by men who are deeply shaped by the Word. Think about the common terminology we use to describe pastors. Polished. Wise. Clever. Funny. And yet when is the last time you ever heard a pastor described as holy? This should be the defining mark of pastors who hope to call their people to the same level of intimacy. Such a pastor can plead with people to worship Christ and not manipulate them into momentary decisions or satiate their consciousness with behavior modification strategies.

He can share authentic stories of the way in which the Spirit is transforming his character and eroding sin from his life. The most eloquent speaker, separated from the power of intimacy with God, will produce stillborn sermons.

As a preacher, how will you promote your own intimacy with God?

Preaching From Scripture

This truth seems self-evident: of course; preaching is from the Scriptures. However, our culture is littered with a dizzying array of self-help and man-centered advice masquerading as authoritative preaching. At its root, this reveals that most pastors simply do not have confidence in the Word; but it is only the Spirit-empowered Word that has the power to change lives. Church plants do not need humanistic tools to make life palatable, but they need to be exposed to the truths of the treasures of Scripture through systematic teaching. This can only happen if the preacher exposit the Bible in such a way that the congregation is exposed to the beauty of the word and its God-given intent. Paul says that this revealed Word serves as the “pillar and buttress of Truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), meaning that it, and not the skills, giftedness, charm or ability must serve as the foundation of the preaching act. A biblical sermon is one that faithfully unpacks the author’s intent in writing the text and the Spirit’s intent in sustaining the text. This need not mean that the pastor spend 30 minutes analyzing a comma, teaching six months on a single prepositional phrase, or presenting dazzling alliterated outlines that would appear simplistic to a five-year-old. A sermon may be based on the Scriptures and still be bad, and yet a sermon not based on the Scriptures is ALWAYS bad. There are a number of benefits that come to a church planter who faithfully teaches the Scriptures.

List a few of those benefits here:

Preaching From the Story

A sermon must not simply be anchored in a specific text of Scripture, but must also be set within the grand story of God’s redemptive work in the world. In an age that has lost any notion of the grand story of the world, it is vital that listeners be given a sense of how the Scriptures fit into what God is doing. The argument that “the Bible says so” is not sufficient. Rather, today’s preachers must demonstrate how the Bible reveals the true story of the world. Poor Bible teaching has often isolated Scriptural texts from their larger context, creating a church culture that treats the Bible like WebMD: enter your problem, hit search and back comes a definition of your problem and a diagnosis to fix your life. The Bible simply doesn’t work that way.

While teaching the text, preachers must show their congregation how the text and the life of the listener is connected to the overall story of God’s acts in history through creation, fall, redemption and restoration. Without proper connection to the grand story of God’s work in the world, congregations will depend on pastors to spoon-feed them regurgitated truth rather than training the congregants to feed themselves. It is vitally important for the long-term health of the church that people not depend on the pastor to provide enough food for the week, but instead learn how to feast daily on the Word for themselves.

How would you preach from the text and from the story in the life of a congregation?

Preaching from Personality

These realities do not mask the fact that the act of preaching is “truth through personality.” While one must work to minimize the distorting effects that personality may bring, the beauty of the treasure of Scripture is revealed through the unique wiring of the preacher. This personality should adorn the truth, not veil it. Finding one’s own unique preaching voice is a massive challenge in our age when celebrity preachers, technological infatuation and sound-bite sermons dominate the landscape. This reality subtly beckons a developing pastor to become a caricature of their favorite celebrity pastor, rather than devoting the time necessary to find their own voice. However, the congregation does not need the voice of someone else, but the voice of their pastor; and they need him to devote the time necessary to develop his preaching gift.

How has God uniquely wired you to preach?

