



Planting Healthy Churches

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Table of Content

Introduction	page 1
Chapter 1: How to be a Good and Faithful Church Planter	page 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be Compelled by Love• Protect and Defend the Church• Attentiveness to the Task• Obedience and Risk Taking• Watch Your Life• Watch Your Teaching	
Chapter 2: Avoidable Mistakes in Church Planting	page 31
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Office Syndrome• They Will Come to Us• Acting Like a Big Church• Failing to be Strategic in Developing Leaders• Neglecting the Worship Leader• Worrying Rather Than Enjoying the Ride• Failing to Ask for Help• Not Resting Enough	
Chapter 3: Winning Unchurched People	page 54
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowing How People Think• Knowing What It's Like to Go to Church• Is It Worth Their Time?• Attending to Quality• Mercy and Truth• Prayer and the Power of God• Allowing People to be in Process	
Chapter 4: Expectations for the Church Plant	page 68
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How Fast Will It Grow?• What Would Make You Give Up?• Balancing Patience and Working Hard• Don't Compare to Others	

Chapter 5: How Will Your Life and Schedule Look as a Church Planter? page 77

- Busy Generalist Who Manages Lots of Stuff
- Structure and Flexibility Are Needed
- Keeping Your Purpose in View
- Using a Calendar Rightly

Chapter 6: Stages of Development and Growth page 86

- No Church Is Exactly the Same
- Stages of Development in Church Planting (Appendix)

Chapter 7: Being Certain That Your Family Survives page 88

- Right Priorities
- Time Spent as a Husband
- Time Spent as a Father
- Remembering That You Are a Son
- Boundaries That Protect
- How Does Your Wife Find Her Place in the Church?
- Keeping Your Kids Out of the Spotlight
- Getting Away

A Final Word page 108

Appendix: Stages of Development in Church Planting

Introduction: Planting Healthy Churches

This is an attempt at a “church-planting manual” for our network of churches. Up until now, our church planters have picked my brain when they ran into challenges or didn’t know what to do next (or just pressed on alone, hoping they were doing the right thing). As we plant more churches and start planting multiple churches each year, it seems wise to get some of the things that we’ve learned on paper. With this manual new planters can have a place to turn for information in addition to the ongoing relationship with their coach and other lead pastors.

However, it’s important to acknowledge up front that whatever I write here will be partial and imperfect. To use one of Paul’s images...you have to be a good farmer (“It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share in the crops” 2 Timothy 2:6). There is a sense in which the things that a church planter has to learn are learned in the intensive process of actually planting a church. During the three-to-five years of preparation, you learn the “principles of farming.” You learn how to prepare soil, kill weeds, and plant seeds. You learn to watch for ripe fruit and how to harvest a crop. Hopefully you have learned the importance of being “hard-working” and, at the same time, that no matter how hard you work planting and watering, it is only God who makes it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

So you have all the preparation that we know how to give; you are ready to be a “hard-working farmer.” This preparation has taught you how to get started and principles for pressing on, but until you start you won’t know what to do next! In other words, there is not an “instant church plant formula” where you just add water and wait. When you start plowing the ground and find out it is rocky, you must adapt your plan (this probably means take time for the grueling task of picking up rocks). When you plant your seeds and only a quarter of them grow, you replant (which means your crop is late...and having to do twice the work by sowing seeds again is not fun). You don’t know

when to pull weeds until you see weeds growing or when to water until you notice the ground is getting dry. And when you're all ready for an amazing harvest and an early front kills the crop, you have to adjust your plan again. Are you getting the picture? Preparation for church planting is preparation...not the thing itself. The act of church planting is one of observations, twists and turns, and adaptation (just like the "hard-working farmer").

When we set out to come up with a replicable model of multiplying healthy local churches, we were never shooting for instant churches. We want real churches, living churches, and effective churches! The model or template is a plan. It's to make it easier and to lay a clear foundation from which to work. It's to keep you from trying to "discover yourself" and think you have to be terribly creative as a planting pastor. We want to plant churches like they did in the book of Acts (oh...how we long for the power of the Holy Spirit to be so effective). In the Bible, God has defined what the church is to be and how it should function. You don't have to recreate the wheel—it's already been done by Jesus. So the template, based in Biblical principles of healthy local churches, gives a structure and a plan. But the church planter has to think, pray, struggle, observe, and believe; he has to know how to make decisions based on the circumstances and contexts in which he finds himself. The model is just the structure...not the life. The church planter and the team of disciples serving with him bring the life to church planting in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have learned through the years, some things to do and many things not to do. There are common mistakes that you can avoid (and we only know about them because we have made them and lived to experience the painful results). There are ways to go about starting a new church that will be less painful and more effective. These are the things that I want to write about here. I remember when my dad told me that he wanted me to learn from his mistakes and not to repeat the same things. At the time, I thought, "I want to be my own man; I want to learn those things myself!"

And do you know what I was? A FOOL! My dad was wise in wanting me to learn from him and not to repeat the same mistakes. It was love that motivated him to teach me. But I wouldn't listen. I pray that you will listen and put these things in your toolbox. I pray that you will not have to suffer all of the same things that I had to with no coach and a trial and error approach. I pray that it is love for Jesus, for you, and for his church that motivates me to write these things.

*Note: In "Our Story and How We Do Church," the section titled "Church Planting," I wrote some about the period of team gathering and preparation to move (including a checklist for getting ready to go). Here, my goal is to write more about how to be an effective church planter once you are on the ground in the city to which you are going.

Chapter 1: How to be a Good and Faithful Church Planter


Be Compelled By Love

There is no shortage of clear direction in the Bible to let us know that our motive for all that we do ought to be love! “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind....You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37; 39). “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36). “Love one another with brotherly affection” (Romans 12:10). “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and discernment” (Philippians 1:9). “Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14). “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you” (1 Thessalonians 3:11-12). “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly” (1 Peter 4:8). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). “For the love of Christ controls us, because we concluded this: That one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). I don’t need to go on. I’ve only hinted at the wonderfully clear call to love God and to love people. How ought we be as pastors? Compelled by love! Motivated by love!

So we ask Jesus to search out hearts as he did the churches in the beginning of Revelation. Is it success that drives us or is it the great love of God in Christ Jesus? Is it concern for our reputation or longing for people to come to Jesus and be saved by him? It makes a huge difference. You can see a pastor who is really about his own image and performance a million miles away. Those who are not Christians can see it. Genuine Christians can see it. And maybe the scariest thing: People who overlook it and follow us...will become just like us! “A disciple is not above his teacher, but when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). If we are not motivated by love, the people who follow us will not be either. Just like us...they will have an appearance of godliness (an outward, put-on, shallow appearance) and deny the power of true Christianity (2 Timothy 3:5). Every church planter ought to tremble at this thought.

But flip it around (it’s much less depressing). Paul teaches Timothy, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). If we are motivated by the love of Christ, the church will be full of love. If we’ve worked out the heart issue—why we are doing this at all—what a difference it will make! We will be a usable, fragrant offering to Jesus. What a joy! Imagine a church of people who treat each other and those being saved with real love. When people come into the church that you plant, what will they say about the community? Will they sense the love of God? Will they see smiles and kindness and hugs and warmth and genuine service and tears of compassion and thankfulness and true friendship? Or will they just see a crowd of people (small or large crowd...it makes no difference) who file in and out not knowing or being known. We value true, Christian community—real relationship. And the primary factor in the development of such a community is genuine love inspired by the Holy Spirit in those who have been recipients of grace.

To be more practical: If you really love the people that you lead, they will learn to love the people that they lead. At first they might not get it. Usually we seem to get the form first. But eventually it will get deep into their hearts. They will realize: “My leader loved me! When I had to go to the emergency room for kidney stones, he was there. When I needed to confess my sin, he listened and helped me. He always seemed happy to see me. He made time for me. He laughed with me (and frequently at me). He told me ‘no’ when I needed it and yet didn’t think less of me for my misjudgments. Over time, we have grown so close that I don’t know what my life would have been without him!” And if you can replicate this in the people that you lead, so that they are doing this with others, you will be a good church planter.

We love the people that we lead in reality...in action. But also in words! My dad and I were having an argument one day when I was in my early teens (I know...not very respectful of me). I told him, “You never thank me for what I do or tell me that you love me.” I must have really felt the need to hear it intensely to give me the courage to say such a thing. What I longed to hear in that moment was, “I do love you, Steve!” What he said was, “I go to work every day. I earn money to support you. You never thank me. Why do you need me to say it?” He came from a generation that didn’t know how to express words of love and affection. But I needed to hear it. And somewhere along the way after Jesus saved me, I decided I was going to say it and say it a lot! If I love someone that I lead, I say so. It may make them uncomfortable at first but, if I have relationship with them on any level, I say it anyway! With women that I lead, for proprieties sake, I would say, “ and I love you.” I tell the young men that I lead “I love you” all the time. They need to hear the words, and you can’t just assume that they know it. Recently I heard my teenage daughters telling their friends “I love you” when ending a not so important phone conversation. I wondered if it was appropriate at first. But then I realized that they have learned something. If you love someone, say

it! Sometimes we think the danger is saying “I love you” and not acting it out (and in some cases it may be true, and we should avoid insincere words without actions of love). But I think more often with Christian men, it’s easier to show people we love them and avoid saying it. Let’s face it: Many of us didn’t have dads who knew how to express right affection. There is an ache in us to have leaders—strong men that we follow—who will tell us they love us. I think it demonstrates to us the love of our true Father. Four times in the New Testament we are told “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26). Maybe kissing other men on the cheek is culturally out, but let us at least carry out the intent of such clear, repetitive direction about our relationships in Jesus’ church. We need clear ways to express our genuine love for our Christian brothers and fathers and sons. Saying, “I love you” to those we lead may be a good start.

Protect and Defend the Church

Accepting the role of protector of Jesus’ church is critical for every church planter (and the overseers that he will be training). Like everything else...it is motivated by love. Both love for the people who are being protected from troublemakers and love for those who cause trouble that they would turn from their sinful behavior and be changed. BUT, protecting the church is the first priority in this case. Jesus warned us about such people: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16a). And again, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Over and over the Apostle Paul is clear about dealing with people who harm the church. “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive,

disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert” (Acts 20:28-31a). “As for the person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11). Paul even warns Timothy about a couple of specific people by name: “Some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (2 Timothy 1:19-20). Because most people believe that “nice” is the primary characteristic of a Christian and the church must allow whoever wants to be there to do so, pastors are usually very hesitant to deal with problem situations where individuals would cause harm to the church. And yet, the Bible requires us as overseers to teach, correct, and give direction to these people. Initially the hope is always that they will be teachable, repent, and have a change of heart and behavior. But if, after effort to help them do so, there is still trouble, they must leave.

Initially you may have a “gut feeling” that something is not right. Generally, we would say that this is not enough to go on by itself. If a couple of overseers sense that something is wrong, everyone should definitely be watching and listening carefully. Sometimes simply expressing some concern about whether or not the church is a good fit for them (where there is an uneasiness about them, but, as of yet, no wrong behavior), will resolve the issue by bringing it to the surface so that

they either leave (not teachable or not willing to work it through) or address the problem (possibly teachable with hope that it may yet work out). I've heard some of our overseers at Blue Sky ask, "Do we have to wait around until they actually cause harm before we do anything?" And the answer is no, not necessarily. But we do have to be quite sure that we are not sinning against them by misjudging the situation. This is why it is a good idea to have inappropriate behavior that you can talk with them about (e.g., you can't pass out your pamphlets here or by the way you've been talking, you clearly will not agree with our understanding of scripture). When they have acted and talked in ways that reveal their heart and confirmed the "gut level suspicions," you can simply say to them, "This is not going to work." Do you have to explain why? Not always. While it may make you feel better if you can, I've almost never seen this kind of explanation received well by the person. Sometimes it seems that a general explanation works the best: "We just feel very uncomfortable about you being here" or "It really does not feel to us like it's going to work for you." (If the person is a church member, it's different. You have to give them "due process" according to your by-laws and have the overseers appoint a disciplinary team to confront them with the problem, seek repentance, and ask them to leave if they are not willing.)

In the Bible texts that I cited earlier, the issues are: people promoting false teachings; those who are causing trouble—divisive, ungodly/immoral people who are not willing to hear the gospel and be changed (Paul's list of the kinds of people who should be avoided is significant); and those who are sent by the evil one—wolves that try looking like sheep. With all of the spiritual opposition experienced in an early church plant, there are plenty of people that the evil one will attempt to use to destroy the young church. It doesn't matter whether it's intentional on the part of the person or not. Very bold false teachers, obvious troublemakers, and the blatantly immoral and unresponsive are the easiest to deal with (in that you simply KNOW you must get rid of them). It's the more subtle

situations that are the most difficult. If the person is the tenth “odd-ball” (for the lack of a kinder word) that has come into the new church and is trying to make it home, you’ve got trouble. In a very small church, the culture is being firmly established by the majority in the initial crowd, and it doesn’t take very many socially unhealthy people to make the church unattractive to new friends. It’s like going to a dinner party where most of the guests are socially awkward and conversation is hard work; you start wishing you had never come and wondering how to get out of the situation quickly. In the larger church that you’re planting from, the culture is more established and a few socially-challenged people don’t hurt the church. But this is not the case in a church plant! Could it be that the new church might not be a good fit for a person who has done nothing wrong (not sinning, not sent by the evil one, etc.)? Absolutely! If a person tips the balance and makes it difficult for the church to grow in a healthy manner, it’s not a good fit. Sometimes it is simply that the person is very religious in their talk and mannerisms (dancing in the back during worship, etc.). It doesn’t matter how sincere the dancing is, if they are not willing to stop when you ask them for the sake of the new guests...you simply ask them to leave (kindly, but clearly).

How does all of this fit with love and mercy and compassion? Very well! A church plant is not for everyone and not everyone will flourish in a new church. If they wrongly affect the culture of the new church or if they are so broken and in need that the new church will not be able to offer them the help that they need, it won’t work. Some people will make it in a larger church where they can be more hidden. John Wimber used to say, “If you spend all your time with the sick, you will never have a hospital.” I believe it’s true. The compassion people on your team will really struggle with this. They will have to trust you that it must be done for the long-term good of the church.

This doesn’t mean that the first people coming into the new church will all be healthy and wonderful. They will be sinners saved or being saved by grace just like you and me. But being

socially/emotionally unhealthy to the point of distraction or disruption is different. Being a gossip that continues gossiping or a complainer that won't stop complaining is unacceptable. It will destroy the church long term. The cream of the crop will not come and join in community with them. The more socially/emotionally healthy of the culture will not come. You must make hard decisions for the long-term good of the mission that Jesus has entrusted to you.

The hardest among the difficult people you will encounter are the previously churched and rebellious. There is always a wandering group of Christians that have been asked to leave other churches or have left because leaders gave correction or direction to them. They are the most difficult because they have an appearance of Christianity and usually know how to say the "right things." They can play the part. It's very difficult to get the true story of what happened at the last church (or the last two or three). They may tell you their version, but it's hard to discern what really happened. One couple that had come around Blue Sky tried so hard. They would even force themselves to submit and follow, but their heart was never in it. Eventually, I found out that he had been asked to leave every church they had ever attended (and it was quite a number of churches). I had wanted him to leave for all the years that they attended; I could never feel peace about them. It finally came to a head because she was starting a Bible study without the blessing of the overseers and inviting people from the church to attend. By then, they had connected with many people, caused quite a lot of value confusion, and disrupted the peace of the church significantly. By that time, it was hard to ask them to leave because of the number of undiscerning people that had connected with them. I then had to explain to other people the reasons for asking them to leave without slandering them in any way (not easy...even if the things you would like to say are true).

Christians with a long church background also frequently have an agenda. Serving to be helpful is usually not in their plan; they frequently want position and influence. A small church just

starting feels to them like the perfect opportunity to finally get the “recognition that they deserve.” When you’re first planting, it can feel like you need them even if they are odd or like they are the only potential older leaders. If you hold on to them or make them leaders, you will never draw the healthier people that you desire to reach, and you will live to experience the pain of your impatience. The first or second time you tell them “no” and will not let them do what they want to, they will get ugly (so find a chance to tell them “no” early...this will reveal what is in them). Think of it this way: When Jesus saves someone, he calls them to a specific church home. It’s a place for them to grow up, be cared for, give, and belong. Those that are proven to have a good heart do so; they may stay in the same church, faithful to Jesus and his people for their entire life. Why are people in their forties, fifties, and sixties wandering from church to church? There is a good chance that they have a problem that keeps them from following leaders and serving Jesus’ people.

But there are people with church backgrounds that Jesus is calling to the new church plant. It seems to always be the case. They are frequently in genuinely unhealthy or dying churches but they have been faithful and endured, hoping that it would turn around. You have to be careful not to hurt these people. They’ve already been wounded by the sad circumstances of a hurting church or possibly ineffective leadership. So how do you know who has a bad heart and who is called by Jesus to the new church? A couple of years ago, there was a church near Blue Sky that closed. Many couples who were in their forties with kids started visiting. Most of them talked a religious language that was foreign to us. They also talked much of how gifted they were at this or that and constantly evaluated what we were doing from their “expertise.” It was very clear that it would not work for most of them to stay at Blue Sky. But there was one couple that kept their distance from these overly-expressive, critical newcomers. They observed and asked questions. They wept at the presence of the Holy Spirit. It seemed like they were breathing fresh air, and they were so thankful.

They didn't ask for anything or self-promote in any way. I started hoping that they would stay (while still watching carefully to see what would happen). Over time, it became very clear that they had good hearts and that they were teachable. They wanted to learn what we were doing and why. They were simply relieved that the pain of the old church closing was over. All of the other couples left (and we were very happy when they did), but this one couple stayed and they are flourishing!

Many younger people have been in churches where they haven't really connected, possibly because the church is very large and non-relational. Sometimes it's a church that had a great youth group but little or nothing for university students or young professionals; it's a good church with an age gap. The younger they are when they come to you, the more teachable they will be. Many people that are in the twenties and thirties will adapt and get our values easily. But it is much more uncommon for people older than this to do so. It happens, but it's just not as easy, and it happens with less frequency (and it takes a longer time). The primary goal in drawing newcomers is new believers and Christians moving into the area for work or school. We try not to draw people from other churches, but we are willing to receive those who seem to be drawn by Jesus (and who didn't make a mess at their previous church). Don't be afraid to ask them what church they previously attended and let them know that you would like to call the pastor to ask about the circumstances of their leaving. Many people will simply leave knowing that you will find out the ugly story (and this makes your life easy). If you feel that you need to, call! You may find things out that will save you a lot of heartache.

Attentiveness to the Task

Remember, we are talking about "how to be a good and faithful church planter." It's very easy for a church planter to lose track of what he is doing in the midst of all the business and

intensity. If you're planting out of a larger church, you're used to things seemingly running themselves (in a larger church, each staff member is responsible for such a small segment of the whole—everyone is more specialized). It's difficult to keep track of just how much you, as the lead pastor, must be attentive to. Listen to Peter on the importance of our charge and the reasons why we would be careful to be attentive: "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4). What care we must give to job to which Jesus has called us! As the lead overseer in a local church, you're responsible to Jesus for the whole thing; you must know what you are doing and why!