Preaching from Preparation

There is simply no way to shortcut the arduous road of discipline that is required to teach well. However, the enormous demands of church planting ministry make finding adequate preparation time difficult for most. To combat the demands of planting, a few suggestions may be in order:

- Develop a flexible teaching plan months in advance that outlines your teaching series and primary text for each sermon.
- Devote specific, scheduled, set time each week to sermon preparation during your most fruitful working hours.
- Discipline yourself to marinate on the Scripture throughout the week, jotting down thoughts from the text as you live, work and play.
- Narrow each sermon to one central, defining truth that you want people to know and apply (How do you want someone to answer the question “what was the sermon about?” on Monday morning?)
- Package the sermon in a way that is sticky to the modern listener and properly balances exegesis of the Scriptures, illustrations of the text and application to one’s life.
- Allow the way in which the specific Scripture in question has shaped your life to bleed throughout your sermon.
- Evaluate your sermon personally and allow others to speak into your handling of the Word.
- Take a break from preaching periodically to refresh yourself and protect your congregation from becoming a cult of personality.

- Pray for the Spirit’s illumination for both you and your hearers.

Whatever you do, do the hard work of preparing well. No amount of books, teaching series, blog articles or downloadable sermons will cover for inadequate preparation, nor will they have the effect that cumulative preaching repetition will. While the Holy Spirit is a God-given reality to serve and help in our weakness, He is not given to make up for our laziness.

How and when will you carve out time to prepare each week?

Preaching from Shepherding

Preaching is for real people in a real congregation. In order to apply the Word to real people a preacher must be around people enough to know their unique hurts, fears, longings, hopes, expectations and joys. The pastor should take time to study people and put his sermons on the road to see how they apply to the real life lived by his congregation. This can happen through one-on-one dialogue, small groups, pastoral care and counseling, or other ministry opportunities. Rather than taking away time from the sermon preparation process, this work actually serves to make you a better preacher. As François Fenelon says, it allows you “to preach with the zeal of a friend, the generous energy of a father, and the exuberant affection of a mother.” The diversity of a church planting congregation will make this a challenge and, thus, a pastor must seek to contextualize his message to folks regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic statues, and faith. While the content of the gospel never changes, the unique inroads of

gospel proclamation may vary based on the congregation.

What specific inroads to gospel proclamation does your church planting context present?

Preaching from Reliance

Throughout the process, a church planter must have deep reliance on the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do – change lives. The glory of preaching belongs to God alone. And yet, in the act of sermon delivery a preacher is constantly tempted to self-reliance. For some, this leads to pride, as they come to believe that their unique gifts, wisdom and insight are essential for God’s purposes to prevail. For others, this leads to cowering due to fear of man. Still for others, this leads to despair, thinking that they are unfit and useless to teach and apply the Word. To combat this temptation, preachers must be marked by a deep reliance on prayer (Acts 6:4). As Douglas Wilson says, “The truth is a very simple one; talking to men about God must always be accompanied by talking to God about men.”

How will you train your heart to rely on the Spirit in your preaching?

In this fashion, we are back full circle to where we began. Preaching starts with worship and it ends with worship. With this in mind, a faithful pastor may rest confident that the Word will have its rightful effect in shaping the pastor and the congregation to be worshipping missionaries. The task of creating a culture that is mesmerized by the treasure of the preached Word will take time; but the beauty of the treasure, and the result of seeing it rightly, is worth any cost.

TEAM

You Are Not Alone

Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Just wait until the honeymoon is over.”

This is not what you want to here when you are about to get married. The insinuation is that once the passion and energy of the honeymoon is over everything is going to fall apart. Real life will settle in and things are sure to change.

There is a great deal of truth in this statement. For many couples their preparation for marriage ill equips them for challenges that come once they are married.

The beginning stages of planting a church are much like a honeymoon: filled with youthful joy, passion, and energy. However, the honeymoon of launching a church is quickly met by the challenges of leading one.

How does a church planter prepare himself for life after the honeymoon?

Consider Tim. After sensing a call to vocational ministry, he has faithfully served a local church for the last five years as a youth pastor. Now Tim feels the Lord prompting him to plant a church. While intimidating, the prospect is filled with hope for Tim as he imagines how the Lord might use Him to impact the world. He picks a location, develops a mission statement, creates a list of core values, and works towards launching the church. Things go well for Tim in the beginning as people are saved, members are added, and groups are formed.

And then the reality hits when a key couple leaves the church, a small groups leader get angry, a college student is tragically killed, and many

marriages in the church hang on the brink of divorce. Not only does it seem like the church is in trouble, but Tim’s family is crippled under the pressure. In his honest moments Tim is scared, discouraged, and alone. The honeymoon is over.

Do not be deceived. Tim’s story represents the normal process of church planting. While each church planter has his own unique experiences of life after the honeymoon, struggle is universal.

What tools has God given Tim to help him persevere?

Your list may have included things like prayer, Scripture reading, solitude, and fasting. All of these are true. However, there is one oft-neglected and yet vital tool God provides the planter – other people.

God builds his church through a team of people united in the pursuit of bringing glory to Christ by serving in his mission.

Leadership is a Team Project

The church functions as a team because God has designed humanity to live in community. In fact, God Himself exists in community. The nature of the Trinity -existing as Father, Son and Spirit-reveals that God exists in community, while maintaining clear distinctions in roles and functions. Likewise the church, and its leadership, is designed to function

in community.

What do the following passages of Scripture reveal about the necessity of a team?

- Genesis 12:1-3 _____
- Exodus 18:1-26 _____
- Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6 _____
- Nehemiah 3 _____
- Matthew 10:1-15 _____
- Mark 3:13-19 _____
- Luke 10:1-2 _____
- Acts 6:1-7 _____
- Acts 13:1-3; 20:3-4 _____
- Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28 _____
- Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5 _____
- 1 Corinthians 12 _____

It takes a team of people to lead a church. The work is too great, the challenges too daunting, the emotional toil too high for God to entrust the work of planting a church to any singular individual. And yet, the temptation of a church planter is to attempt to plant alone. The gifts, passion and drive of most planters cause them to take on more weight than they should handle alone.

You do not have to plant a church alone. In fact, you should not plant a church alone.

Team Leadership Serves the Church

Team leadership also serves God's church.

Paul writes that, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Several things are clear from this passage. First, leaders in the church serve to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Second this work serves to build up the body of Christ. And finally, this goal is achieved through the efforts of diverse, Spirit-gifted leaders seeking to honor Christ.

Consider some of the benefits of planting a church with a team.

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Your list may have included some of the following ideas:

- **Ownership.** A team allows for shared ownership of the mission. This empowers a sense of shared responsibility in the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the church in making disciples (Matt 28:18-20).
- **Unity.** A team models the loving relationships and gospel unity that should characterize all of Christ's church. This allows the leadership team to model the love that they desire to permeate the church plant (Jn 17:23; Ro 15:5; Eph 4:3, 13, 5:21; Col 3:14).
- **Accountability.** A team provides the necessary accountability to protect a leader and the church from sin, poor decisions, or even heresy (1 Tim 4:16; Titus 1:6; Jas 5:16).
- **Wisdom.** A team provides a context for shared decision-making through the wisdom of multiple people with different contexts, backgrounds, and experiences. This cumulative insight aids in the process of ensuring God-honoring decisions and mobilizing mission (Prov 15:22, 24:6).
- **Power.** A team places the authority and power of leadership in the hands of multiple individuals functioning in unity rather than any one singular individual. This protects the church from authoritarian leadership and serves to balance power through mutual respect and submission.
- **Encouragement.** A team lovingly serves to encourage one another through mutually enriching relationships, which aids the team in persevering through criticism and

discouragement (Heb 10:24-25).

- **Giftedness.** A team empowers leaders to serve in areas of recognized Spirit-giftedness. Diverse giftedness propels the mission of the church forward since no one person has the full complement of gifts necessary to lead the church (Rom 12:4-6; 1 Cor 12).
- **Work.** A team allows for a proper division of labor in the face on the onslaught of demands felt in the church-planting context. This helps to protect any one leader from burnout and synergizes the efforts of the leadership team allowing for them to accomplish more than any singular individual could alone (Ecc 4:9-12).
- **Protection.** A team protects a church from becoming overly dependant on any singular leader which the church to focus on the true leader of the church, Jesus Christ, and not a fallible human leader.

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

Perhaps you do not need to be convinced that you cannot plant a church alone. But the questions remain: How do you determine who should lead? How do you move from being a singular individual with a dream of planting a church do a united team passionate about the mission?

Who is currently on your church planting team?

What roles will they fill?

What other leadership tasks do you think will be essential for your church to fulfill its God-given mission?