What is Sunday service about? Why do we do it? You have to believe the reasons with all your might. It is a gathering of the church and new friends for Bible preaching, worship, prayer, and relationship (at least meeting people). These are critical in our mission of disciple making. It's the church in the book of Acts...devoted to the Apostle's teaching, praising God, prayer, and new salvations. We gather with a purpose. It's Jesus' purpose for his mission! Not just routine or habit. A great weekly expectation of the move of God's truth and power in people who need him—this is the church. Why small groups? Do you still believe that people must have real, transparent relationship where they can apply the Bible to their lives together? People must know others and be known to grow up in Christ. Or the team meeting? Vision for the committed core—everyone who serves on a team. We must keep unity and move together in this mission. If you serve, it's essential for you to be at the team meeting. The lead pastor has twelve times a year to cast vision, encourage,

and teach those who will influence the rest of the growing church. It's not an afterthought or "just because"; there is great purpose in strengthening the foundation of the church. The team meeting is the context for building a healthy, vibrant community where, "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). We could go on (and you should): Staff meeting, the Series, membership, baptisms, children's dedication, retreats, summer conference, coffee with leaders, hands-on prayer. Why do you do these things? If you can't write down the reasons that we do each one of these, you don't really know the purpose for what we do. You must know!

So...attentiveness. You're asking the question: How is it going in each of these areas? Do people understand why we do them? Are we just going through the motions or are we hitting the mark? If you realize that there are very few new friends in the Sunday service, you ask why. Are people inviting friends? Do they know how? Is our Web site easy to find for Christians moving into the area, and is it good enough for them to give us a try? If you understand why these things are important, they are not terribly hard to fix. By being attentive to the effectiveness of each area in the make-up of the church, you are creating a context for the church to be healthy. Only Jesus can make the church grow; he is the one who builds up the church. We are just cooperating with him.

Every Monday as you are talking through how things went over the weekend, you are asking the question: How are we doing? Are we hitting the mark? You must be careful not to carry the entire weight as if you are to make it grow. But taking on what is really your responsibility (obedience to Jesus, protecting the doctrine, creating a healthy context, etc.), you must lead to see that it takes place. You do this in faith and hope and expectation, knowing that Jesus loves his church and is bringing men and women to himself. You believe him for both his part and yours! And you keep going, doing your best, getting help where you need it, resting in proper amounts, and rejoicing in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Perseverance

The grace to keep going is one of the great Biblical graces of the Christian life. We undervalue the beauty of perseverance because we don't want it. That is, we don't want to need it! We want everything to be easy. We want the path to be always smooth. Perseverance means waiting and hard going and hanging in. Not as fun as "green pastures," "quiet waters," and "restores my soul." But remember that, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). And "if we endure with him, we will also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:12a). Even better, listen to Paul's great counsel to Timothy: "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). We must get good at keeping on. Those who keep going, make it to the end. There is a kind of expressed faith in our trusting Jesus and pressing forward when things are not yet succeeding and flourishing or when darkness challenges all that has been accomplished. Believing his promises for the future when the church is already large and greatly used of God is one thing; you already have a kind of living evidence (or knowledge) that God is blessing it. Believing him for big things when it is small, insignificant, and slow growing is another kind of faith. Which one do you think Jesus counts as faith?

When Vine was small and still meeting in our living room, I felt ridiculous believing that we would plant churches in university cities all over the United States and that we would "touch the nations." It's easier to believe now that Vine is near 2,000 people, and Jesus has planted seven new churches and two more are in the works. Believe him when it has not yet happened! Dare to believe the promises whispered by the Holy Spirit. Make yourself write them down so that you don't forget. When things are slow or hard...read the promises that he has made. "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by

faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:6-7). So, “We make it our aim to please him” (2 Corinthians 5:9b). I long for the day when our lead pastors and church planters would believe the promises whispered by the Holy Spirit with great faith. It doesn’t mean that we have to boast that the church we are planting will be amazing. We boast in the glory that will be brought to Jesus and the lives that will be changed. Some promises seem too grand to speak; there is no way for it to not sound presumptuous. **BUT THE PEOPLE NEED VISION.** As a lead pastor of two different churches, I have always talked about the day when we would plant churches, even when it was still utterly impossible for us to do so. I am regularly talking about the time when we will plant churches in Taiwan, but there is, as of yet, no visible evidence that it will happen. But, I believe it with everything that I am, just because I believe the Holy Spirit spoke it to me. It’s not some kind of “name it—claim it” theology. It’s simple faith in the God who does the impossible. If you don’t believe his promises, neither will the people that you lead.

Perseverance means to continue believing and go on even when you don’t feel like it. Though I’m not talking about faking it. In church planting the ache and fear and discouragement are real. It’s painful to hope and wait and choose to keep hoping! There are times when you will feel like it’s all success and blessing; it’s not all hard and painful. But the struggle seems to stand out in our minds because it’s the part we like the least and understandably so. If we believe that God has his purpose even in the struggle, we will persevere. Paul says it best: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). He reminds us that the suffering and waiting are not purposeless! God is glorifying his own name and protecting us by making our weakness clear to everyone. What a gift to us! We don’t want people to think we’re so great anyway, right?!! To God be glory in everything. So he goes on: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down,

but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). This is part of the reason that we need one another so badly. We remind each other that we are not crushed, can’t go to despair, not forsaken or destroyed...even when it feels like it could go there. No...we believe God. If our struggles in church planting work together to somehow manifest the life of Jesus in us, so be it! So we persevere to the end.

After the great promise in Revelation 21:4: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away,” he goes on, “the one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (v. 7). Look up the seven times in the book of Revelation (mostly in Chapters 2 and 3) that Jesus says “the one who conquers.” They are amazing promises FOR US! We could even take it a step further and believe what the Holy Spirit says to us through Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Romans 8:35). I should point out that, while many Christians in history and in the world today have experienced these things, our great troubles in church planting are mostly painful to our pride and our impatience. Let’s face it—we don’t really suffer much as far as suffering goes. Yet, with our comparatively tiny suffering, the promise is still for us: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). If we are already more than conquerors through the love of Jesus, then the promises in Revelation are certainly ours (sounds like the righteousness of Jesus has already been imputed to us). So let’s press on. Let’s keep going, even when it’s hard. “Only let us hold true to what we have attained” (Philippians 3:16).

Obedience and Risk-taking

Effective church planters obey Jesus and follow him in what he asks of us. “Playing it safe” does not blend well with the Christian life, especially for the Christian who is called to plant a church. The entire thing is a risk. You start well with obedience even by initially leaping off the cliff and agreeing to move to plant a church. But obedience and risk-taking are not just characteristics that decorate the beginning of a church plant—they are essential in the basic fiber of the planting pastor all the way to the end of this race.

By our temperament and personalities, some are more prone to risk-taking than others. For those to whom risking comes more naturally, taking the time to weigh, discern, and seek counsel will be a big deal. Planters who know that they are generally more cautious must learn when it’s time to stop analyzing and weighing possible outcomes and just pull the trigger. You have to know yourself well. And you have to know the other pastors and overseers that help you to understand how you function so that they can help you properly.

I am an external processor who is prone to make quick decisions. I also am able to work through the possible problems with a specific course of action if I have someone who will listen to me and ask me questions. Once Larry Anderson from Vine learned how I functioned, he was able to come along side me as an overseer and greatly increase my effectiveness as a lead pastor. He listened to me for hours and hours at a time and was not bothered by the seeming uncertainty of talking through different courses of action until I had peace. If you are an internal processor (think things through in your head over time before you can make a decision or are ready to talk about it), you need men around you who know this and can ask you questions and encourage you to go for it. They also need to give you courage to make decisions that feel risky; you have to be willing to make

mistakes (this is important because one of the issues with a cautious internal processor is always trying to be sure that everything goes perfectly—thus, the cautiousness).

I don't mean that a pastor should make decisions without prayer, careful thought, and seeking godly counsel. For the more cautious among us, it's not easy to take a risk even after having done these things thoroughly. We all desperately need to surround ourselves with those who can complement our weaknesses and help us to be more effective in this mission. Pray that Jesus would give you such men to support and encourage you. And don't make the mistake of thinking that this person must be older than you, as Larry was twenty years older than me. James Chidester has also functioned for me in a similar capacity, and he is nearly twenty years younger than me. Jesus puts each person in place to function for the good of his church. Believe that he will provide you with the support and advisors that you need.

The kinds of obedience and risk-taking required in a church plant often have to do with decisions about how to go forward. It takes a visionary leader to know what to do next and vision comes from Jesus. He builds his church. He leads us by the Holy Spirit. But it doesn't always seem obvious to everyone what the way forward is, and you may very well feel the pressure of "what if I'm wrong." The truth is that it doesn't so much matter if you are wrong as long as you have acted in faith. As the scripture says, "Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Hebrews 11:6a). When we first built the original building for Vine Church, we left the parking lot gravel. It seemed practical, and we didn't want to be extravagant or wasteful with Jesus' money (plus we probably didn't have the money). However, after a while I became convinced that it was important to bite the bullet and pay for the asphalt. In some ways, I felt like a spoiled child arguing the case for a luxury that we could not afford just because it would be nice. I felt like we had to up our appearance from a smaller, rural church to a larger, more effective one. For our members, it made little difference. The

asphalt was all about the first impressions of new guests and visitors. But the members had to pay for it. I felt Jesus pressing me about it, so I pressed the board and, once we were in agreement, the church. I think we needed somewhere around \$45,000 to do the paving, and the offering did not go so well (the members were not terribly interested in paying for pavement). But at the spring party where the bookkeeper gave me the not-so-good news about the offering, someone walked up to me, asked how the offering had gone, and wrote a check for the remaining amount. Jesus wanted that pavement done, and I was to go forward in faith even if I looked a bit foolish in the process.

Obedience and risk-taking!

We could apply these principles to a dozen different issues that will come up when you're planting a church. What facility will you lease for Sunday services initially? Who do the pastors/overseers choose to be small group leaders? How high can you afford to set the budget for the coming year? When do you bring on the next staff member? Is the church large enough to lease full-time space or purchase a building? Do you really give away that much money to another church? Can you give up that young church planter with a worship leader and team (plus a bunch of money) and still be a healthy church? The specific situations will continue to arise as long as we are following Jesus. Sometimes the question will come up as a subtle nudge in your heart. Sometimes another pastor or your coach will push you on the issue. It may be that you have a dream where it seems that Jesus is speaking to you. Or it could be that you are talking through future challenges with the other overseers and the conversation somehow leads to a new risk. No matter how Jesus speaks to us, once we have weighed it together, prayed, and are convinced that it is what he wants, we must obey him (follow him, do what he says, let him lead us, surrender his church to him, believe it is for our good and joy, trust that he will provide). Risk-taking for the Christian pastor is never foolish

when done in the sure context of faithful overseers who are willing to carry the responsibility together and believe Jesus is behind the course of action.

Watch Your Life

Paul gives Timothy this poignant direction: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (1 Timothy 4:16a). It is maybe the most fundamental direction to be given to overseers, yet it’s far too easy to subtly overlook. I want to deal with our lives first and, later, our teaching.

As pastors, we can unknowingly fall into the trap of having a professional Christianity. That is, “My Christianity is my work.” When I’m off work, I don’t want to think about Jesus because he reminds me of work. Now we wouldn’t say it that clearly; we know it’s not right when we say it. However, it is a very real struggle. Most people live out their daily life struggling to include their faith in Jesus in their everyday responsibilities at work and school; they have to avoid the danger of compartmentalizing their lives where Christianity gets the “Sunday compartment.” For pastors and staff, work and following Jesus are constantly blended together. The church becomes our constant companion. If not careful, we can end up reading the Bible for work, praying for work, serving others for work, worshipping for work, sharing Jesus with another for work. You get the picture. Slowly we can find ourselves living “differently” from other Christians. Our love for Jesus grows cold and pure motives for what we do disintegrate. We can find ourselves in the place of the Ephesian Christians receiving Jesus’ correction: “I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:3-4).

We love Jesus, and we have been saved from sin and death by the wonderful gift of his grace. I think back to the days when I was newly saved and in my first church home. How much I delighted

to gather with the church. All week I was waiting with eager anticipation for what Jesus would do and what I would learn in the Sunday worship. Jesus was my life! That's a Christian. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). What a willingness to follow Jesus--it is joy and delight to simply belong to him and be called by his name. But when a man becomes a pastor, the responsibilities in following Jesus can become heavy. A new pastor realizes that people are depending on him; people are watching him to learn how to be a Christian and how to walk after Jesus. In one sense this is right and good—it must happen. But over time it can result in a professional and performed Christianity.

Maybe the key to resolving these challenges is simply in our thinking about what we do. First is this: To be a pastor is a calling. It's something that Jesus gave us to do. We were created for this purpose. We are selected or appointed (1 Corinthians 12:28a: "And God has appointed in the church..." and 1 Timothy 2:7: "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle...." You can hear God speaking to Jeremiah in chapter 1, verse 5: "Before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"). "Pastor" is not our title—it is simply the kind of Christian that Jesus has asked us to be. It's the purpose that he has given us as his sons. If it is so profound and not just that some lead pastor brought you on staff and decided to train you to be a pastor, then the importance of what we are doing goes dramatically up! God did this to us! It is real purpose for our lives. We can't separate it from being a Christian and shouldn't try to. Like Paul, we can say about ourselves, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

All of this to say, we are not employed, and we are not employees! We don't have a job in the usual sense. We have been called by Jesus from ordinary lives of work to serve him and his church with our everything. We are supported by the church through the giving of tithes and

offerings. Paul says it two times: “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” (1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18). He goes on to say that it is not oxen that God was speaking about: “Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop” (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). All of this is true. But, still, we are not employed. Our serving as pastors is not a profession, and we are not “professional Christians.” I might say it this way: All of our time is time off to devote to his service. We must think of it this way or we will quickly fall into the trap of “my Christianity is my work.”

There are some other hints about this in 1 Timothy where Paul tells Timothy “keep a close watch on yourself.” Paul tells him to “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). And he says further “practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress” (v. 16). So we are to be living examples in following Jesus. Yes, we are on display so that disciples would be made for Jesus. People ought to be able to watch our lives and know how to live as a follower of Jesus. The responsibility that Jesus has given us is less manager and administrator (although these undoubtedly come into it) and more being a living example. We are free to live as followers of Jesus while being pastors! What if we enjoyed Jesus now as much as we did at first? What if we couldn’t wait until the next Sunday so that we could worship and see what Jesus would do next? How we talk, the way we conduct ourselves daily, the depth of our love, our faith expressed in real circumstances, and the purity of our hearts and actions are wonderfully on display for all to see. So, is it pressure? If we could think about it rightly, it wouldn’t be! We are free to live for Christ. We are recipients of grace! Maybe much of our problem comes from our performance mindset and our fear of disappointing our Lord and people around us. Maybe we are easily drawn from the freedom of grace to a kind of law that becomes a heavy burden

to us. I can hear Paul shouting at me,” O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3).

There it is! We are already perfected by grace through the death and resurrection of our perfect Lord. See, it’s our insecurity that gets the better of us. In the Galatian church it was a temptation to turn to the Law of Moses for self-righteousness. For us, we turn to our self-made law of performance. Are we doing well enough? Will we please people? Maybe the question is: are we men or boys? Boys don’t yet know how much father loves them; they are not confident in his love...just learning it. But if well trained, they grow up into strong men who are confident in Father. We are to be men who know grace and the wonderful acceptance through the imputed righteousness of Christ that is already ours. While we are still imperfect, we stand securely as men...as sons...in our Father’s gift of grace. “God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). If he loved us like that when we were still objects of his wrath because of sin, wouldn’t his love clearly still be ours because of his own choice and pleasure after he has justified us, forgiven us, and adopted us as sons? Are we perfect pastors? Not one of us! Certainly not me.

We struggle to rest or be “off” from the tasks of our responsibilities because we are not yet confident in his grace. This is the story of my life as a pastor. Always striving to do more...just a little bit more. Maybe then I would truly have peace with God. I got a glimpse of this problem in my thinking when I was fishing salmon with John Lanferman, the U.S. national leader for New Frontiers Churches. We were not catching any fish. I was his “guide,” and we just had one afternoon to get his friend, Sam, and him a big fish. I was feeling the pressure to perform. Suddenly, as were driving the boat in circles watching our downriggers, John says to me: “Can’t you feel how pleased Father is

with us?” I looked at him and did a double take! “What do you mean? No! I can’t feel it! If he was pleased with us, wouldn’t we be catching fish right now?!” I didn’t actually say it but I thought it all. I think I told him “I’m not sure I feel it!” And he smiled at me as if with utter peace. Wow! I’m messed up! That’s how I lead the church far too often. “If you were pleased with me, wouldn’t I be catching more fish? Wouldn’t the church be growing faster? Wouldn’t people tell me more frequently how well I am doing?” Still subtly trying to earn Father’s pleasure is tiring work! He will never give us what we want in this. He may even frustrate our work to bring us into the freedom of his grace! So is he just as pleased with me when the church seems stuck as when the church is growing? Yes, because I am in Christ! His Son already pleased him on my behalf. When Father looks at me and sees that I am in Christ, he is pleased!

It’s true that “we make it our aim to please him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). But not so that he would like us or accept us. Those who are loved by him and already accepted through Christ want to please him simply because they love him! We want to please him out of thankfulness and not out of insecurity about where we stand with him. Let us be grown men in this! When he puts these truths deep within us, we will know how to work hard and how to rest. We will know that we are pleasing to him at all times because we are in Jesus. What a freedom!

So, yes we are under grace and already pleasing. And, yes we make it our aim to please him. We watch ourselves closely. We live as examples in the freedom of Christ and not under the burden of performance. Guarding ourselves against sin and carelessness, we live as Christian pastors so that we are usable as an example to others. The worst outcome of our calling to be pastors would be for us to shipwreck our faith through moral or doctrinal failure. To do so would dishonor Jesus, cause great harm to our families, and wound a great number of people who love us and follow us. Jesus has spoken promises to us over and over that this will not be the case in this network. I regularly pray for

such protection. But we are most likely to fall into such sin when we live under the heavy weight of performance pressure. Never being satisfied or believing we are accepted puts us under a great burden of insecurity. And men tend to give themselves to sins like pornography, adultery, and various addictions (not to mention the problems of restlessness, anxiety, and depression) when they feel insecure and uncertain about how they are doing. The fear of failure and rejection--either self-rejection or fear of rejection from others--puts men in the place of trying to find comfort and relief. Too often men give in to temptations, thinking it will satisfy, only to find that it drives them deeper into despair and insecurity. It is essential that we grasp this truth of grace. Only then will we see ourselves and the work that Jesus has called us to correctly.

Practically, we must know how to be off work while still being on as a Christian. On days off (which we should have every week—at least one day completely off—even in the intensity of starting a new plant), we should not check our work email or receive calls regarding work. We should talk to and email friends and family (the goal is not to isolate yourself). On vacation we should not even have our phone on or open our email. If it's on, and you're "screening" calls, you still see the name of the person calling and wonder, "What could they want" or "What's wrong?" This throws us back into the stress of dealing with situations from which we should be resting. We don't finish preparing our teaching for Sunday or make a few phone calls because we didn't get time. If it's critical for the weekend, then get it done before your days off. Otherwise, make it wait until Monday!