Consider Bob. Bob shows up early in the church planting process at a core group meeting. Shortly after this meeting, you and Bob meet up for a cup of coffee and Bob shares his story. He has felt a call to church leadership, but has never served for longer than a year in any one church. As he recounts each experience, it is clear that Bob has been wounded by his journey.

He left his last church a few months prior to hearing about your church plant. He says, “Your church seems to embody everything I’ve been looking for in a church. I think the Lord has gifted me and I’m ready to serve. What can I do to help?” How do you respond? What criteria would you use to evaluate Bob?

The answer to this question will be vital for a church planter and will require that he function as a “wise master builder” (1 Corinthians 3:10). Team selection for leadership in a church can serve as a great asset or major hindrance to the mission of the church. The reality is that not every person who wants to lead in a church plant should. Therefore, the church planter must rely on the Lord to grant the wisdom and discernment necessary to select a team of leaders equipped for the task. Jesus himself, on the eve of selecting his apostles, spent lengthy time alone in prayer seeking the Father for wisdom. So must you.

The Lord raises up leaders and a skillful planter recognizes those God is raising up.

What are some defining marks of those God is raising up for leadership in a church plant?

Selection of a Team

Character

An essential mark of a Biblical leader is character. A leader must have a heart awe-struck by the gospel. This means they must have a deep awareness of their own sinfulness and yet a robust hope found through the grace of Jesus Christ. The gospel produces in them a life of holiness as a response of gratitude to the sheer majesty of the gospel. No amount of giftedness, skill, charisma, passion or titles can make up for a lack of character. Such character should mark both the person’s intimacy with the Lord and their stewardship of their lives, families, and resources. A planter can avoid giving people leadership roles that exceed their maturity by elevating the role of the character in the selection process.

Scripture provides a number of lists detailing the fruit of a life marked by the grace of God. The fruit of the Spirit and the qualifications for the office of elder and deacon in the church provide good starting points for assessing the heart of an individual in question.

Fruit of the Spirit <i>Galatians 5:22-23</i>	Deacon <i>1 Timothy 3:8-12</i>	Elder <i>1 Timothy 3:1-13;</i> <i>Titus 1:5-9</i>
Love	Dignified	Not a new convert
Joy	Not Double-tongued	Devout
Peace	Not addicted to much wine	Holding fast to the faithful Word
Patience	Not greedy for dishonest gain	Temperate
Kindness	Sound in faith and life	Prudent
Goodness	Blameless	Not quick tempered

Faithfulness	Not slanders	Hospitable
Gentleness	Sober-minded	Not self-willed
Self-Control	Faithful in all things	Loving what is good
	Husband of one wife	Husband of one wife
	Manage household well	Manage household well
		Not driven by anger
		Uncontentious
		Gentle
		Just
		Respectable, orderly, balanced
		Good reputation with outsiders
		Free from love of money
		Not addicted to too much wine

While not exhaustive or applicable to every leadership role, these lists provide good criteria for the assessment of the character of a potential leader.

“Whatever ‘call’ a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.”

Spurgeon

Fruitfulness. Secondly, fruitfulness in making disciples is a clear mark of an effective leader. A potential leader must have a track-record of effective disciple-making, often without a leadership title, prior to be affirmed to such a role in the church. This means that a church planter must observe the life and fruitfulness of an individual prior to appointing

them to leadership. This may mean considering other church contexts or mission locations in which the individual has served. It may also mean analyzing their ongoing missionary practices within the places where they live, work, and play. Or it may mean giving them time to prove themselves as a disciple-maker in the church plant prior to giving them a specific role.

The best leaders are often humble servants marked by a relentless passion to make disciples.

Likemindedness. Church planting synergy is dependent on tight alignment in both theology and ministry philosophy. These areas are too vital for their to be any division on a church planting team. The theology and ministry philosophy set by the church planter must define reality for any additional team members. Team members must be able to give a unanimous answer to the question, “What type of church are we planting?” Agreement around this question provides unity in decision making and mitigates against divisiveness.

Giftedness. Giftedness is also a vital mark of a leader in a church planting team; although, it must not be the only criteria for leader selection. A team member can serve in a proper role through self-examination, the assessment of elders, and various tools that help in gift discernment. Unity in diversity, rather than uniformity, should be the goal in building a leadership team since it will take a wide array of Spirit-giftedness to lead the Body well.

There are a number of helpful tools that have been developed to assess the giftedness of an individual and allow a church planter to discern what types of gifts their church most needs. Several helpful tools include:

Triperspectival Leadership²: Using the trifold roles of

² Timmy Brister has provided a helpful guide to this line of thought by combining numerous writing

prophet, priest, and king leaders are assessed for their function and fit in the church context. A prophetic leader leads the vision of the church and serves to answer the question “Where are we going?” A kingly leader guides the plan and organization of the church and serves to answer the question “How will we get there?” And a priestly leader cares for the people of the church by helping them answer the question “How can I be a part of what God is doing?”

APEST³: Alan Hirsch and the team at The Forgotten ways designed a leadership profile building on the five functions of apostle, prophet, evangelists, shepherd, and teacher outlined in Ephesians 4:11-13. Apostles serve to extend the gospel to new locations. Prophets discern, know, and apply God’s will and ways. Evangelists recruit people for gospel mission. Shepherds nurture, care and protect those in the church. And teachers understand and explain God’s truth.

StrengthsFinder⁴: StrengthsFinder is a tool used by business professional, corporate executives, and church leaders to assess leaders function. The tool analyzes 34 distinct leadership themes and provides an individual with a test for determining their top 5 talents. This allows the team to better understand its makeup and function.

Calling. Finally, a leader must possess a sense of calling from the Lord. While not everyone will have as dramatic a call as the apostle Paul, all leaders in the church must have a sense that God has called them to serve the church plant in a leadership role. Church planting provides a unique

on the subject at <http://timmybrister.com/2009/03/triperspectivalism--leadership--and--church--planting/>

³ Alan Hirsch and the team at The Forgotten Ways outlines the APEST leadership functions and provides an online test at <http://www.theforgottenways.org/apest/>

⁴ <http://www.strengthsfinder.com/>

combination of stressors unlike other areas of gospel ministry. For those with a family this project will place a unique strain on the marriage and require sacrifice from both the spouse and the children. Only an overriding sense of calling from the Lord will sustain a leader. Thus, in an effort to fill leadership needs, a church planter must guard against the temptation to coerce people into leadership who are not desirous of such a role.

These five marks provide a strategic place from which to begin the search for leaders in the church. And as is readily apparent, this is not something that can be done quickly. True discernment is forged through lengthy periods of prayer and evaluation.

“The gospel is not a help-wanted ad. It is a help-available ad. Nor is the call to Christian service a help-wanted ad. God is not looking for people to work for Him but people who let Him work mightily in and through them.”

John Piper

How will these five criteria shape your leader selection process?

Developing a Team Culture

What are some unique challenges that come from planting a church with a team?

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God seeks to build a team that is “in one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). And yet, the residual effects of sin will mean that every team will have to fight for unity. It will not just happen. In fact, without consistent effort and attention any team will drift towards disunity and dysfunction.

What are helpful ways that a church planter can create a vibrant team culture?

Community. The leadership of a church plant should function in genuine Biblical community. This may not mean that everyone on the team are best friends; however, the leadership team must create a spirit

of genuine unity. Community building can happen informally through ongoing dialogue and interaction over shared meals, team parties, prayer walks, or joint hobbies. It can also happen more formally through the intentional creation of environments where the leadership team can interact.

Communication. Open, honest communication builds a sense of camaraderie and trust. The team must work to encourage and edify one another by pointing out areas of noticeable fruitfulness and personal life transformation. They should also work to challenge one another in areas of weakness or personal blind spots. Inherently, the church planting environment will create friction and team members must work to restore relationships quickly whenever there is disunity. The process of working through conflict provides a context in which true team is forged. This process results in a culture where confession and repentance in relationships are normative and restoration can result. The result is an arena where people know that they have one another's back and will not tolerate divisions, infighting, character assassinations, or other forms of sabotage among the team.