One our days off, we are not off from our love for Jesus, so we pray because we can't help ourselves. We search the Bible to be built up and encouraged with truth. We read other books that give life to us and build our faith (for me it's biographies of Christian pastors from the first and second great awakenings). We exercise to keep ourselves healthy and to relieve stress. We spend time with our wife and kids, loving, teaching, and playing. We spend time with friends who we

especially enjoy (not talking about office stuff), and we pray for one another and for the church. We remember to cultivate hobbies or activities that help us rest and enjoy life. All of these things are the stuff of living as a Christian.

Watch Your Teaching

Once again, Paul's direction to Timothy was to "keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Timothy 4:16a). We should believe what we teach and teach what we believe. But it is not "believe whatever you want as long as you believe it sincerely." We must grow in our belief of the objective truth in the Bible. I say "grow in" because we are imperfect in our understanding and should continually mature in understanding of the scripture. Jesus taught us, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). The foundations of starting this network came out of the question of how to rightly handle Bible truths. Do we adapt our doctrine to the current culture by looking for explanations and interpretations contrary to the intent of the original, inspired authors? What we believe and what we teach is really important, and the goal is not our comfort or the culture's approval of our beliefs. The real question is, "Does God approve of our understanding of his Bible?" Paul says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). That's the goal. That we would not be ashamed before God with how we handle his truth.

To do this we will need to study and read. We want to teach "the main and the plain," clear and simple truths (to use John Wimber's language). Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. Salvation by faith in Jesus through grace alone. Discipleship and healthy, effective local churches. And many other wonderful Bible truths. We want to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I did not

shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). But how do we handle it rightly if we do not truly know it? Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* is important for every church planter. You will need to review entire areas of doctrine as you go into teaching a series on particular topics, refreshing your knowledge to be sure that you are teaching the Bible well.

Some of you will have to be careful to still keep it simple. The better your knowledge, the easier it is to teach simply and clearly; if you don’t really understand the truths you will find yourself rambling in circles, trying to hit the issue with every pass (and your teaching will be tiresome for you and for the church). Those of you who thrive on details will have to learn how to summarize and omit details that are not absolutely necessary to a solid understanding of the text that you are teaching. It’s too easy to fill up a teaching with trivia that is interesting to you but has little relevance to understanding the text at hand. If you know you thrive on detail, editing your outlines and cutting out the unnecessary will be important for every teaching. On the other hand, if you tend to be simplistic and more practical in your understandings, you will need to push yourself to be sure that you are handling the Bible correctly. Pastors who struggle with detail and organization will often read a text and have a hard time nailing down the main point and the relevant applications of the text. They will frequently teach part of a text but miss major issues or points that are clearly addressed. If this is you, force yourself to think more carefully about the content and implications. Ask someone to help you talk through what the text is getting at or to check in after your prep to be sure you haven’t missed major points. After a while you will get better at drawing the content from a Bible text.

Over the years, I have under-emphasized study and reading for the leaders that I have been training. Because our pastors tend not to be seminary trained, I now believe it is all the more important that we teach young pastors to study and carefully remember the clear doctrines of the

Bible. And no one will truly grow in this without developing a love for reading. I've found for myself that reading the biographies of faithful pastors that have held to clear doctrine have given me a fun and repeated exposure to fundamental Christian beliefs. It's also allowed me to see the failings and blind spots of other pastors.

With all of this, we keep it simple but we must be sure that we are accurate in our understandings and in what we teach. I've said over and over that this ought not make us argumentative and mean. When I was praying with the pastors one day, I felt that I heard the Holy Spirit tell me what our attitude ought to be: "We don't claim to know everything. We just want to follow Jesus." This is not permission for ignorance—just direction for our attitude. We believe the Bible. "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And at the same time and from the same book: "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Let us be both!

Chapter 2: Avoidable Mistakes in Planting

The Office Syndrome

The larger a church gets, the more administrative work is required for everything to run effectively. By the time you are planting a church, your sending church will be approaching or over 500 people in attendance with many staff. The good news about this is that you've seen how a larger church is organized and led. When the church that you're planting gets larger, you will know what to do to keep it vibrant and effective. That is, IF you ever get to that size! And if you try to operate like you did on the staff of a larger church, the church you are planting will likely not grow well and will probably never plant other churches!

I have already pointed out that pastors are not primarily administrators and managers. Even in larger churches, our pastors tend toward structure and organization more than we should (that's my fault...sad carry-over from my accounting and business days). But when you're planting a new church, it is deadly! When we unknowingly do this, the real work that Jesus appointed for pastors to accomplish does not get done, and we may end up with very organized structures and systems with very few people. I call it "office syndrome."

In Acts 6, the young church was growing, and their administration was falling behind. Some of the widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food. What the apostles said was this: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2). They were not saying, "We're not servants—find someone lower than us to do the grunt work!" Jesus had worked them over too much on the issue of who was the greatest and what is the appropriate heart attitude of a servant. They knew very clearly that Jesus had appointed them for the work of preaching the good news, and it was not a light load! Then in verse 4 they state, "But we will devote

ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). So...first responsibilities for the apostles were preaching and prayer (yes, prayer was part of their work as we are learning, too).

And just so we don't think this was only for apostles, look at Paul's direction to Timothy and Titus, who were appointed as local lead pastors to represent Paul in Ephesus and Crete. First to Timothy: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 3:1-2). Then Titus: “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine....Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:1, 15). Obviously, a primary responsibility that we have been given is preaching and teaching.

The apostles also had prayer high on their list but, again, what about local pastors? Paul teaches Timothy: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.... This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.... I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Timothy 2:1, 3-4, 8). Paul even told Timothy, “I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3). Notice the content even of the prayers of pastors: salvation and growth as disciples (or you could say the knowledge and practice of the truth). This is what God wants! This is why we plant churches—that people would be saved and follow Jesus. The work is always done first in prayer!

The last primary responsibility is identifying, training, and releasing pastor/overseers and deacon/leaders. Both Titus and Timothy were representatives of the Apostle Paul who were left in place as local lead pastors for a period of time to help appoint overseers and leaders. Titus is told:

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). Then Paul lays out the guidelines for Titus on how to identify and train them. Paul tells Tim that he left him in Ephesus “so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3). He warns him about the kinds of wrong doctrines circulating and the specific men promoting them, and then he goes into how to choose and teach the right overseers and deacons. While most lead pastors will need help from their leaders in identifying pastors and overseers, it is the local lead pastor that is responsible for the ongoing leadership and training of these men. And it is certainly the lead pastor’s responsibility to identify and train the deacon/leaders. This is essential to the health and purpose of Jesus’ church. Without pastors and leaders that hold to the truth and live a lifestyle that is faithful to Jesus, there is no hope for the church.

These three things appear obvious to me: Lead pastors are to devote their primary time to preaching, prayer, and leader development. Failing to prioritize our time correctly will result in a church that is well-organized but spiritually weak. So these priorities need to get to your calendar. Preaching and teaching includes the Sunday service, but also Team Meetings, the Series, training group leaders, talking with a young potential leader about what he believes and why, explaining the good news about Jesus and his grace to a new family in the church...and on and on. The bottom line with this is that you must be with people. If you get stuck in the office and the only time that you see the people of the church is on Sunday or at meetings, you will not be as effective as you should be.

The same is true with prayer. If you don’t see prayer as one of your primary responsibilities, you will neglect it. Prayer will get pushed out by email and phone conversations. This is why, after Jesus corrected me on this issue, I made all of the staff pastors and leaders put prayer on their calendars for every office day from 8:30 until 10:00 a.m. We pray together FIRST. And we continue

to ask ourselves the question, “How prayerful are we throughout the rest of the day?” We don’t want it just to become another structured meeting. We want to be spiritual men who pray because we want to pray.

Leader development is the process of identifying and training pastor/overseers and deacon/leaders. To do this you must spend time with them! We are relational in our leadership. You have to spend time with them to know them. Time where you are hearing their story and telling yours. Time where you pray for them and spur them on in following Jesus. Time where you challenge them in growth and maturity. You become their leader by spending time with them leading them (not just hanging out and being their friend, although that will happen some, too). Again, you can’t just get stuck in the office. To find, train, and lead the next layer of leaders you have to be with them often.

So you will have to find other people to order the stamps, answer phones, prepare the facility, and plan the parties. You release deacon/leaders to manage these things so that you can do what Jesus has appointed you to do. The most common objection that I hear from pastors on doing this is simply “It’s easier to do it myself than to find someone to do it.” If you believe this and hold to it, you will never lead a growing church that gets over 100 or 150 people. There just won’t be enough of you to go around. You must be replicated. So be sure that you have your time prioritized correctly so that you can focus on the main purposes that Jesus has given us as pastors and church planters. You must get out of the office and be with the people that Jesus is calling to himself!

They Will Come to Us

Related to the office syndrome is the thinking that the people will simply come to us. We just open an office, advertise a service time, and wait for the people to come in. It’s another problem

arising out of losing focus on our main purpose. When we are used to just working in an office and being in a larger church, few people notice the lack of effectiveness of the disciples in inviting, daily teaching others about Jesus, and following the Holy Spirit's lead in drawing people. In a large church there can be a sense of momentum, especially in a university city, where word of mouth and practical visibility has "taken over" and there is a steady flow of new friends coming in. But the disciples get lazy and, while it can seem like everything is going beautifully, there is still a great loss in disciple-making effectiveness of the church. In a church plant, with no reputation and no great facility to draw people, thinking "they will come to us" is devastating! The church will stall.

You as the lead pastor are also the lead inviter! You have to tell the story of why you're planting this church over and over. When we were planting Vine and the church was a total of twenty people, I decided that I would tell my story to twenty different people a week. I started counting them to keep me accountable. Both times I've planted a church, there is a kind of unspoken threat that I've felt to be quiet and NOT tell people what we were doing. And both times I had to intentionally press through this spiritual resistance and fear. If you are silent as a planter, the people you lead will be silent. If you risk and blow your cover and learn how to graciously tell people what you are doing and invite them, the people that you lead will do the same. Just today, while on vacation with my kids swimming in the pool, I felt a nudge to walk around the pool and talk to a young man who was to be a college freshman this fall and talk to him about Christianity. As is always the case with me, I was hesitant. It felt a bit embarrassing. I didn't know how I could bring the conversation around to Jesus and church. But I did it. I talked with him. He asked me what I did, and I told him that I was a pastor. I asked if he had ever gone to church much, and he said no. After talking about the kind of churches that we plant in university cities, I simply told him, "If you are ever interested in talking about Christianity, I would love to talk with you. Would you call me?"

He said he would, and I gave him Blue Sky's invitation card. He thinks he is going to be an elementary school teacher. But I have a sense that Jesus has lowered his sights on him and will save him and give him a purpose like he's never imagined! It's risk every time.

A church planter has to be gently, respectfully, and appropriately bold and a bit crazy. It starts by you regularly talking with people in the community, telling them your story, and inviting them to the church. Some will come because Jesus will use your faith risks. Then tell these stories of inviting people in your preaching. This will help the team and the church take courage and act just like you (risking for Jesus and for people's salvation). If you can build this in the culture of the church from the beginning, there is a chance that you may just plant a disciple-making church where people are regularly saved (and one where you don't just grow from transferring unhealthy people from other churches).

When you're first starting a plant, you have monthly parties to which your team can invite new friends. Later these will become small group and discipleship community parties. But even these can be brilliantly planned with the most exciting ideas, but still have no one actually inviting new friends to come. If you thought giving sodas away at a park or granola bars on campus or waters on move-in day were the way to go, they would still produce little result without real people connecting with other people, telling their story, and inviting them to come. Do these things. It helps with visibility and helps people to become familiar with the name of the church. But don't ever let them become a substitute for daily following the Holy Spirit's lead in meeting new people, genuinely caring for them, and inviting them to the church. At Blue Sky, we discovered at one point that we had over-spiritualized inviting. In the Seattle area, it always feels risky because there are so many people who are anti-Christian. Thus, it could feel like we need an audible word from God to move us to risk inviting. But one day I found myself almost involuntarily pulling an invitation card out of my

pocket and asking a huge, African American man if he would like to come (seriously...I didn't realize what I was doing until it was nearly over). I liked him and so badly wanted him to come (and he hasn't...yet). We realized that liking a person was reason enough to invite them. Feeling like they would be a good fit at the church or like they would find friends there was enough. Sometimes it's a Holy Spirit moment (like the guy at the pool this morning), but OFTEN it is simply a hope for their salvation—"I like them and want them to be with us in Jesus."

Build this into the foundation of the church. Talk about inviting experiences all the time. Tell the church the good ones and tell them about the rejection and how to cope with it. Ask upcoming leaders who they have recently invited or is there anyone you've been thinking of inviting. You will stir it up in their hearts and give them courage to do it! Then follow up and ask them how it went (sometimes you have to push them off the cliff!). David Chery, one of our pastors at Blue Sky Church, is the master at taking a small group leader to lunch or coffee and intentionally inviting someone in the restaurant to the church. By doing it in front of the group leader, he is teaching them how to risk and follow the Spirit's lead. He's stretching their comfort level and giving them ideas for how to do it themselves. You have to teach people to do this all the time. And don't forget to tell the stories of leaders and member who have wonderfully and effectively risked in inviting someone who actually came and stayed.

As lead pastors, we must stir this pot and keep stirring it until the end when Jesus tells us we are done with this mission. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The seeking comes first and then the saving. You and the disciples at the church you lead are on a people-seeking mission. Jesus is seeking them in our cities, so we are seeking them. We act just like Philip, who went to his friend Nathanael and told him, "Come and see" (John 1:46). Then when Nathanael came, Jesus took care of the saving (and it was a glorious day for both Philip and

Nate). It won't happen automatically. You are responsible to cast the vision and set the example. They won't just come to you...go to them!

Acting Like a Big Church

When you plant a new church, you will immediately feel a constant tension between what the church is right now and what you hope for it to be. You must be full of vision about the future and the growth of the church. But you can't act like a big church when you're small. To people coming in it feels presumptuous and makes you look fake. If you're a small church you must act like a small church BUT with a big vision.

If you act like a big church, what you do will not be appropriate to the context (which is what makes it feel fake). It will feel awkward if you are teaching on a high stage with a loud voice as if you were in an auditorium of 1,000 people when you're really in a hotel conference room with fifty. In a room of fifty, you must feel much more personal. You have the opportunity to look the people in the eye as you speak to them (a privilege that you will greatly miss later). Your manner is more conversational. You will feel more casual. Now...here is the balance. At the same time, you can't feel like a poorly run, "mom and pop," small-time country church. You must dress appropriately (looking like a leader to people of all ages without looking churchy). Your words must be well spoken, as if your message was truly good news and life to them. Vision for why you're doing what you're doing and Jesus' plan for this new church must constantly come out. You can't tell "inside stories" like you might in a living room of just friends. Always talk as if you have company over (even if there are few visitors yet). Be warm and passionate, believing what you are teaching. But always be real and never perform.

The worship team sometimes will be tempted to do songs that are too hard or “big” for the size of the church plant. When this happens, it feels like they are trying too hard and never quite doing well enough to make it sound good. The music becomes a distraction to the worship. The worship leader must choose songs that are not too hard, too high, or too grand. Again, they should be appropriate to the size of the crowd. It’s like singing the old Matt Redman song where he shouts “everybody dance” when no one is dancing (and has no intention of doing so—or at least so you hope). At a conference with 500 youth crammed down front and an auditorium of 2,000 people packed in right after an amazing week of God’s power, everyone may indeed be dancing. Great. But that is probably not the context of your new church plant, right? Leading this is simple: If the song makes you feel a bit uncomfortable or embarrassed, like you’re not sure people can really sing it or relate...just tell the worship leader not to use it!

Everything should be appropriate to the context of the church. You can’t make the Web site look like you’re a mega church. It will feel like “bait and switch” when they arrive, and they will never return (if they are looking for a mega church, you will not keep them anyway). Don’t include a youth group if you are just planning to start one when the first high school student finally shows up (just say on the Web site that middle school and high school students join us in the auditorium for teaching and worship—it’s honest, recognizes their presence, but doesn’t overstate). Don’t use a stock photo of some amazing, happening kids program if yours is two babies and 3 toddlers in a room with two teachers. Make it feel quality, safe, important, and just beginning.

You also have to be careful that you are not simply transferring large church systems to a new church plant. The principles might be the same, but what you actually do may be very different. In a large church, you may need a dozen people and a schedule to do snacks for the team meeting. In a new church you might need one person who enjoys food stuff and will do it every month for the next

year. You don't need a fancy database, or a bookstore, or a complicated scheduling system. Keep it simple and true to the size of the church. Otherwise, you will spend all of your time trying to run a system that is not even necessary.

You will also find that there are programs or services that a larger church offers that a church plant cannot (like recovery programs, marriage retreats, or even youth groups if you don't yet have any youth). People may try to get you to start these programs, but you must resist with all your might! Do just a few, simple things well. If you can stay focused on the few and necessary things, you may indeed grow large enough to need such programs for the purpose of the church. If they want to start a "help to the poor" program, tell them that they are free to take their money any day of the week and help a poor person. There will be time later to implement effective help to those who need help. But at first, you can't do it.

Failing to be Strategic in Developing Leaders

Jesus was very intentional in deciding who would be his key leaders. He chose them carefully (spending much time with them and spending an entire night in prayer). "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, who he named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13). It was very important, and he considered who he would choose very carefully and prayerfully. And then you'll notice that he spent a large amount of his time with them. They were constantly with him, watching him, listening to him, and being taught by him. He had three years to get them ready to function without him around. He frequently drew them away from the crowds to spend time alone with them.

When you're first starting a church, there is a sense where it can feel like everyone has the same role as a member of the planting team. But you have to distinguish between people; you have

to identify what each person is meant to do. You will elevate some people above others and make them leaders. Can you imagine Jesus coming back to his disciples--the whole crowd of them--and choosing twelve from among them? I picture myself in the crowd wanting him to choose me but fearing that he would not. We are not talking about how much a person is loved or their basic worth and value. Rather, it is identifying their God-initiated purpose in the new church. The ones that are meant to be leaders, you will need to spend more time with than the others.

It must be this way. Jesus did it this way. The Apostle Paul did it this way. There is simply not enough in one person to take care of and train and be a friend to everyone. So being strategic in identifying leaders is the first hurdle. I recommend that you do not do this on your own. You need your coach or more experienced lead pastors to help you see them and keep you from making serious mistakes. Most often I've seen new planters choosing the wrong group leaders because they feel like "they are the best that I have," rather than waiting for the right, God sent and called leaders. The problem with this is that you can't easily "undo" making them a leader. When others come along that are truly called to do it and have the ability to influence many, you will wish you had waited or went more slowly. Or worse yet, if you have made people group leaders who should never have been in that position, you run the risk of not drawing and keeping other true leaders (because they will look at the church and feel like there are not leaders that they could follow).

Once you have leaders though, you must spend time with them. They need to be coached and encouraged and focused. When you're in the early stages, it's easy to keep trying to spend time with new people to win them to the church and forget the development of leaders. I think we usually just hope that the leaders are doing the same thing and that they will just "hang in there" like you are doing. But many leaders will get stuck and quit growing without someone to help them. At any given time you should be able to look at one of your leaders and know "this is what I want to see

developed in them next.” And this is the focus of your time spent with them. It’s purposeful time! “Tell me about your group. How are you feeling? Who are you spending your time with? What are you reading?” If you spend purposeful time with them, they will develop into a leader that can operate more independently. It’s called maturity (Ephesians 4). Then they will multiply themselves over many times as they spend time with other leaders and help them grow to maturity also. But if you don’t pour yourself into them from the beginning, with the intentional purpose of helping them grow into full maturity, the church will struggle to grow and effectively make disciples.

It can feel at first like you have to do everything. But just for a little while, until you have developed other leaders that can do it nearly as well as you can. When we first planted Vine, I was leading all of the small groups—I believe it was five nights a week (unlike our current approach to church planting, we started with no team, no plan, and no money). I had to develop the first five group leaders. But then, after a time of intensity, I was able to send them each with a small group and they were able to help develop other group leaders with me. Then I just led one group where I was developing a leader and spent time with the potential leaders in the other small groups (without leading every group). Most of you will have a number of already-trained group leaders on your team, so you will skip the wonderful step of leading five small groups a week. But you must spend time developing the new leaders as you coach and encourage the existing group leaders.

If you feel unsure what to do to help potential leaders grow, you might get ideas from the “Potential Church Planter Checklist.” It will help you think of things that you can do to cultivate their growth and work them through a process of testing to discover what their role might be. The Bible requires you to spend the time and energy to find out what a man or woman who may be a deacon leader is really made of; you have to discover what is in their heart, motives, and lifestyle. “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless”

(1 Timothy 3:10). While the checklist is specifically intended to prepare a potential church planter, many of the ideas will apply to preparing any leader. The important thing is that you don't bypass the relational and intentional process of finding out who they really are and what Jesus means to do with them. I write more about this in "Our Story and How We Do Church" in the section on Leadership.

One more thing: If you're going to be strategic in developing leaders, you must remember that the very nature of Christian leader development is relational. If you build leadership structures without building authentic, loving relationships with these leaders and between them, you will still end up with nothing worthwhile. Listen to how Paul talks to Timothy: "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy" (2 Timothy 1:3-4). What a sense of relationship and mutual love was between them! It didn't start that way. Acts 16:1-3 just says that Tim was "well spoken of by the brothers" and that "Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him" on his continued church planting mission. But after spending much time together, sharing together in Jesus' purpose, and suffering together they are now so close that Paul prays for him day and night. Not only that, Paul says that seeing Timothy again would fill him with joy. Now they are forever bound together in the love of Christ. Paul calls him "my true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). Timothy had been trained, tested, and deeply loved by Paul. Paul was his leader, his father, and his friend. If you learn to love the people that you lead like this, and teach them to love one another and the people that they lead, the church that you plant will have a safe culture of genuine Christian relationship.

Neglecting the Worship Leader

Another common mistake of new church planters is not putting enough time into the worship leader and assuming he's fine. The worship leader has a very challenging and vulnerable responsibility in the new church. He is a deacon/leader. He experiences the same kinds of pressures and inner struggles about his worship leading as you do about your preaching. And he's the second most visible person in the church. The evil one would love to be able to knock him down to hurt the church and dishonor the name of Jesus. It's not the same as for other leaders or even staff pastors. He is under a LOT of pressure. And your support for him must match the intensity of his responsibilities.

Whether the worship leader is on staff or not, you will have to find a way to regularly spend time coaching him. As a deacon/leader he has already been properly tested and proven to be the real deal. But worship leaders, as musicians by wiring, are often sensitive and emotional. They need you to help them develop a very firm doctrinal foundation. Give them books to read and check in with how it is going. Challenge them to think Biblically and include them in discussions about beliefs. Ask them how they are doing often and make them actually talk with you. I've noticed that they usually will not want to be an extra burden to you, so they will brush over your inquires. You must let them know that they are a priority for you and that you genuinely love them.

Because they will evaluate their leading too much, just like you pick apart your teaching each week, you have to teach them how to notice things that need to be changed without beating themselves. Verbal encouragement after the Sunday service will help them a ton. Even if there are things that you need to ask them to do differently, write these down and save them for Monday. On Sunday point out things that they did well and for which you are thankful. Give them a hug and tell them that they did a good job. Even if something bombed, tell them it will be fine and that they are a

good worship leader (and that you will help them more on Monday). Ultimately, you are teaching them to get out of a self-evaluative, performance mindset. You want them to do their best leading worship and then to leave it with Jesus, knowing that they are under grace.

The last issue is the great pressure of the evil one against them as a worship leader. They will face intense temptations and need to have a relationship with you that is very transparent where they can confess quickly. Without this safe and loving context, they are vulnerable to keeping temptations to themselves and getting into situations where they fall into something devastating. When we planted Blue Sky, Jesus told me that Chris Miller was the first staff member (“worship first this time”). Chris is on my speed dial right after my wife. He knows that he can walk into my office at any time to talk. He has standing permission to confess to me and tell me how things are going day in and day out. When he is struggling in his thoughts, he knows he can come to me and talk it through (about anything). Develop this kind of leadership friendship with the worship leader and you will provide a context where it is easier for him to “resist the devil” (James 4:7). Otherwise, his visibility and fear of disappointing you will drive him into a kind of inner hiding where he keeps a pleasing exterior but is vulnerable inside. Protect him by staying close to him.

Worrying Rather Than Enjoying the Ride

I have no authority to write this section because I have been the worst at worrying and failing to enjoy the process. But maybe my failure in this area will give you some insights into why it’s so important that you do better than I have. There is no doubt about it: Church planting is intense and stressful. And the thinking behind stressing rather than trusting (if there is any thinking) is the assumption that by paying very close attention to all of the things that could possibly go wrong, I can stop them from happening. And this is partially true. There is a good gift of being able to anticipate

possible outcomes in situations and steer the ship so you don't crash. With the big picture items, it's a wonderful gift. But in the daily details it can be devastating.

The first way to cope with worrying about the church is to accept that there will be things that go wrong. We must get this resolved in our hearts and accept it. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). At my age, I'm pretty sure that he was right! But right before this he was telling them about specific trouble that the twelve would face, and he told them, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace" (John 16:33a). Wait...he tells them about the trouble that would come and then says he told them so they would have peace? I think the key to the verse is "IN ME." That's where the peace is—"in me you may have peace." In Chapter 15 of John's gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the Vine and us as the branches. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). In him we have peace; in him we bear fruit. This is a recipe for church planting. STAY IN HIM!

So there is going to be trouble, but in Jesus we will have peace. In my years of leading a church, I have yet to see a trouble that Jesus did not resolve (You might ask, "Then why has Steve worried so much?"). The only reasonable answer is that I have not believed Jesus properly). Troubles are temporary. They get worked through—if not in this life, then in the next. Paul says it this way: "For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Further, in Romans, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). This has been my experience. What I'm saying is simply that every single bit of worry and stressing and straining to keep from having any problems has been an utter waste of my time and energy. It

has been faithless work! And we know that “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6).

So here it is...don't worry! When it's bedtime, pray and go to sleep. Leave it to Jesus. Know that there will be troubles, but he will work them through. You can't live on the Sunday rollercoaster of attendance numbers. The ups and downs will drive you crazy (and there will be ups and downs, none of which determine the outcome of the church plant). People will leave the church. You will have a few leaders over the years that sin and blow up their lives (just a few I pray...I have thankfully not seen too many). There will be times where there does not seem to be enough money. Jesus will allow this to test your trust in him. Parties will go poorly, equipment will break, people will get sick and die, occasionally someone will accuse you, and there will be times when your preaching simply stinks! I'm starting to believe that I ought not try to avoid all of these things. It's not that we want to go through them, but it seems that God brings them to test and train and discipline us. We grow and mature by going through some trouble. John Wimber used to say, “Never trust a man who doesn't walk with a limp.” All he meant was that those who have endured through trouble in life and kept going after Jesus have been proven and become trustworthy. You might say refined by fire. As I get older, I limp more and more. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God and limped the rest of his life, may we prove genuine and walk faithfully to Jesus until the end of our lives.

There is another practical side to all of this. During a church plant there is so much to enjoy. Worrying and stress takes away the joy! In the midst of the trouble, people are going to be saved from sin and death. Amazing! We get to participate in such happenings on earth. Marriages will be restored. Bodies will at times be healed. People will be set free from unclean spirits. Deep and real friendships will be formed. Truth will be declared and believed by some. You will watch people becoming everything that God has meant for them to be. People will give their money like Barnabas

in the book of Acts, and you will call them sons and daughters of encouragement (Acts 4:36). Pastors and new church planters will be called to their place. Churches will be planted. And, as when Philip came to Samaria, “there was much joy in that city” (Acts 8:8). May it be that way in the cities in which we have been sent—much joy! May healthy local churches be planted and established in Jesus. And may we learn to trust Jesus in everything so that we will not worry but, rather, enjoy the process.

Failing to Ask for Help

This common mistake is built into the fiber of most young men. We have a tendency to want to prove we can do it. It seems easier to figure it out alone, rather than go through the experience of being vulnerable and looking weak. Or sometimes it is simply feeling that, “It’s my responsibility, and I shouldn’t bother someone else about this.” When I’m training a pastor, I tell them “don’t worry, I will ignore you or blow you off or refuse to answer you when you’re asking something where you don’t really need my help. Until then, ask!” You don’t have to do church planting alone. But you do need to learn to initiate asking for help.

Sometimes the help that you need will be very specific. You are stuck with what you should be doing next to build up the church. Don’t fake it—ask! You’re still thinking through how to best lead the Team Meeting. Don’t make it up—call for ideas. This particular preaching series is feeling difficult, and you can’t afford to blow it. Talk through your logic, the texts, and why you decided to do it with another lead pastor and see if you can figure out what’s wrong. One of your leaders is struggling, and you need help with how to best help them. Again—ask for help. The list of things that you will need help with never ends. I still regularly call someone to talk through specific situations and ask for wisdom and counsel. Listen to the Bible on this: “A wise man is full of

strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might, for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory. Wisdom is too high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth” (Proverbs 24:5-7). The wise man asks for guidance and counsel. The fool has the opportunity (and the gate of the city where the elders would gather to talk), but he doesn’t open his mouth. By being afraid to look foolish, he actually becomes the fool. I never make significant decisions without seeking wise counsel from trusted men. I can’t do it alone. I’m too weak and narrow in my thinking. Jesus has given me other men who make up for my weakness and who see what I cannot see. Any time it looks like a lead pastor or church planter is doing an amazing job and succeeding, you can be sure there are men who he has trusted and listened to for wisdom. His success is shared with his friends.

As a church planter, it’s hard moving from the staff of a church where you were surrounded by other pastors who had become friends to a situation where it can feel very lonely. Now you’re the lead pastor and everyone else is looking to you for leadership. Friendships have all shifted with the move and you have to be intentional about getting the right support. You have to call the guys who can help you. Saying they are busy is a sad excuse. Everyone who is doing anything worthwhile is busy. The work that you are doing is important, and you will need help. If you wait for your coach or other lead pastors to call you (which they may do), you will not get help at the right time. We cannot see what you are going through. Distance has separated us, and you are not in a set of circumstances with which we are immediately familiar. We cannot tell when you had bad dreams and woke up afraid and feeling depressed. Before you left to plant, we would see it on your face when you came in to pray and ask you about it. Now we don’t daily see your demeanor. We are not informed about how the Sunday service went unless you call us to talk it through. You can wait for

the Holy Spirit to speak to us about your need (which also may happen), but you would be foolish to not use wisdom and just call. And you're much more likely to get the timely help that you need.

Sometimes we don't know what we need. You've been there, right? You don't feel good, but you're not sure why. Nothing specific is wrong, and you don't need counsel about a decision that you have to make. The wife and kids are doing well. But you don't feel good. It may be that you just feel alone and need to talk with a friend. When this happens, don't call with nothing to say and sound happy (that's fake). Tell us what is going on: "Everything seems to be going well, but I'm in a funk for no reason that I can pin point." What a wonderful gift of friendship Jesus has given us among the lead pastors. What would we do without each other? To talk on the phone, tell stories, compare notes, talk about fishing, and ask about the wife and kids...it's just a part of what it means to be doing this together. Many of you are within driving distance of another church in the network. Why don't you drive to see one another? Meet for coffee and catch up. You don't have to have a lead pastors' meeting scheduled to get together. We need each other, and relationships grow with time spent in the unity of the Holy Spirit. You don't have to go this alone.

Not Resting Enough

The final common mistake made by church planters is a simple one: Not taking enough rest. Again, our driven, independent natures work against us. There is always so much to do, and we are afraid to fail and we want it all to happen very fast. But we are encouraged over and over that God, in addition to giving us work to do, gives us rest. "See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath....So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29). "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep" (Psalms 127:2). "The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm" (Proverbs

10:23). “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus said to the busy and tired disciples: “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). The Bible is full of direction on hard work and real rest. Even in church planting, you must take care to rest.

The problem that church planters may encounter of going too hard sometimes starts with the sense that “it all depends on me.” It’s a new feeling. When you were a staff pastor and your lead pastor was in charge, you left the office and forgot about work. But there is a different kind of pressure and responsibility that a lead pastor must carry. It’s real. But the first mistake in your thinking is that it all depends on you. No...Jesus builds his church (careful even with your language...it’s not “my church.” We belong to Jesus). Further, he has given you other people around you to carry the load and to help do the work. Though you may feel as if it all depends on you, there are faithful friends that Jesus has placed around you so that the load would be distributed more lightly. Think about this often. You are not carrying it alone. Many willing disciples are carrying it with you. They wouldn’t have uprooted and moved with you if they were not willing to share in the burden of responsibility. You are a team. If a team loses a game, it’s not blamed on the captain. It’s the team that bears the loss.

But more of the problem often originates from practical oversights. You must have at least one full day a week to “hide out” and, preferably two. That means team members can’t just stop by when you’re off (unless they are a very close, personal friend). You’ll have to help them to know this, because the planting team is often very close knit and spending time together is a comfort. But you need a day to stop thinking and talking about the church to simply rest and be a husband and father. Tell your team, “On Saturday if there is an urgent need, call your group leader instead of me. If I’m needed, he or she will get in touch with me.” When the church is larger, the group leaders

would call their Discipleship Community pastor with a need where they needed help. When the church gets larger, no one but staff pastors would probably dare call you on your day off. But early on team members don't think about it.

Once you've planned accordingly, you can even shut your phone off (I know...it's a thought that hurts many of you. But I bet it makes your wife smile!). Also, do not check email over the weekend; it will still be there on Monday. If you need personal email to communicate with friends and family, then open a live or Gmail account for home. Stay off Facebook and turn off Twitter. Who cares what everyone else is doing at every moment. You need rest. If you see what people are doing, you'll for sure run into something that a member has posted that is stupid and irresponsible and it will bug you all weekend. I know that these are crazy thoughts in our age of smart phones and the expectation that everyone ought to be available at any time. But fight against it.

For some of you, being electronically wired is like an addiction. You've gotten so use to it that you literally have withdrawals and feel nervously uncomfortable if you're not connected. But it's not good for you. You need time to slow down. It's an amazing experience for me to go to Montana for the month in the summer and disconnect. I make my kids disconnect. We are always amazed at how our minds finally feel peaceful, we are less irritable, and we like each other much more. I'm sitting in Montana writing this right now, and it's freeing to be away from the phone and email so that I can actually think. While our electronics make many things easier for us, God did not intend us to live under the constant barrage of electronic relationships, nor to know what all of our friends are eating for breakfast. Too much is too much. At least on your days off and on vacation, disconnect!

Why is this so important? Well...there are many reasons. Here are a few: One, because God tells us to rest and has provide for our rest; two, so that our families will survive (we will get to

family more a little later); and three, so that we have the strength to run this race for the long haul. The man who is exhausted, either emotionally or physically, is vulnerable. Being tired makes us vulnerable to temptation and to sin. It also can compromise our health. Those of us who have struggled with anxiety probably suffer the effects of it because of overstimulation and lack of real rest. In this group of churches, we are not interested in superstars that are impressively successful. We want effective, disciple-making churches where lead pastors actually make it to the end without giving up or blowing up.

So you will have to think and pray about what gives you rest. I tried for years to find a hobby that I could enjoy and relax while doing it. Everything that I wanted to do cost money that I didn't have, so I just pressed on and regularly struggled with restlessness and depression. Those of you who love sports have a wonderful outlet to help you emotionally and physically. Keep regularly playing your sport (find a way even when the kids come). At Blue Sky, Luke and Brian play on soccer teams. David lifts weights and learns languages. Dave and Scott play basketball and have recently run a marathon. Nelson runs and rides his bike. Many of us read for fun. And I go fishing. I run a little too, but not because I like it or it's restful (although it does relieve stress after an intense day). I run because I must for my health; I need to live to raise my children and to finish the job Jesus gave me to do. It doesn't have to cost a lot, but you need something to take your mind off work, remind yourself that there are things to enjoy in this life, keep you fit and healthy, and give you a context for friendship.

Chapter 3: Winning Unchurched People

Knowing How People Think

When I was a teenager, I did a lot of rabbit hunting with a dog. To get the rabbits, you had to know the nature of a rabbit; you had to know how they think. They don't think like deer, and they don't think like raccoons. When being chased, deer run in a straight line (or relatively so), and raccoons climb trees to escape. But by nature, when being chased, rabbits run in large circles. So if you're hunting rabbits, when the dog starts barking on a trail, you wait in that place for the rabbit to circle back around. If you didn't know this, you would be a rabbit hunter who was always in the right place at the wrong time. You have to know how a rabbit thinks.

When planting a church, our goal is to reach people who don't typically attend church. We are not interested in just transferring Christians from church to church, recycling them each time they get bored with their present home. When Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations, he put in our hearts a longing to reach people who have not yet believed and been saved. But to be effective in this, we have to know how they think. What are their challenges in life? What barriers in their thinking keep them from hearing the message? What social styles or church cultures are incomprehensible to them? In what contexts do they feel at home or comfortable? How do they hear what we are saying? We are trying to understand those who we long to help.

Some churches take this way too far. We are not trying to think like unsaved people. We are trying to understand how they think. Our thinking is always to line up with the truth of the Bible. This very issue creates a serious problem for many. Some will change what the church is and compromise Biblical truth so as to not be offensive to people. But what good is it if you win people to something other than the powerful message of Jesus crucified and risen from the dead to save sinful men and women? Paul was abundantly clear about people adapting the gospel message: "But

even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). We can’t change the message, and we can’t change the nature of the church to reach our goal of adding people. God help us if we do!

The purpose of understanding how people think is to remove unnecessary barriers to their hearing the good news of Jesus. When I was a new Christian looking for a church home, the style of some Christians was not understandable to me and often offensive. The man who walked up to me on the street and boldly asked, “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?” might just as well have been speaking Russian. I was offended by him and did not want to talk with him. He may have thought that he was doing his job as a Christian, but he certainly wasn’t doing it very well. Or take for instance the church that I visited for the first time where the crowd of people, at the direction of the pastor, all simultaneously broke out in tongues. I instantly decided I would never return to that church and walked out of the service. They would have no further opportunity to preach the gospel to me. These are style issues; they are issues of understandability for unchurched people. And “if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker is a foreigner to me” (1 Corinthians 14:11).