Roles. Clearly delineated roles and responsibilities among those on a team serves to foster a team culture. The team must work to provide a clear definition of roles and hold various individuals responsible for ownership of their areas of care. Having measurable and written expectations for each team member protects against unclear expectations causing needless friction. It also helps the team hold one another accountable for the vital things they must be doing.

Growth. A church planter should also provide ways for team members to grow, both in areas of recognized strength and weaknesses. To do this, the planter should see his role as an equipper of equippers and seek to

find personalized strategies to serve to build the health and function of his team. This will mean monitoring performance and providing feedback on tasks. It will also mean suggesting resources (books, conferences, and individuals) that can be catalysts for development for each person on the team.

Evaluation. A related key to developing a team for a church plant is to provide specific evaluation in the areas of character, fruitfulness, giftedness, like-mindedness, and calling. The selection criteria provides the leader with tools by which he can consistently speak into the lives of others on the team. This happens best through a combination of both formal and informal evaluation. Informally, the team should maintain clear lines of communication and evaluation throughout projects. And formally, the planter should arrange specific times during the course of the year to provide thorough constructive feedback for team members.

Perseverance. Finally, any church planting team is forged in the fires of conflict, stress, pressure, disaster, and pain. Because church planting will push people to the max emotionally, relationally, financially, and spiritually, disappointment is inevitable and frustrations will occur. The good news is that these can be the very things that the Spirit leverages to build the character of your team. Simple faithfulness to the process and perseverance through the trial, allows the time necessary for the Spirit to unite a team.

What steps do you need to take to work towards developing a team culture?

Practical Considerations

Slow Down. Selecting and developing a team takes time. It is not something you can do by looking at a resume or sharing a cup of coffee. It seems that the needs of leadership around a church plant are endless. And yet, it is much easier to patiently wait for God to provide the leaders than it is to remove leaders that you have elevated too quickly.

Find the Right Seat. The needs of a church plant change constantly. So too do the people God sends your way. In fact, many faithful leaders find that their own sense of calling changes over time. Therefore, rather than forcing a leader into a previously determined seat on the bus, it may be better to get the right leaders on the bus and adjust the seats they sit in as necessary.

Watch the Ceiling. Some leaders can grow with the changing realities of an expanding church and some will hit a ceiling. This may require new leaders in order to move the church forward or changing the roles of certain leaders who struggle to lead in a growing church.

Live with an Open Hand. The reality is that most church planting teams do not stay together forever. Over time the circumstances of life, changing awareness of giftedness, divergent ministry callings, or a host of other issues may lead to changes on the team. Thus, a leader must live with a clear awareness that the Lord is in control of the team He is raising up.

Conclusion

“The true shepherd spirit is an amalgam of many precious graces. He is hot with zeal, but he is not fiery with passion. He is gentle, and yet he rules his class. He is loving, but he does not wink at sin. He has power over the lambs, but he is not domineering or sharp. He has cheerfulness, but not levity; freedom, but not license; solemnity, but not gloom.”

Spurgeon

There will be moments when opposition is great and progress is scarce. There will be moments when the temptation to doubt God’s ever-present care will be great. There are times when we are tempted to think that we would be a better head of the church than the one who is the Head, or a better sovereign than the Sovereign, or a better savior than the Savior.

Dangerous Calling, Paul David Tripp

One of the most profoundly simple books written on ministry in the last few years was only published a few months before the writing of this book.

Tripp’s book serves to turn up the Gospel’s volume in our hearts and open our ears to hear it. His book and books like it are so effective because they say exactly what we already secretly know about ourselves.

A friend of mine recently said “I’m not a real pastor. I’m a poser.” And while he was trying his hand at humor, I also recognized in there a bit of truth. Apart from Christ we really haven’t done anything good that would recommend us to the work of church planting. We’ve simply obeyed and failed and obeyed again until He brought us here by His grace.

No matter what our resumes, vitae and diplomas say, our only qualifications come from God, and if we believe anything different from this then we are posers. We may fool others for a while, we may even fool ourselves for a while, but God cares too much about us and our ministries to let that go on.

Our hope is that this book has provided both a practical and soul-searching tool for you as you seek to navigate your life and ministry. My prayer is that it will open your heart to hear what God has to say about you and that you will take comfort and conviction from His Word.