In this group of churches, these kinds of extreme stylistic errors are not likely; we’ve talked so much over the years about reaching unchurched people and the issue of understandability. Our challenges are more subtle and have to do with using the language and style of the culture to communicate the good news of Jesus. When Paul was in Athens, his speaking to the unbelieving related to what they already understood: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23). And he went on to preach about the Living God. Somehow we have to know

how people think and from what point they are starting. In the rest of this chapter, I will be covering some issues for you to consider on winning unchurched people.

Knowing What It's Like to Go to Church

You have to know what it's like for them to risk going to a church. In the Seattle area and increasingly in other parts of the country, it's common to meet people who have never been to a church. They have no idea what to expect. That's scary! Imagine going to a doctor's office if you had never been before. You've heard stories of needles, surgery, and people dying, but none of this is particularly comforting. Just knowing the routine would help put you at ease a little (check in, insurance card, waiting room, nurse calls you back, asks you questions, waiting again, doctor knocks and comes in, asks you the same questions, writes prescription, and is out of the room in two minutes flat!). With going to a church, if you could let people know on the Web site what it will be like, you will help give them courage to actually show up. It doesn't have to be complicated; just give them a brief run down, from what to wear, parking, and through the end of the service. And teach the people you lead to do the same thing when they are bringing a friend for the first time (nothing is worse than having your friend show in a suit and tie because you didn't communicate with them properly).

There are many other people that have been to church before. They may have grown up in church and been out for a long time. These people want to know what kind of church it is: Formal or casual, hymns or band, embarrass guests or leave them alone, two hour teaching or sitcom length, weird things happening or fairly normal people. In this case, you're trying to give them the brand of Christianity. And in just a few words you can describe it in a winsome manner (the service is about an hour and fifteen minutes, dress casual, you can get a cup of coffee, we sing for about twenty

minutes with a band and the pastor teaches from the Bible for thirty-five to forty—straight forward and nothing to embarrass you).

This is one of the major issues for all people: Will I be embarrassed? There are churches where people are asked to raise their hands or stand if they are new guests. Maybe some church people like this...but even after being a Christian for twenty-three years, I feel very uncomfortable being pointed out. Unchurched people want anonymity. That is, they want to blend in and be able to observe without having people treat them differently than everyone else and without pointing out that they are new. We ask them to fill out a welcome card so we can send them a gift card to get a cup of coffee on us as a way of thanking them for coming. We promise that we will not use their information for any other purpose (and we don't). And even doing this makes many people uncomfortable, so they choose not to fill out the welcome card. "Why do they want my address? Feels like a sales gimmick to me!" We are as down to earth and normal about it as possible. And we really are very glad that they are there and we really do want the gift card to simply be a kindness to them. But some will be willing and others will not.

Related to this, visitors do not want to be overwhelmed with people talking to them. It's a difficult balance to find and, especially in a new church plant, they will be a little overwhelmed by people anyway so you better hope that socially winsome people get to them! At Blue Sky we always trained our small group leaders to invite people from the Sunday service to small group. But after a while, in the very unchurched Seattle environment, we realized that first- or second-time guests were being invited multiple times in a service to a small group with very little other conversation or relational connection. One couple that I met had been invited six times in one service!! Our group leaders were doing their job a little too well! We had to retrain them to give a bit of time for relationship to grow and start by remembering their name. Also, to maybe ask them to lunch or

coffee after they began to know them a bit rather than to the higher commitment small group gathering. You can't overwhelm people. Most people come in with the thinking that they are already too busy to attend church and that giving up their Sunday morning is quite a sacrifice. If it feels like there is also an expectation to have a dozen new friends who all want to get together with you, they will not come back. So, we have to respectfully give them space and watch for indications that they are ready to know people more. It takes a person with some social skill to see this, but hanging around longer after the service and engaging in more small talk about their family or personal life are good cues. Also, keep in mind that the younger the person, the less adjustment time you have to give. A university student might need you to invite them to play basketball or go to a movie on their first Sunday. Younger people are much better at new friendships and often not so busy yet as to feel constantly overwhelmed (as they will be later when working full-time and raising kids). Think these things through carefully with your team. There is no easy answer, other than be respectful and be sure that your team is socially healthy enough to know how to build new friendships gently.

Is It Worth Their Time?

Visitors will also be wondering if attending the service at the church will be worth their time! American consumers will always think of this in terms of how much they get out of the time spent at the service (it's an economic cost/benefit analysis—although they wouldn't consciously put it that way). Are there any people here to whom I can relate or see myself getting to know? Will my kids enjoy it and make friends here? Do I like the pastor or not? Is there anything in his teaching that felt relevant to me? It has to be worth getting out of bed early on one of their two days off a week (maybe after staying up too late the night before). There must be a real pay-off for the hassle of trying to get the kids ready and in the car and checked into the kids program. There had better be

some spiritual benefit that makes me feel good about having spent the time. While we know that these are not the ultimate reasons why a person ought to gather with the church, worship God, and receive Bible teaching, they are the very real factors that new guests are considering as they visit the church plant. So make it worth their while! That is your goal. Again, it's not change the content so they like it or agree with it. Rather, it is package it in a helpful, understandable manner in the context of genuine people and in the power and presence of the Living God.

Your preaching must be well prepared, true to the Bible, organized in a manner that makes sense, and applied to the lives of real people. We are not performing but we are being certain that our message can be heard and understood by both Christians and non-Christians alike. Our language must not be religious or filled with words that people will not easily understand. Be careful that we don't start using Christian terminology that is a foreign language to unchurched people (theological terms like justification, sanctification, doctrine, propitiation, etc. must always be explained). The Bible is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), but often we preachers are dying and sluggish. Pray that we would be moved to life in the preaching of God's word and that our hearts would be lit up with love and compassion for the people that Jesus is drawing. Again, it's a tender balance (a balance that I'm still trying to find after preaching for seventeen years). Stay true to the Bible texts and teach it powerfully in the presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, be winsome to new friends and gain their interest and affections so that they will return to hear more of this good news of Jesus. We must do both. And the smaller the church, the more important it is that the pastor is personal, engaging, and relevant (because there is no large facility or crowd to make the church feel legitimate).

Attending to Quality

In addition to the preaching, everything about the gathering of the church must feel quality and create a context that is enjoyable for guests. This can be challenging as a new church plant is moving in and out of a rented space every Sunday. You don't have many of the benefits of the larger church from which you were sent. Parking must be well marked and have real people assisting and welcoming guests as they arrive. You have to do amazing portable signage (Scott Joseph at High Rock did the best that I have ever seen in a church plant). Your coffee must really taste good and the coffee table must look good. Greeters and kids program workers must be excellent in screening, training, and appearance. The set up must be neat and professional. The music with the worship team must be high quality, well practiced, appropriate for the size of the church. Remember, people are used to spending time in the highly competitive context of businesses, restaurants, coffee shops, and malls. If the church that you are planting feels like a poorly run restaurant that everyone leaves betting that it will be out of business in six months...people will not come back. If I had to choose between an amazing, high-end environment or the Spirit of God's presence in the service, I would definitely choose the Spirit at work. But if we can have both, we will accomplish the job that Jesus has given us with much greater effectiveness.

Blue Sky's facility is not ideal. We are located in a city that is the center of wealth and style in the Seattle area. But we are meeting in the only facility that we could find and afford—an old biotech building that had been abandoned for a number of years (and thus, our ability to afford it). We had to spend a lot of money refurbishing it and, still, didn't get the place up to standards in our city. It is a major limitation to our growth. When you're planting a church, the situation is not always perfect, but we do our best and trust Jesus. Sometimes money does not allow you to do any more (and sometimes our little faith doesn't allow us to have the money we need). Sometimes it's a

matter of being blind to the issues. We all get so use to our environment that we need an outside set of eyes to help us see what things really look like to our guests. It's like thinking your running shoes look fine until you see them next to a new pair—it's the contrast that helps you see the reality. You should invite your coach and other lead pastors in just to see what things are like and to give you feedback. Beg for feedback. Don't hang back and just listen to anything that they bring up. Tell them ahead of time that you want to hear from them the "good, bad, and ugly" (they can also tell you anything encouraging that they see). Jeff Miller from Clear View Church and Sandor Paull from Vine Church have helped me multiple times while planting Blue Sky, by seeing things that needed to be changed or updated. I had become so used to things the way they were that I didn't have eyes to see. Ask for help with seeing quality in the service, and you will improve things that you would otherwise overlook.

Mercy and Truth

The old saying "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down" is true when it comes to effective Biblical preaching. The mercy of God is the sugar that helps people to swallow the Truth. We've frequently talked about one of the great evidences of Christian maturity is "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Truth without love is distorted, and love without Truth is a blatant lie. When you are planting a church and longing to draw unchurched people, you must be very conscious that mercy and love are clearly coming across while you speak the Truth as it is in Christ. At times I've been so concerned about not compromising the truth in a culture that has abandoned even the idea of truth that I have forgotten the great sweetener of mercy.

If the guests coming into the new church have a sense that you are true to the Bible and you speak the truth with a kind of mercy for people and their pain, they will be much more interested in

hearing what you have to say. We must teach the hard issues of the sovereignty of God, the problem of sin, salvation through faith in Christ alone, sexual purity, gender identity, eternal judgment, and hell...and all of the topics that are harder for unsaved ears to hear. We can't avoid the truth but we can be positive that we are quick to speak of the mercy of God toward hurt and sinful people. When you're speaking about sexual sin, you speak as those saved from such sins ourselves; the great hope of freedom and peace with God is always on our lips. "Come" is the thrust of our message, not "Go away!" The message that God has entrusted to us as ambassadors is not "you are beyond help; stay away from me." Quite to the contrary, our message is, "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). It is the message that God has entrusted to us and, as with any ambassador representing a sovereign, we do not have the right or the authority to speak the message in a manner or with content different than the orders he has given (God forgive me for the times when I have done this).

If we as Christians speak with love and mercy to those who are captive to the evil one, there is a greater hope that they would listen to words of life and turn to Jesus. It's true that the elect will come in at the right time because God has ordained it to be so, but this doesn't mean we should make it more difficult than it already is for them. Remember "that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4). If we sound unkind or judgmental or unmerciful, new friends will have little interest in what we have to say. Go back through the gospels and read how Jesus spoke to people: Truth in love. The times when you hear him get harsh and angry are nearly always with the religious leaders who claimed to represent God but simply oppressed people with legalistic heavy loads.

At the same time, understand that you can't make people who are not being drawn by God hear and believe; Jesus was clear that "no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws

him” (John 6:44). No amount of talking will help them to believe the truth to which their eyes are blinded. “In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). How much more ought we have mercy in our speaking truth to those so blinded that they cannot see and believe and come to Christ. Always speak the truth, but always speak it seasoned with mercy and love.

Prayer and the Power of God

Because we always pray for people at the end of our services, you must have clear thinking on why we do it and how this part of the service relates to new people. Sometimes people suggest that new friends would like our services better if we didn’t do this. There is one sense where this may be true. But, we believe in the power of God and any real help that people will experience comes from him and not from us. If people come into a church service and say it was very nice and there was enough sugar with the truth and the music was excellent and the entire scene was very comfortable, I am not yet satisfied. My next question would be “Did you experience the power and presence of the Living God?” Nice church is not enough. Non-threatening, polite church that is devoid of the power of God is unacceptable. I have wondered sometimes during recent years if people seem to be slower coming to the commitment of a true disciple because not enough people have the faith and courage to lay their hands on them and expect the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. The first Sunday a person is visiting might be premature (unless the Spirit clearly leads). But when people have been around for months and never yet experienced his powerful presence, I have to wonder what has gone wrong.

Dave Bieraugel is a young man who came to Blue Sky with a hard shell of self-sufficiency and independence that seemed impenetrable. He was analytical and critical and suspicious. But, through the loving determination of a few of our members, he had developed some new friendships among us. This was really helpful for Dave. But if it stopped there, we would never win him. From time to time, during the worship, I would go over and lay my hands on him and pray (and a few others did, too). Usually there would be little visible result. But later his new friends would say “when you prayed for him he felt like his legs went rubbery and that he might fall down.” They would explain to him about the power of God that had been resting on him. You see, Dave didn’t believe that God was that real. Now Dave is one of our pastors and is laying his hands on other new friends as Jesus wins them to his church. Hands-on-prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit are necessary to heal people of their secular materialistic thinking. People must experience the power of God in our worship services.

If we make the services so neat and acceptable to visitors that there is no evidence that God is among us, we have lost our balance. It is true that what we are doing needs to be explained so that everyone can understand on some level what is happening (“We pray for people at the end of our service every week. If you would like someone to pray for you, just come up to the front and someone from our team will lay a hand on your shoulder and pray. You can tell them if there is something specific that you want prayer for or not. God tells us in the Bible to pray for one another...that is what we’re doing”). May we never be like the people described by Paul as “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). Rather, I pray that the churches we lead will be as described in another place: “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (1 Corinthians


14:24-45). In a small church plant, you don't want lots of crazy and hard to understand manifestations going on (you have enough strikes against you in people's minds as a new, unproven church), but there must be evidences of God's power. This may make some people uncomfortable (as with Dave Bieraugel) and others may not return. But the alternative is a church that Jesus doesn't attend and that is unacceptable.

Allowing People to be in Process

Let's finish the chapter with one final issue regarding winning unchurched people. It's very difficult for many of us to remember just how messed up and confused we were when we first came into a church. I don't mean socially/emotionally messed up to the point where we were disruptive. I just mean we thought ourselves okay, knew little of the Bible, and didn't live at all like a follower of Jesus. And when it's hard for us to remember what it was like for us, we tend to expect people to change faster than they are able. New people that come in will be in process. Either as Christians in process of deciding if the new church is for them or as non-Christians in process of being drawn to Jesus. In either case, we can't expect them to look great from the beginning.

People that are not yet committed to Jesus and/or his church look uncommitted. And they shouldn't commit until it's the real deal. They will not go to small group or serve or give their money. These are not things that uncommitted people do. Further, they may live like unbelievers (especially if they are unbelievers). We must allow them to be in process without trying to take over Jesus' job and try changing them ourselves. If we do, we will just end up with hurt people that don't really change but have an outward religious appearance. Can we love a person that doesn't yet believe the Bible but is willing to listen and learn? Can we love the young dating couple that has just started coming and is living together? Or the university student who is partying every night of the

week but still somehow is drawn to hear about God? It's true that these things shouldn't go on forever; we cannot receive people into membership that don't think and live like genuine Christians. But they must be able to come just where they are and get into the presence of God if there is hope for them.

So we must be careful that our language doesn't sound as if "everyone here is already perfected." And we don't act as if something is wrong because a person doesn't go to a small group or give money. Or get visibly uncomfortable when a couple living together mentions the fact, revealing that they are not really welcome. We love them, and we pray for them. I remember how dearly Larry and  Anderson first loved me when I was new to church. When I would say things that were simply not true, they would simply overlook it and patiently pray and wait for Jesus to deal with me (there are times to correct, but almost always it's with those who already claim to belong to Christ and are committed in the church). The love they showed me was one of the powerful tools of God that won my life. Their love demonstrated to me the love of God: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 8:8). If God has loved us long before we believed him or had turned an inch from our sinful ways, we must learn to demonstrate his love for people who are in this process (I'm not saying that we don't protect the church. If a guy is preying on women at the church, we don't wait for Jesus to save him. We get in his face and tell him that we will not allow him to do that here and if he plans to continue he must leave! Or if someone is teaching other people lies and disrupting the church, we deal with them).

If we, as church planters, would believe that God is the one who draws and changes a man or woman, we would look at people in process with eyes of faith. It should be that "we regard no one according to the flesh," knowing that "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). Too often we don't believe that this is

truly how things work. If people are not yet a new creation, we cannot expect them to act and think new. We've seen people that we thought would never make it, and whom we gave up on. But when Jesus made them new, everything changed! So in our teaching and our interaction with people we remember this truth. Allow people to be in process for a time. If they don't come around and start stinking like rotten fruit, we will deal with it. But until then, we are patient, gentle, and kind in the hope that they will be saved by Jesus and brought into the family of God.

Chapter 4: Expectations for the Church Plant

How Fast Will It Grow?

There are some factors that can help us make an educated guess about the speed at which a church plant will grow. If the city has few churches that are similar to us in style and theology, it may grow faster. If there are many churches and they are already effectively reaching students, it will likely be slower (if large mega-churches, maybe very slow). If the team is smaller, less healthy, or not as mature, then growth will be slower (and, in these cases, to grow in a healthy manner, slow growth is important). If the lead pastor is courageous, has a passion for evangelism, and is especially gifted in preaching, it may be faster. A very gifted worship leader will help it grow faster. If the culture is familiar to the team and the planter, it will likely grow faster than if there is a significant cultural adjustment period. BUT...having said all of that, we simply don't know for sure. We plant churches in the cities that Jesus tells us to plant in. If he will let you plant in a smaller university city where there is a church vacuum (that is, no churches like us reaching students), it will be easier on you and the team. But again, we don't ultimately choose these things. We plant where he leads us. Some will be harder and some will be easier; he has his purposes in both. We don't make the church grow...he does!

When we planted Vine, growth was slow at first. But after the first three years we began to double in size annually and then, after a couple more years, settled into a thirty to fifty percent growth rate annually. It was easy to start feeling like we were doing an amazing job...even making the church grow by all of our brilliant leadership. Then we planted Blue Sky. Talk about slow! It has taken us eight years to reach 450 people and send our first church plant (and it has been a painful eight years). I've done most of the same things we did when planting Vine and, when it wasn't growing fast enough, tried everything else that we could come up with. Finally, I realized what the

Bible actually says: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Paul states: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). The sooner you and I accept the truth that God makes his church grow (and we can’t do that part), the better off we will be. We lead in the gifts that Jesus has given us to create a healthy environment for the church, but we cannot draw people to Jesus nor can we save them. We do our job, and we trust Jesus to do his.

So we cultivate faith and believe Jesus for the promises that he has spoken to us, and we trust him whether the church plant is faster or slower. We can’t hang back and protect ourselves by believing little to keep from experiencing disappointment. We must believe that he will grow the church, and we must set goals for growth (“starting with a team of twenty-five people, we want to be at 100 people by the end of the first year”). Then, at the same time, we are not freaked out or unbelieving if it is slower than we thought. At times it seems that it is necessary for the church to grow more slowly so that God can grow the lead pastor or the core team. If that is necessary in us, so be it.

What Would Make You Give Up?

Your expectations need to be such that you can trust Jesus no matter how fast or slow the new church grows. You can’t simply be in this if it will grow fast, but if slow you may move on. There is something offensive about going into a city and university with an attitude that seems to say, “I will do this as long as I am successful and look good, but I will find somewhere else to succeed if it doesn’t meet my expectations.” Such an attitude would reveal a lack of love for the people there. And what about those who have believed that Jesus called you there and have risked everything to be

a part of the church, radially committing themselves to the vision and mission that you laid out for them? It's similar to the thinking, "I'm here in this city as long as I like it." If we are indeed called to a particular city and people, we must live out that devotion as men under orders. We are staying there for the rest of our lives, unless Jesus truly assigns us to a new task (and in this case, he would clearly and wonderfully provide for the future leadership of the church that you would be leaving—like Sandor being fully prepared to lead Vine when Jesus sent me to Seattle to plant Blue Sky). Knowing everything about us and about the people we are called to lead, Jesus chose the city for us so that his church would be established, and he would be glorified. We must be in it for the long haul.

Can you imagine the faithfulness required of Paul to plant in some of the cities where he planted? On Cyprus they were opposed by "a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus" (Acts 13:6). In Antioch, they were rejected by the Jewish leader who "stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district" (Acts 13:50). At Iconium, "an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them" so that they had to flee (Acts 14:5). In Lystra, Paul was drug out of the city, stoned, and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Four different cities and a great start, right? Let's go to another one? No, not yet (that will come later). They actually went back to the cities in which they had preached and were mistreated so that they could encourage them and appoint elder/overseers in the churches (Acts 14:22-23). Seems like a dangerous plan, but they loved Jesus and loved the people so they did whatever it took for them to be established in Christ. We get discouraged and are tempted to give up if it doesn't grow fast enough. But Paul simply saw the challenges, opposition, and suffering as part of the deal. What kind of faithfulness will be required of you? I'm not sure, but I pray that whatever Jesus chooses for you and me, we will be faithful to him and to the people to whom he has called us.

Balancing Patience and Working Hard

If you are going to be a church planter, two things will certainly be required: patience and hard work. You must work hard and do everything that you can do. At the same time, you patiently wait on God to act and move. It's a balancing act. Paul's devoted himself to "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom" (Colossians 1:28), and then declares, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Colossians 1:29). That's it! We struggle with his energy. He provides the power that works within us...we struggle and work hard, believing he will accomplish his purpose. On one hand, you can't say, "I'm going to sit back until he does it." And on the other, you can't say, "If he's going to be slow in coming, I will do it myself." No...we struggle in his power.

The reason this is so difficult for us is that we cannot control it all. In patience we wait and with effort we work. We must know when to engage each one. When we've done what we are supposed to do, we don't continue to strain and struggle. Then is the time to rest and wait. Paul says it this way in Ephesians regarding spiritual conflict: "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:13). It doesn't seem to be a passive or surrendered patience but, rather, a firm standing once we have done our part. Holding our ground in faith and in prayer. Yet believing that God is able and willing to accomplish all that he has promised to do. Listen to James: "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient" (James 5:7-8). He's talking about being patient as we wait for the coming of Jesus (how we all long and ache for that day!). Don't you think we should all also be patient during the days of labor before the end comes? Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is

coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4). Again it’s like a farmer, working hard in the day, knowing that night will come and the workday will be finished.

I am not personally very good at patiently waiting (and I am too good at hard work) and this weakness has caused much wear and tear on me. I pray that you will be better than I have been in these things and, while you work hard, also wait patiently for the Lord. “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7a). “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2). “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29). What a wonderful day that is for the farmer! Let us wait for it patiently.

Don’t Compare to Others

This is a hard one! We are far too competitive for our own good. From the playground in elementary school, we so badly do not want to be last or want to lose. At school it was kickball and, while the games have changed, the reality of comparing ourselves to those around us frequently hasn’t. And for a church-planting pastor, the size of our acceptability is almost always measured by the size of church attendance. The temptation is to think that the pastor with the biggest crowd is the better man. The church that grows the fastest is obviously most favored by God, right? No! That is measuring by the world’s standards and not the standard of heaven. In this time of impersonal mega-churches (which I hope will give way to a generation of many more medium-sized, disciple-making, relational, healthy, local churches), the truth is that we are all losers if judged by such standards. But these subtle thoughts (or suggestions from the evil one) have major flaws.

Jesus knows what is good for us and has ordered our days. “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16). What an amazing truth. Even today...cooler in Montana, just waking from a nap, back hurting (but less than yesterday), thunderstorms moving through, my dear wife very affectionate to me, the kids all listening like obedient children (for the moment), feeling a bit on the blue side, and the sprinkler whirling in circles in the yard. Not a bad day, all in all. Written in God’s book before I even was born...“every one of them!” What a peace and contentment it brings to believe in the Living God who has ordered our days.

When we think of our leadership that way, we begin to understand that he has secretly ordained times and seasons, successes and failures, sicknesses and health, and on and on...all for our good and his glory. When Jesus and the disciples pass a man who had been blind from birth, the disciples wanted to know who had sinned, thus causing the man’s blindness. And Jesus’ response is wonderful: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the work of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3). Let me ask it this way: If you were the man born blind, having spent every day of your life not seeing, would you be willing to live those years in darkness to become an amazing display of the glory of our God? That’s what he was—on display to show the glory of God. Isaiah says, “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified’” (Isaiah 49:1-3). The NIV translates the same verse this way: “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.” Is that what our lives are? On display to reveal the glory of God? Even when he “hid me away”? Is it enough for us to be the Lord’s servants and to be

used by him in whatever ways he chooses? We must resolve this issue in our hearts or we will be comparing and evaluating ourselves and other pastors for our entire lives.

If Jesus asks you to lead the smallest church in this network, will you do it? Will you honor him with the way you respond to such a calling? Or will you accuse God of treating you unfairly? Just so you know the truth, I've done both (that is, honored him and accused him). But how badly I want to honor him with the days and purposes that he has chosen for me—whatever they may be. I'm so proud of godly men who trust Jesus and refuse to compete based on the size or speed of growth in the church that they lead. It glorifies God.

On the other hand, what if he calls you to lead a larger, fast-growing church? Understand that it will include many pressures and temptations that you would not have known in other circumstances. But if he has chosen to use you for his glory in such ways, will you lift up your head in pride (I keep thinking of saw blades whirling over my head. A vision that I had long ago... "Lift up your head and you'll lose it!"). How will you think of other pastors who lead smaller, slower churches? Will you love them and encourage them and treat them as honorable servants of Jesus? Will you give all that you have and all the resources available to the larger church to help build up other effective, disciple making local churches that glorify Jesus? Or will you accumulate an empire for yourself—for the display of YOUR splendor (though such so-called splendor would be as filthy rags)? I trust God for grace to be given to all of us that we would present ourselves as servants of God who guard our hearts and minds carefully. Jesus said it perfectly: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10). That's it. Servants and dearly-loved sons: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Galatians 3:26).

So tell your insecurity where to get off and leave your reputation out of it! The church that you plant will undoubtedly grow faster than some and slower than others. You should pray that Jesus uses your life in effectiveness. Like Richard Baxter, the puritan pastor of the 1600s, prayed during a time of sickness and disappointment, “I put up many an earnest Prayer to God that he would restore me and use me the more successfully in his Work” (*The Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter, 1615-1691*, Frederick J. Powicke, p. 79). If God has chosen a quickly-growing plant and gives you success, keep your head down and see to it that you are faithful with what he has entrusted to you. Build carefully because, “Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and fire will test what sort of work each one has done” (1 Corinthians 3:13). If you build a strong foundation and don’t get carried away with size and success, you will lead a church that has a great impact, makes many disciples, and plants many churches. If God has chosen you to lead a slower-growing church, do exactly the same thing. Wait patiently, thank Jesus for the pace that allows you to build more carefully, stay attentive to the task that Jesus has entrusted to you, and make disciples for Jesus. When I read Ian Murray’s biography of Jonathan Edwards, I was shocked by the fact that he never led a large church—maybe three hundred at the largest. Yet he was faithful, and God has used his labor and multiplied it many times over in the years after his death. If my life had a fraction of the impact of his, it would be a beautiful demonstration of grace. Maybe it comes down to having a perspective like the psalmist: “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10). I’m just glad that he brought me into his house and now calls me “son.” What more do we need? Doorkeeper will do just fine!

If this doesn’t move you enough to persevere in what he has called you to, then do it for the reward. Terry Virgo, at our 2012 Summer Conference, was pointing out the promises of reward in

the Bible for the works of those saved by grace. The scripture points out that even Jesus endured with his reward in mind and commands us to look to him as our example: “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2). And in Revelation, our glorified Lord speaks of the reward that he will bring with him when he comes: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done” (Revelation 22:12). And further, “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Hebrews 10:35-36). It’s not those who lead the biggest churches that necessarily get the best reward. We simply must “do the will of God” in our day and time. I hope that Jesus gives you much success and that many disciples are made and churches planted because of your obedience to God and, that in the end, “it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” (John 3:21). So we believe Jesus for favor in the work he has given each of us to do, we don’t compare ourselves to others, and we endure until end...come what may.

Chapter 5: How Will Your Life and Schedule Look as a Church Planter?

Busy Generalist Who Manages Lots of Stuff

At the church from which you were sent, you probably were able to focus on a few things as a specialist. By the time a church gets to be 400 or 500, most of the pastors are no longer doing a wide range of responsibilities. Most are discipleship community pastors with a few other specific responsibilities. But in a church plant, you start by doing most of the work yourself. That is, being a staff of one or two doesn't allow you to focus on a few things, you have to juggle many. This means you will be busy and you will need to learn to organize and prioritize in a way that allows you to keep your sanity. Church planters usually go one of two ways with these challenges: 1) Get overwhelmed and start avoiding things that they don't like or can't get to (not a good option); or 2) Buckle down and get help to organize and learn how to get it all done in a doable timeframe (the option I recommend).

We will talk about organizing yourself with a calendar later. The first issue you must deal with is recruiting and training people to help you so you can entrust many responsibilities to well-equipped members. Pastors frequently tell me that it's easier to do things themselves than it is to find someone to do it well. This is usually true when you don't know how to find the right people and train them. At more-established churches, the daily organizational responsibilities are done by paid staff with members helping. In a new church plant, you must rely on members who are willing to serve to do a lot of the work. Often pastors feel guilty about asking them to serve, but you will find that many of the members are more than willing to help if you train them and support them. They didn't move on the church plant just to sit around, and most will be excited about the chance to do something specific.

You shouldn't regularly need to answer phones, watch the front door, open mail, and send gift cards to first-time visitors. Find someone who thrives on administration and teach him or her what you need. Then, get three or four other volunteers for them to coordinate and lead in handling the office needs. You should not try to pull together snacks for the team meeting or food for a party at the last minute. Find someone who loves preparing food, and ask him or her to get a couple of friends to help. Train them carefully in what you expect the quality, spending, and presentation to be, and let them run with it (giving them encouragement and feedback as needed). You will have to lead the bookkeeper, but small group childcare cannot end up on your plate. Clearly lay out how it should work and find a young woman who is well-liked and a good judge of character to help recruit, screen, and train childcare workers. Same goes with set up and tear down for the Sunday service. You are finding leaders who will coordinate other people (with good training) to take care of many organizational and administrative details. While this is hard work up front and you may not get the right person the first time, once you get them trained and in place it makes your life a lot easier. You have to check in with the people you recruit to find out how it's going and, if it is a struggle, decide if this is because they have not been adequately trained or because the specific responsibilities do not work with their gifts, personality, or availability. If you have the benefit of starting with another full-time staff member, it will be even better as you divide up the oversight of different areas between the two of you.

The church planter that can recruit people, train them well, oversee them, and have them end up liking what they do is a church planter that will lead a healthy and effective church. The church planter that does not learn to operate this way will attempt to do everything himself and end up doing it poorly. This frustrates the people who are trying to work with you and the church will struggle to grow. So accept that it is necessary for you to lead in this manner and that it is going to keep you

very busy. But you will not be nearly as busy as if you were doing it all yourself (or worse yet, trying to get your wife to do it to make up for your weakness. Bad idea. We will talk about this later). You still have to have time to pray, prepare for preaching and teaching, identify and train leaders, and help new people get connected at the church. You will not be bored!

Structure and Flexibility Are Needed

To oversee people and lead in such broad areas of responsibility, you must have some structure to your life and work schedule. Show up at the office when it is time to open each day and leave at closing time (with many times out to lead people during the day). People need to know that they can count on someone being there during the times you've said the office is open. How would you feel about a restaurant or business that, when you finally had a chance to stop by and give it a try, had locked doors even though it was during "regularly posted business hours?" It is irresponsible.

Coming up with some structure within your day will also help you to work most effectively (we will talk below about how to use your calendar to do this well). You will have set times to pray and prep teaching and have regular meetings with key volunteers or staff to review how things are going (the precursor to staff meetings). Setting up a regular, weekly conversation with your planting coach will also help you. And, at the same time, you will have to be flexible. Things will come up that you didn't expect. A newcomer that you've been hoping to talk with will stop by and just happen to have time for lunch. Someone from the team will end up at the hospital, and you better get there to pray and encourage them. Things break and can't be broken on Sunday, and you will find yourself scrambling to get someone to take care of it fast. Hold the structure firmly enough that you don't let the major priorities get lost, but hold it flexibly enough that the real opportunities to lead or

reach people can get your time and attention. And simply tolerate the last-minute surprises of things that go wrong because they will always come. You might just as well roll with it.

Keeping Your Purpose in View

Maybe one of the most difficult things for a pastor to do when he is very busy is to keep hold of his main purpose and priorities. With all of the email and friends texting and people that need questions answered as they take care of coordinating details, disciple making doesn't easily come to mind. This is one of the reasons for prayer first every morning for an hour or so. In the presence of God, we are drawn back to a clear view of purpose. We find ourselves praying for specific people who you want Jesus to draw into the church. You pray for that new visitor that liked the church, but you're afraid that they might not return. Asking for protection for the leader that is struggling with temptations reminds you how much he needs your training, encouragement, and friendship. Seeing a vision of the church with fifty new university students coming in gives you faith and courage to get out on campus and invite more people. Often, during prayer, I will experience direction in how to handle a specific text that I am preaching from for the coming Sunday. We need the Holy Spirit to help us stay focused on the main things.

And every day when prayer ends and you go to your desk to start looking at what has to be accomplished that day, you can feel like you're swallowed up in details and again lose the purpose. Regular times with key leaders will help you with this (also with potential leaders who are coming along well). Stop and make a list of each of these leaders. How are they doing? In what areas do they need to grow next? What reading would help them next? How much of their story have you heard? Nothing helps me to get refocused on my main purpose like time with a leader or potential leader. Don't just hang out with them as a friend. Really lead them. Have a plan and love them

deeply. Challenge them and stretch them. Not only does it accomplish the purpose that Jesus has given us (Ephesians 4), it will also remind you of what you are for and how much you love doing it.

Then you have to get to some details and get things done on your calendar. Don't avoid the things that you don't like. Just get them done, knowing that even the things that appear small are important in the larger picture of our mission. But get them done, don't drown in them. When it's time to prepare for preaching, disconnect from the details again. Turn off your phone (after texting your wife of course ;-), shut down email, and be sure someone is getting the phones and watching the front door so that you can focus and not be disturbed. But then you have to get your purpose back in focus and get the details and problems out of your head. Pray for a while and pace back and forth in your office reading out loud the text that you will be teaching. Remind yourself why you preach the good news of Jesus and think on what you hope Jesus will do in the people this Sunday. You will start feeling vision and purpose returning to you. Much of our problem is that we try to do too many things at the same time. We call it multi-tasking but it's really like chopping up your brain in little bits and then expecting it to work properly. There is a discipline of setting details aside and drawing your mind back to the real reason you are willing to give up your life for Jesus and his church. These are the very things that move you and give you life. So you must keep them in view as you plant a church.

Using a Calendar Rightly

The Bible doesn't tell us how to organize our time or specifically use a calendar. But over and over I've watched pastors struggle to keep themselves organized in such a way that they feel they can get everything done for the day and go home with a sense of peace. When I start seeing that wild look in a staff pastor's eyes (usually like "I have too much to do and no one understands"), I know

that he has let his calendar get away from him, and he is no longer in control of how he uses his time. The details and lists have started controlling him, and he is simply a slave to the busy chaos that comes with leading people. When I ask to see their calendar, I will inevitably find that he uses it very little (except to find out what day it is), and I will usually find that he is working from lists (probably on sticky notes). The other symptom that always comes with a person that doesn't know how to use their calendar rightly is dropping details; they will be frustrated because there are important things that they have forgotten to do until it's too late. They are upset at themselves for not doing a better job, but they don't know how to keep track of their responsibilities in a manner that will guard them from forgetting things. So here we go; I'm going to teach you how to stay organized and not get overwhelmed.

The first concept is this: Sticky notes and task lists do not work well. It's tough to organize them, and you finish each day with dozens of things on your list that are not finished (and thus, no peace to go home and rest). Further, lists do not allow you to organize WHEN your tasks need to be done. So, no more lists! Get rid of them and refuse to keep them. Everything that you need to do goes directly on your calendar on the day that you need to do it. I'll talk about how in a minute.

There are three kinds of entries on your work calendar: appointments, planning blocks, and tasks (the fourth and fifth possibilities are your anniversary and your wife's birthday). Appointments are time bound; I have a meeting with Scott on July 24th from 1-3 p.m. You place it on your calendar on the correct day, and it takes up the specific time slot agreed upon. Don't trust your memory for appointments. Use your calendar, so your mind can be free to think about other things until then. You may think you can do just fine remembering these types of things, and you may truly be able to...until you get very busy! Always put them on the calendar. As a church planter you will

probably have two or three specific appointments a day. If you don't, you are not spending enough time leading people.

The second kind of entry is a planning block. These are chunks of time that you set aside to work on a specific area of responsibility. When I block out every Wednesday morning from 10:00 a.m. until noon for preaching preparation, it's a planning block. I might also block out an entire afternoon to do the preaching plan for the next six months or two hours one morning to pray and think through who are the next potential church planters. They are not tasks but, rather, areas for which I am responsible that if not forced onto my calendar will always get pushed out by daily tasks and disruptions. I'll simply never get to them or remember that they need to be done (until it's too late). I encourage our staff pastors at Blue Sky to have these planning blocks placed strategically on their calendars from the time the annual church calendar is completed for the next year (usually by October of each fall). If you are responsible for small group multiplications, put a monthly block on your calendar that asks "What groups are multiplying next?" or, better yet, "Who are the upcoming group leaders?" An hour block, once a month on your calendar, will remind you to sit down to think about and plan these things. That is, as long as you really follow your calendar. These planning blocks are flexible in that it may not matter much if you do it at 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. (they are not time bound like appointments), but you must choose a block of time that you think will work best for you to focus on planning. If it's something that you don't like so much, put it in the morning while your mind is fresh; this also allows you to get it over with and move on to more enjoyable things.

The third type of entry on your calendar is a task. These are the things that need to get done but are not as grand as planning and not as fun as appointments. The baptism tank needs to be cleaned and set up. I have to recruit someone to join the coffee team. I must find a retreat center for the fall retreat. They usually have a time and date when they need to be completed. You know that if

you don't have a retreat center booked by early in the year, there will be no place for the retreat. So you put it on your calendar in the second week of January and forget about it until then. Baptisms are on the calendar four times a year at Blue Sky. So the pastor in charge, as soon as next year's calendar is completed, can go to his calendar and "backdate," for each baptism scheduled, the preparation of the tank. The tank needs to be set up by the Wednesday before the baptisms will occur to assure that it is filled and warm by Sunday (and that I'm not doing it on Friday or Saturday during a day off). So I put the task on my calendar when I need to do it (or better yet...when I need to get someone else to do it). Backdating is very important. If you know that you will need three months to get everything ready for Easter, then "get ready for Easter" is placed on your calendar in January (right after Vision Night so that you are not focusing on too many major things at once). Now you won't end up remembering that Easter is coming up two weeks prior when it's too late to design and order invitation cards or plan the activities for the kids program.

Every task goes on your calendar for a specific date when it needs to be done (allowing yourself enough lead time in case there is a delay). Then you can forget it. I pads and smart phones are beautiful for this reason. When I'm off work and remember something that I need to get done, I used to spend the weekend trying to remember that I need to place it on my calendar on Monday. Now I simply enter it on my Ipad calendar and it syncs with my laptop calendar automatically (now even instantly through Icloud). Then I can forget about it and get back to relaxing. I don't write this stuff on my hand or a piece of paper stuck in my Bible; it goes directly on my calendar on the appropriate day. The greatest help about this is that you can forget about it entirely until that day! You don't have to use precious brain space trying to remember it (and if you don't yet think that brain space is precious, you are still truly young!). When a pastor comes into my office, I want them

to have their calendar with them so that when we talk about something that needs to get done, they put it directly on their calendar and not on a sticky note that will end up “who knows where.”

The tasks are not usually time bound, although you place them in a specific thirty-minute time slot on your calendar, and they can be moved around as needed. If you have more tasks than you have thirty-minute slots, you probably have put down more than you can do in a single day. So every day when you’ve finished with prayer (or before prayer if you’re in early), the very first thing you do is open your calendar and look at the day; what do I have to do today? You organize and edit it as necessary so that it flows smoothly for you. Throughout the day you are referring to your calendar to keep yourself focused and not forgetting things. Then you never leave the office without checking your calendar; how did I do today? Everything that was completed just stays on the calendar as a record. Anything that you were not able to complete gets forwarded to the next appropriate day. Sometimes you realize that it can wait a week and other times it must be done first thing in the morning. And I suppose on rare occasions you may have to stay late and get it done yet that day (although I would wonder why it wasn’t better prioritized during your day’s work that day so that you didn’t have to stay late). Now you can go home with the peace of knowing that everything that had to be done that day is complete. There are no outstanding long lists to bother you as you try to rest; you have done everything needed today, and you don’t need to think about tomorrow until the morning. It is not the only way to do it, but I have not found a better way to keep your life and schedule organized in a more effective and least stressful manner. Maybe when Jesus said, “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34), he was referring to how you keep your calendar.

Chapter 6: Stages of Development and Growth

No Church Is Exactly the Same

When we talk about stages of development in a church plant, we are discussing generalizations. But no two churches are exactly alike. The stages are principles or tendencies of churches to function a certain way at specific sizes (Tim Keller's "Process Management" is one of the best articles addressing the issues to consider at different stages). At best, we are talking about some of the predictable patterns and challenges that church leaders will face at different stages of growth. So they are principles and not formulas. You must think carefully about the factors in your location and context that impact growth and development. The larger city where Blue Sky is located has forced "facility" to the top of the list of problems that inhibit our growth. The area is very affluent, and people are used to new, expensive, and very attractive facilities for everything from stores to restaurants to schools. Old and run-down buildings (like the one we lease at Blue Sky) stand out like a big zit on the end of a person's nose (in this case, the church's nose). Thus, in evaluating issues that would inhibit growth at Blue Sky, after multiplication of leadership and all of the other issues are addressed, a twenty-million-dollar barrier still exists: How to purchase a facility in the Seattle area.

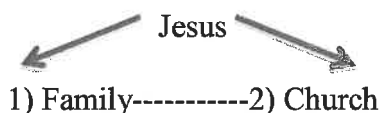
As we talk through these issues of development, think carefully about the idea behind what needs to be done...not just about the change or improvement itself. Why does the lead pastor, at some point, need to stop training the group leaders and trust the responsibility to another proven pastor? Why do new staff pastors need to be added at various sizes? Why does quality have to improve with increased size? Being behind on identifying and training healthy leaders or giving being lower than it should be will effect how and when overseers can go forward with the changes suggested at different stages of growth. The local overseers, with the help of your coach, must

faithfully evaluate the church's readiness to go forward in each case. I'm positive that there are church leaders (like Tim Keller) who understand the leadership impact of various decisions through growth stages much better than I do. But for our values of healthy, disciple-making local churches that are relational, multi-ethnic, and multi-generational, and located in university cities, I believe that the following chart will be relevant in helping you think through the issues (see Appendix).

Chapter 7: Being Certain That Your Family Survives

Right Priorities

Trying to prioritize your responsibilities between church and family is not an easy challenge. But the Bible requires us to be attentive to both. One of the hard lessons that we have learned from reading biographies of many of the pastors through the first and second great awakenings is that too many of them lost their children. You can't be away from home half the year and expect your wife and children to flourish in Christ. They need a husband and father. Sometimes I've heard people set the order of priorities like this: Jesus, Family, Church. I don't like it because it positions devotion to Jesus against family and even church. I see it more like this:



Jesus is our all and all. Our devotion to him permeates every aspect of our lives; he leads and sustains us in family and church and every other aspect of our life. My wife always tells me, "You love Jesus most, or you will not have enough love for me!" And she's right in that Jesus is the source of everything that is truly good and loving. He is the source of the love that we distribute in our families and for disciple making in the church. No love for Jesus—no love for anyone! But loving him is not in competition with your love for your family. Jesus said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). It's not if you love Jesus first and most as he instructed, you will love your family and the church less. On the contrary, if you want to love your family and the church more, make the primary and overarching love of your life the love of God. Or you can put it this way: If you put anyone ABOVE Jesus, you have lost your way. Jesus is everything to us and he is

our primary devotion. Then you can begin prioritizing other things, and I would suggest that it goes something like this: 1) Family→ 2) Church→ 3) Community.

So we must prioritize the place of our families rightly, as it is ordered in the scripture. Speaking about overseers, Paul tells Timothy, “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Properly loving and leading your family is a requirement for even being an overseer. Training your children well is not optional; it is a requirement. Failing to do so reveals that we are not mature enough to be entrusted with Jesus’ church. And further, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself....let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:25-28;33).

Your wife and kids must survive the church plant and they must survive a lifetime of you being a pastor. As pastors, we are responsible before Jesus to see that it happens. Men sacrifice their wives and children all the time to idols of this world—money, success, lust, self-centeredness. But our wife and children are to flourish not languish. Here is the wonderful promise: “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his way! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord” (Psalm 128:1-4). Being a church planter never means sacrificing

your wife and children to ruin. They are a great priority in your love for Jesus Christ and your calling to be a pastor.

Time Spent as a Husband

If you're not careful on a church plant, your wife may begin to wonder if she still has your love and affection. Everyone wants you and needs your time and attention. There are always more things to fill the schedule than there is time. There is no doubt that you and your wife will sacrifice for the mission that Jesus has set you upon and, one of those sacrifices will be time. However, there must also be time that is carefully guarded and protected to meet her needs.

To carry out your responsibility as a husband, there must be times when you are available to no one else but your wife. Take time to listen to her and let her process how things are going for her. Men tend to process life in terms of tasks being accomplished. Women tend to process life in terms of relationships and how they are feeling. Because she will be going through a lot of transition with the new church, you will need to be certain that there is time when you listen and not just as you're falling asleep at night. Nothing is worse than being exhausted and trying to sleep only to have your wife decide that she needs to talk! Sometimes this can't be helped and you need to wake up and listen because of the timing or importance of what she is processing. But you can also alleviate much of this pain and the conflict caused from it, by simply carving out other times when you are alert to pay attention to her and listen. You can't just assume that she is always okay; you have to take care of her.

Part of taking care of her is being sure that she has a friend or two of her choice with whom she can talk about everything. As a lead pastor's wife, this is not always easy! They must be mature enough to be able to hear her feelings and even her frustrations with you and not have it mess them

up. It's not healthy to have your wife talking with just anyone about struggles and problems, but you cannot leave her with no one with whom to talk. So agree on a person or two that feel safe to both of you with whom you don't mind her talking freely about how things are going. It will help you both so much if she can have this outlet and not feel like you are the only one with whom she can talk.

Another part of taking care of her is continuing to help her feel loved and special to you. You are not married to the church. Your promise to her was "until death do we part." Be sure that you have a night every week, or two at the most, where you take her out. If you can't afford dinner, coffee and a walk will probably work just fine. This might mean that you have to spend the time and effort (and possibly money) to get someone to watch the kids. Why not put the effort in and have her remember how much you love her. Also, buy her stuff. I know people say that different people have different love languages, and I do believe it's true. My wife feels most loved if I help out around the house and help with the kids. So I am especially attentive to this. But, in the midst of church planting and all of the financial sacrifice and giving involved, every wife will have things that she wishes she could buy. They may be necessities that she has been putting off—like clothes or shoes. Or they may be luxuries that she has willingly not enjoyed for a while because of her commitment to budget carefully for the family. You will help her and strengthen her for the long haul if you are attentive and spend some money on her.

Surprise her like you did when you were dating. Don't be so wrapped up in the needs of the church that you neglect your romance together. But think carefully and be sure it's really something that she would like and not just something that you enjoy! I love buying my wife flowers. I'm not sure why but it just makes me feel like I'm being very sensitive and romantic. But she hates it when I buy her flowers! She knows that they will die in a week and, she is just frugal enough to feel as if she cannot enjoy them; it feels wasteful. In addition, she is allergic to them and has to put them on

the back porch to watch them out the window (very romantic). Finally, after about ten years of marriage (I never claimed to be very intelligent), I learned to stop getting her flowers, no matter how badly I wanted to do it. But a cookbook that she's had her eye on? Wow! That's romance! Know your wife and be sure that you're doing a little extra for her by getting her surprises from time to time that she will really enjoy.

Part of taking care of her will also include helping her to get time away from the kids. And it may be that the only way to do that is for you to make her get out while you stay home. I've noticed that this can be difficult for many couples because they feel like any time that they can get "off" they want to spend together. But whether she has realized it or not, she needs to get time not only away from the kids—but away from you! Just like I need time to go fishing with a friend, if only to remember that there is something in life besides responsibility, she needs time to do something that she likes to do just for herself. For some it will be shopping (and not for groceries...just shopping. I don't understand it, but I hear that many women actually enjoy it). For others it's exercise or coffee with a friend. Whatever it is, you would do well to help her figure this out and encourage her to do it without guilt. Having something that she enjoys to which she can be looking forward to goes a long way toward giving her strength and courage to persevere. Knowing all of the pressure and demands to which you both are devoted, place strategic nuggets of relief and enjoyment in your schedule. This will help you both to keep your sanity through the challenges of church planting.

Time Spent as a Father

After your wife is well taken care of (and I do intentionally mean in this order), you have to consider what your children need from you as a father. I don't have time here to address the larger issues of parenting (although I may write more on this at a later time). As the group of lead pastors

has prayed together, we have frequently felt the Holy Spirit encouraging us that our children would not be lost; what an amazing promise and an outcome for which we all ache and long. But our attentiveness to the needs and growth of our kids is critical. In addition to all of the other demands that are upon us, we must take care of the children entrusted to us. And remember, we do this before we can get to our responsibilities as a pastor; it's a priority and the effective carrying out of this role is a requirement for us to even be a pastor. Too many men in general and too many pastors specifically, simply leave the task of parenting to their wives. The thinking is, "I'm out working and making money, so you take care of the family." And I might sarcastically add, "And I'll see you when they go to college!" But children do not grow up well without fathers. And we are clearly directed in the Bible, as fathers, to train and discipline our children. This requires your time and attention.

Consider some of the Bible texts on our responsibility: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4). If you and I do not teach our children to obey, who will help them to understand that this is right before God and the only safe way for them ("go well...live long in the land")? I watched a mom spend fifteen minutes trying to persuade her four-year-old son to get off the slide so that they could leave the pool. She threatened, pleaded, yelled, and bribed; the boy knew that he did not have to listen to his mom and he did not intend to do anything that he did not want to do. My question is simply this: Why hasn't that boy's father taught him that he MUST listen and obey his mom?

Godly fathers don't discipline in wrong anger, which only makes the situation worse by introducing fear of rejection and fear of not being loved. I say "wrong anger" because there will be plenty of times when you are rightly angry and should be...yet, you cannot let your anger cause you to sin against your kids. "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26). So while we don't discipline in wrong anger, we must discipline! "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24). Listen to the description of this verse out of the ESV Study Bible: "Physical discipline...is viewed as an important part of the correction and training of a child, to teach him to avoid wrong behavior, to embrace what is right, and to build godly character. Equally important, physical discipline is an expression of love for a child, while the one who 'sparing the rod hates his son.' Taking into account all of the teaching of Proverbs, physical discipline of a child must never be severe and must always be exercised in love." I couldn't say it better. What love and tenderness, and concern for the present and future well-being of your child are included in right discipline! Not excessive, not in anger or rage, carefully thought through for the best teaching result, consistently applied...so that our children grow up mature and wise and godly. The point is, fathers, we must be engaged in the discipline of our children, not passively and not secondarily but leading in this. And we must do it so thoughtfully and carefully that our children obey our wives when we are not around, so that her job will be easier.

I've always noticed how loving and warm my children have become after being disciplined (whether it's a spanking for my five-year-old son or taking away the electronics and assigning weed pulling for my thirteen-year-old daughter). Loving talk, encouragement, affirmation of "why I'm doing this," and painful consequences go a long way in helping our children to learn. Rebellion in any of us is ugly and difficult to uproot once it is deeply rooted. Just as our true Father knows how to

discipline us (read Hebrews 12:3-11), as Christian men we ought to give enough time and attention to our children that we can excel at rightly disciplining them. But you have to know them and to spend time with them to effectively father them.

I'm not sure that it matters specifically what you do in your time together, as long as it is time to interact and talk and listen to each other. I'm awful at playing—always have been and starting to think that I won't get very good at it until eternity. I don't like sports much, so that is not a good contact point for my kids and me. We watch old shows together and talk about what is going on ("Little House on the Prairie," "The Waltons," "The Cosby Show," "The Andy Griffith Show," etc.). I read books to them. We go for walks and drives. We enjoy dessert together (one of my best talents). For you it may be some sport and working together (I prefer running alone and working alone—not good at talking while I'm doing either). But find what it is that you can do with your children and use the opportunity to love them and train them.

Many times it's in the daily, necessary activities of life as you are interacting with them. Don't waste these, but use the opportunity. Talk to them while you're cooking. Change their diaper, both to help your wife and to help your child. Let them ride on your lap while you mow the lawn. And give them responsibilities in the family. For my kids it is mostly cleaning up after meals, taking out the trash, keeping the house clean, and feeding the dog. And everyone has a job almost every day. It's very good for them to learn to be responsible and to do a job well. Fathers, teach your children how to start a fire, cast a fishing pole, fix an engine, change a tire, identify a kind of tree, cook a meal, paint a wall, play an instrument, or sing a song. You are building them into people who become mature adults and setting the example so that they will also know how to be good parents someday.

Finally, teach them the Bible. Read it to them from the time that they are very young (I've recently found *The Jesus Story Book* by Sally Lloyd-Jones especially wonderful). Talk to them about verses and the various events in the Bible, relating them to daily life. Help them to memorize key verses from time to time. Ask them about what they're learning in the kids program at the church that you lead (and tremble if the kids—in the church that you lead—are not learning anything!). As they get older, give them other good books that will build their love for Jesus and understanding of the Bible. My fifteen-year-old is just finishing Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and the Edwards' biography (she is a crazy reader). My thirteen-year-old is reading *God's Lavish Grace* by Terry Virgo. All of this is helping them to grow in their Bible understanding. As they get older, they will ask you hard questions about important doctrinal issues. Take the time to give them a good answer, even if it means that you have to go study a bit to do so.

Now a word of caution: Don't be such an "I'm going to train you" dictator that you make your kids hate learning and hate the Bible. I am a big fan of letting kids be kids. Summers should be off to play and relax. Schooling should not be so competitive that they are constantly overwhelmed. And parents should not act like "my child is a failure" if they are not better than everyone else's kids. That's way too much pressure. Your kids will end up feeling a kind of external, religious pressure to be perfect or think you are not satisfied with them. Jeff Miller, the lead pastor of Clear View Church, tells his kids "I love you just because I love you!" What a wise man. I've taken it up and added "I love you when you do right and I love you when you do wrong. I love you no matter what!" I tell them regularly, especially when they have made a mistake, got a bad grade, or are being disciplined. Our kids are not "pastor's kids." They are the children of Christians! Keep your specific responsibilities in the church out of it so that they don't feel performance pressure because of what you do.

Remember, it is good to have children and to be a father. “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). What a privilege and sacred trust given to us by our Lord that he would entrust us with the lives of children. They are not a distraction or a burden (although they are at times distracting and tiring). Even while in the intensity of planting a church, start off well by rising up to the challenge of being a father. You cannot be so busy planting a church that you lose them in the process. Or I dare to say, in the end of it, you will greatly regret your oversight.

Remembering That You Are a Son

I include this section under “Being Sure That Your Family Survives,” because with all of the responsibilities of marriage, parenting, and leading a church, it’s very important that you actually make it to the end. It can feel, at times, like there is not enough of you to go around. The pressures on all sides can make you feel like you go from one intense responsibility at the office to another when you get home. Your own imperfection, with the evil one’s condemning voice, can make the load even heavier. God has entrusted us with a lot, but not so much that he will not give us the faith and strength to carry it. We are under grace, and it will not be our great ability or skill that carries us through the challenges that God has placed before us, but, rather, we will make it through by his wonderful grace. Knowing this, you must also take care of yourself. It’s like the often repeated but seldom necessary direction on an airplane: “Be sure to put on your own oxygen mask first and then help children or others around you.” If you pass out or die in the process, you will be ineffective in

helping your wife and kids. It is important that we have time to remember that we too are dearly loved sons of the Father.

After my dad died when I was twenty-two, I felt as if all of the weight and responsibilities of the world had fallen on me. There was no longer a man older than me who I could trust and depend on to help me. I experienced something very similar when Jesus told us that we must start this small network of church-planting churches; all of a sudden, I was without more mature men to offer me support and safety. The experience of going to plant a church can carry with it many of the same struggles. You have been loved and raised up under a godly man who has trained and encouraged you through the years. Like a father, he has made you feel safe, helped you through troubles, and believed in you. But now you have moved away and no longer feel his immediate, daily support. Much like leaving home, there is a greater weight on your shoulders that he can only share from a distance. Somehow you have to survive the expectations and pressure, not completely on your own, but more alone than you've yet experienced in serving Jesus.

So remember that you are a dearly-loved son; God is your Father and he has called you to himself. Never alone! That's the truth about our standing as sons. Reconciled to our Father through Christ, nothing can separate us! "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). If expectations weigh upon us and are wearing us out, I would just ask "whose?" Whose expectations are you carrying? It's important to know because, while many people are constantly expecting things from us, there are few that we must be attentive to please. You do have to please your wife, as long as she is not pushing you to sinful directions as Eve did with Adam ("But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided" 1 Corinthians 7:33). God wants us to live in unity in our marriages so that both of our expectations of one another line up with what God wants. In addition to your marriage, you and the other overseers

must live in unity of purpose and beliefs; where there are expectations between you that are not lining up correctly and peaceably, this must be resolved to maintain the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

So there are expectations between people that are important and to which you must be attentive. But...just a few! I have sinned through my tendency toward trying to keep everyone happy throughout much of my life as a pastor, and I have spent many sleepless nights unnecessarily lying awake. Trying to keep people happy is a killer. Solomon had it exactly right: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Whole duty. The people in the church that you lead will pull you every direction possible if you live to keep them happy. And the only pastor that is able to act in faith is the one who is determined that he will not live as a pleaser of people but, rather, as a God pleaser.

In remembering that you are a dearly-loved son and that your entire existence is not just about pleasing people, you must find a way to take time for yourself. Just as I mentioned that your wife needs time to do things that energize her and needs to be away from you and the kids, you need the same. Time alone to read and pray is important. You need time to relax and do whatever you want to, at least occasionally. And it really doesn't matter what it is as long as you want to do it, you can be away from life's pressures, and it gives you energy. It's good and necessary that you have space in your life to enjoy; it should not all be responsibility and sacrifice. While these hours may come once a week or only once a month, be sure that you take them without guilt. Father loves you as a dear son and his intent, in addition to the hard work you must do in carrying the message of Jesus, is also that you would receive the pleasures of joy and peace in this life. Remember: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no

variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). And remember that he is the God “who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

Boundaries That Protect

When the church plant first starts, it seems that everyone is involved in almost everything because the entire church is made up of only twenty or thirty adults. Your wife is involved in many things, and you spend much time talking about how things are going and what is next. This is good and appropriate in the very early stages of the plant. But, the time quickly comes, when the church office is up and running, that you must start leaving the work at the office so that you can get time away from things. It can be very difficult to begin setting this boundary because you have both shared so deeply in planting this church. But the point comes when the pressures and “invasion” into your lives are too much.

This means don’t bring problems home to discuss and worry with your wife. Let her stay out of these pressures, for the most part, and bring home blessings and peace for your wife and kids. There are some things that you will need to talk about; you will want to keep her informed with major changes and problems. But there are so many daily issues where it is not helpful for her or helpful for the particular situation to involve her. This specific person has a conflict with someone—she probably doesn’t need to know. Let it get worked through between the involved parties. The giving was low this month—why worry her about it? A particular member seriously sinned—you were slimed by it, but why would you want your wife to be slimed, too? It’s usually just that we can’t get the problems out of our head and so we talk them through at home hoping that talking about it more will bring relief. But most often it doesn’t! She will get worried and, possibly, emotional about it. Then both of you will go to bed with a heaviness and fear and pressure on you. “Let no corrupting


talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29). In addition to the more general application to how Christians speak to one another, this certainly must also apply to how we talk to our wives and what we bring home from the office. If the effect of your words will be heavy and burdensome on your wife, it certainly cannot be counted as “giving grace.” So rather than bringing problems home, talk with one of your key leaders or your church-plant coach or another lead pastor before going home. Have them pray for you. Trust Jesus to work it through. Then go home in peace, possibly with it still rumbling in the back of your mind but leave it in the back! Tomorrow will be another day, and you can go back to working on anything that needs to be resolved.

Remember that your overseers are your main counselors. My wife has given me plenty of wise counsel and encouragement over the years, but she has never been my main counselor on leading the church. It is the role of overseers. This is one of the reasons why the qualifications for an overseer are laid out so clearly in scripture. It is an important calling with intense responsibilities and the overseer must be mature enough and empowered by Jesus for the specific task. Don’t expect your wife to carry such things; it is not fair to her. There may be some sense for her where she wants to know everything; it can make some wives feel that they are safer if they know all of the details. But this doesn’t mean it is really safe for her or for the church. Set the boundary and lovingly keep it for your sake and for hers.

The other important issue is just that you really need your home to become a safe place for you away from the pressures of leading the church. If the details of work are the conversations of home, you will never get away from it. This is why it is almost always unwise to have your wife (or any other pastor’s wife) on staff at the church. If your wife is the children’s director when the church is first starting, you had better be training a replacement. It won’t work well long term. Bedtime will

become staff meeting and being your wife's boss is very unpleasant when you have to say something that is difficult.


This doesn't mean that you will not talk about the church. You will. Here is my rule of thumb: I always talk about good news of the things that Jesus is doing! I want my kids to hear it. My wife needs the encouragement. Our whole life is about following Jesus, and the stories of joy and hope are an important part of our lives. Talk about these things and celebrate them together. Adam was saved this week. The small group that Ben leads had four new people. The visitors that we really liked last Sunday came back. Attendance was over 100 people. Shelby was healed of a gluten allergy. God's presence was wonderfully powerful during worship. These things will not tire you out but, in the retelling, you will be strengthened and filled. This kind of talk builds up and gives grace to those who hear!

One other issue: Having people in your home is good—to a limit. You must know how much is good and how much is too much so that you can help set these limits and protect your family. You and your wife should decide together what is doable. It may be, if you are a young couple with no children, three or four nights a week is just right.  and I did six when we were first planting Vine. It was a lot but it was okay for a while. But as soon as our first baby came along—no more! I had to start kicking people out of the house so that we could put the baby to bed, when before they would hang out until all hours of the night. We were more tired from the additional responsibilities of family. And your personalities will have a lot to do with it. If you are both more outgoing, you may really enjoy more people in your space more often. But if you're more introverted, you will quickly begin to feel like you need your space, too. Listen to these things (and for sure listen to your wife and her concerns about this). It took us a while to work out the right balance, but eventually we did. And also understand that it will be a moving target. Now with four


children, two who are teenagers, we can do fewer evenings than when the kids were fewer and younger. Our lives are very busy with transporting them to orthodontist appointments and youth group events. One night a week is good with two nights from time to time. This is all we can do at this point. So work together and figure out a good starting plan that works for you both. Then you, as the husband, take the responsibility of protecting your family by sticking with it.

How Does Your Wife Find Her Place in the Church?

It is important to help your wife in feeling confident about how she is to function in the new church. First, I would simply say that all of our wives are unique and have their own particular strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. Nothing is worse for her than having a set of expectations imposed upon her as your wife for how she ought to function. The one thing that is the longing and passion of every pastor's wife is to live as a godly, Christian woman under the grace of Jesus. Certainly the qualifications for the wives of deacons or the women deacons would apply to the wives of overseers: "Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things" (1 Timothy 3:11). But specific spiritual gifts or personalities are certainly not required.

In earlier times, the expectations may have been that she play the piano and put her hair up. For us, it's more likely to be expected by some uninformed individual that she leads/teaches other women in the church and is always socially available to everyone. But we've never accepted such images and stereotypes. Some of their personalities will be outgoing, and they will enjoy lots of interaction with people. Others will have a personality where they do not like being that visible and will function best behind the scenes. I've always just told  to do what she feels Jesus wants her to do and what fits with her specific personality and gifts. At times women have started asking

her if they could get coffee with the expectation of sharing their problems with her (undoubtedly because she is my wife), and I told her to tell them that, as the mother of four, she doesn't have time to meet with people in that manner. When people have the reasons explained to them (and I've probably done this at a team meeting two or three times in all the years that I've been leading a church), they will immediately understand.

Also, understand that your wife will have pressures on her that other members of the church will not have. For instance, as your wife, she is more visible to people, no matter what you do. People will want to meet her just to know who she is. This is good and right. But it means that Sunday services will be busy and, for a more reserved wife, tiring. She should not be expected to serve in specific areas such as kids program or greeting unless she feels strongly that she wants to serve there. By the time she checks your kids into the program, speaks to the people wanting to talk with her, prays for you during the preaching, prays for people if she would like to, and talks with more people after the service (not to mention getting back to pick up the kids), she will have done a full morning's work. For  it takes a lot out of her. Monday is her off day; she doesn't answer the phone or email or go out shopping. I never schedule people into our home on Mondays. She loves the people and loves getting to help and build up the church on Sundays, but it takes a lot out of her as an introvert. So I help her by affirming that she is doing just what she should be doing. Sometimes she will start feeling guilty for not doing something more (usually it's not being in kids program or not spending more time taking care of other women). I will immediately and strongly encourage her that she is doing what she should and honoring Jesus with the gifts he has given her; she has been obedient to Jesus and does not need to do anything more unless she really wants to. If your wife is more energetic and outgoing, encourage her to do that for which she has faith, but help her to balance it so that she doesn't do so much that it becomes a strain on either of you or on the

kids. Help her to be what she has been made to be and protect her from those who would try to get her to do more.

Keeping Your Kids Out of the Spotlight

Another important issue in making sure that your family survives the church plant is to do your best to keep your children out of the spotlight. Pray that Jesus will protect them from unnecessary expectations or pressures simply because they are your children. So far, in our network of churches, I have not seen this occurring. But I'm always very aware of the dangers of it. Your children are not super kids or super Christians. I suspect that at this point in time, only one of mine has experienced regeneration. There should never be anything said by you or anyone else that makes them feel as if they must maintain an image of goodness because you are a pastor. It's true that an overseer must be able to keep "his children submissive" (1 Timothy 2:4), but the Bible clearly places the responsibility for this on the father and how he leads his children. The text referred to earlier, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1), is not direction for the children of the pastors but, rather, for all Christian children. The responsibility for pastors and their children are the same as those for all Christians: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). So if the pressure is on anyone to see that your children are good kids, it's on you. A pastor does not have the right to push it off on his children as an attempt to protect his image or reputation.

There are some things that you can do to protect them from other people. Teach your kids how to discern who is good for them and who is not. Not everyone who attends a church ought to be able to influence your children. Sometimes I've notice certain people trying to be close to my kids (I believe in an effort to feel closer to or have a connection with me). If I'm uneasy in my stomach, I

will ask my older kids to be a bit cautious and with my younger, I will simply intervene and see to it that there is not an opportunity to spend time with them. Talk with your kids about who at the church seem to be a good example to them. Help them find heroes in the faith and role models right there in the local church. Steering them and teaching them how to discern people and situations is wise and protective of them.

Also, in your preaching, be careful of how you talk about your children. For my younger ones, I may tell stories about them that help illustrate a text in the Bible (not just because they are cute and I like them...it must really help in the understanding of a text). But as my children get to the age of seven or eight, I no longer talk about them in the service without asking them about it first. This simply feels respectful of them. Usually my kids want me to talk about them (I'm not sure why, but they seem to like people hearing that they exist). But be careful. Never talk about them without their permission and never share something personal or embarrassing about them.

Getting Away

One last thing on helping your family to survive: Keep your finger on the pulse of when you need to get away. My kids hate missing Blue Sky. When we go to Montana for a month, they are all (from the youngest to oldest) heartbroken that they will not be with the church. It's also good for them to miss gathering with the church so that they appreciate the great gift that Jesus has given us. But it is not good for them if their dad doesn't make it for the long run. I do need to get away. When you start to feel on edge all of the time, you better figure out how to get away (and you probably should have done it two weeks earlier).

When you're planting a church you can't be gone very often on Sunday. The church is small and vulnerable, and people will feel a little lost without you until things are more established. But

you will need to be gone for rest. Have another lead pastor in to speak for you if there is not yet anyone locally who can do it well enough so that you're not worried. There may also be times when you can more easily be gone for a short break during the week because your children are not yet in school. My favorite thing to do when under pressure and needing rest is to get on the road and drive six or eight hours away for a few days. I feel like I'm driving off from underneath the responsibility for just a while and this allows me to decompress. In the summer, when things are slower at the church, plan at least two or three weeks of vacation. When the church is larger and the pressures greater, you may need more than this.

Don't forget that visiting family is usually not really a vacation for young couples. While it is a kind of "getting away" and it does meet the need to see people that we love, it is seldom restful. There are usually too many dynamics and expectations when visiting family at the very time that you are trying to escape such things. To be sure you have enough vacation time to truly get rest, you may have to persuade your family to visit you instead. I know everyone's situation is different, but I've yet to see a situation where it was the kind of rest needed. You need to really be away. So plan your vacations appropriately with your own rest and your wife and kids in mind.

A Final Word

Some of you may be a bit frustrated that I didn't include much more "how to" in this writing. The truth is that it is more of a "how to be" as a church planter. We like "how to" because it's simple and straight forward. If someone could just tell us to do this and there will be a wonderful outcome, it sure would be easy. But I'm sure that this is not the way of church planting. Church planting is more about men who are called to be pastors spending their lives as a kind of living example so that more disciples would be made for Jesus. The instruction manual is the Bible, and there are no complete checklists...just disciples who are willing to obey the words of Jesus and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. It's not like starting a business, and it's not as easy as just doing what someone else has done. While the models that Jesus has given us are helpful starting points, the church is a living organism.

My biggest concern in writing this has been the character and life of the church planter. Healthy disciples will beget more healthy disciples. Men who are motivated by success and human approval will produce unhealthy churches that will not effectively make it for the long haul; these men and the churches that they lead will end in disappointment and pain. When we say things like "character over gifting," we mean it! So I've spent my time writing on church planting for the formation and encouragement of faithful men who are called by Jesus to plant a church. I hope that the warnings and encouragements will spur you on in your race. I hope that each will have the courage to fill in the blanks with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. And my prayer is that you would make it all the way to the end of your days on this earth in consistent obedience to Jesus. The saddest stories of Christian history are the stories of well-intended pastors who don't finish their race. Imagine if we all made it to the end and if each of us replicated a dozen other effective church

planters in our lifetime! The disciple-making outcome and the multiplied worship of Jesus would be breathtaking.

Many church planters seem to operate with non-biblical thinking like “the early bird gets the worm,” all rushing to be successful first. I believe it should be more like “keep your nerve,” “hold your course,” “steady as she goes,” and “never give up.” It may end up taking longer to get there, as with the tortoise and the hare, but which one wins the race? Like I often said when first planting Vine, “I would rather have ten disciples than a large crowd of attenders.” Now I say that I would rather have ten faithful churches with godly lead pastors than to have hundreds of churches in a movement that is no longer willing to run in obedience to the God of the Bible. With ten healthy, effective churches we can plant ten more. If we have 100 churches with no unity that are drawing crowds and failing to make authentic disciples or losing their doctrinal footing, we will only reproduce temporary thrills that will not last on the Day. The churches that we plant will be proven by fire—that is what the Bible says: “Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done” (1 Corinthians 3:13). May the work that you put your hand to in planting or helping churches be planted be proven to be built on the foundation of Jesus. And may it prove to be for his name and for his glory.

Stages of Development in Church Planting

<u>Attendance: Team to 100</u>	<u>Attendance: 100—200</u>	<u>Attendance: 200—500</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team. Help original team adjust to new city, jobs, etc. Support and equip Team to serve. • Including. Emphasize parties and invitations. At least monthly parties when starting. Great invitation cards for the Sunday service. • Space. Leased office and Sunday-only space for church. • Sunday Service. Start effective Sunday service. Mobile, but making look quality. Worship and preaching quality highest priority. • Small Group. Relational foundation being laid. Group leaders all original team members. Identifying first small group leaders that were not part of original team. • Training. Lead pastor training all group leaders. • Overseers. Identifying, training, and developing initial board members. • Church Planting. Praying for first 2 or 3 pastors and potential planters to be identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team. Original team is transitioning to being a part of a church. Loss of unique identity and purpose. • Including. Parties shift to small groups and cluster of groups—Lead pastor casts vision for inviting. Annual Anniversary party for entire church. • Space. Still leased office and Sunday-only space w/2 service times. • Sunday Service. Step up the feel and quality of the service (graphics, sound, freshen up look, etc.). Worship and preaching highest priority. • Small Group. 60-70% of adult attendance in small group. Identification of new leaders and coaching shared by other staff pastors. • Training. Lead pastor still trains all group leaders, but training another to do it. • Overseers. Long-term overseers beginning to emerge—still training them. • Church Planting. Casting vision about planting at around 500 people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team. Little or no talk about team. Now established local church. Only when casting vision for future planting. • Including. Discipleship Communities take over the relational community building (begin when over 200). Lead pastor still casting vision for inviting. • Space. Lease 12K to 20K sq. feet of space to refurbish. • Sunday Service. Find leased facility for feeling of permanence and, again, increase the feel and quality of the environment. Still worship/preaching priority. • Small Group. DC Pastors take over leading all group leaders. Lead pastor leads pastors and staff (still helping identify group leaders and staff/pastors/planters). • Training. Another staff pastor takes over leading small group and DC system. • Overseers. Established and caring for staff, protecting the church, and growing in doctrine. • Church Planting. 1st potential planter on staff supported by network fund. Vision to plant.

Stages of Development in Church Planting

<u>Attendance: Team to 100</u>	<u>Attendance: 100 to 200</u>	<u>Attendance: 200 to 500</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff. Two full-time staff (LP plus worship leader or pastor). Training second pastor to preach on Sunday. • Finances. Giving mostly from original team members. Annual budget \$50K to \$150K. • Series. Lead pastor doing all sessions. Smaller group style—more interaction. 10 to 15 people per session. • Team Meeting. Once a month for all who serve on teams (may be more casual for newer guests to attend). Mostly original team but expanding. Lord's Supper here. 25-50 attending. Welcome new members. • Worship Leader. One worship leader with a guest in from another church to give break. Begin training another as soon as possible. • Kids Program. Small and being led by a volunteer. Most of the children in a small church plant are very young. Must feel safe and be quality, but will be simple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff. Add 3rd staff or pastor. Need at least two pastors plus full-time worship leader (and maybe part-time support staff). • Finances. More new members giving than original team members. Annual budget \$150K to \$300K. • Series. Still all done by lead pastor. More teaching style—less interaction. Training another pastor to do a couple sessions. 15 to 30 people. • Team Meeting. More new members than from original team. Only those who serve. Training for values, key doctrine, and principles of healthy local church. Lord's Supper still here. 50-100 attending. Welcome new members. • Worship Leader. Training of 2nd worship leader well under way. Identifying and training potential 3rd and 4th. • Kids Program. Identifying potential longer-term kids leader (may be original volunteer or may not). Consider part-time position, as long as it doesn't keep you from bringing on the 3rd pastor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff. Add 4th and 5th full-time staff (depending on finances). Need at least 3 staff pastors to start DCs. Maybe full-time kids director by 400 or so. • Finances. Budget now \$300K to \$600K annually at \$25 per person per week (in Midwest; West Coast may be double). • Series. Another pastor now does 1 or 2 of the sessions. Environment, lunch, and teaching quality must improve. 30-50 people. • Team Meeting. Improve quality and feel. Better snacks. More vision for the future of the church. Other pastor announcing and leading on details. Lord's Supper moved to DC. 100-250 attending. Welcome new members. • Worship Leader. Training for 3rd and 4th worship leaders well under way. Leading in DC's and the best of them leading on Sunday. • Kids Program. Quality, organization, and effectiveness must increase. Consider full-time kids leader. By the time the church reaches 400 to 500, this person will be led by another staff pastor, not lead pastor.