

Saturday, October 14, 2006

Leadership Letter # 8

Dear Nigerian friends (and others who are also receiving these letters),

Guess who invented church planting? Was it (1) Ken Eze, (2) Olu Jacobs, (3) Henry Oursler, or (4) God?

I hope you believe church planting was invented by God! It is His chosen way to spread the gospel and extend the kingdom. Peter Wagner has said, "*The single most effective methodology under heaven is planting new churches.*" Because church planting is God's idea, we should be able to go to the Word of God to find biblical principles for planting reproducing, missional churches. These principles will form the foundation for a dynamic new church. I want to highlight just a few of them here today. We'll talk more about these in our upcoming church planter's conference.

## **Twelve Biblical Principles of Planting Healthy Churches**

### **(1) Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. He is the Lord of Church Planting, and He has a vision for your new church.**

It is a very comforting thought to realize that you and I are not responsible for the growth of the Church. Jesus is. Only God can grow a church. Let me repeat that, because I do not want you to be deluded into a self-sufficient attitude that says if we work hard enough, we can build a great church. Only God can! And He has promised to do so (Matthew 16;18ff). He is the chief shepherd. We are the under-shepherds serving Him. And we must depend on Him fully. Paul understood that in Acts 16:9-10.

*A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

The Spirit of God initiated their mission into Macedonia. Paul followed God's leadership and direction, even when it wasn't what he had planned on doing initially.

Some pastors and planters have an entirely different view. They are deluded into thinking "*it is MY church,*" and they will build it by *their* plans. Some hold fiercely to the power they possess. In the United States we call people like this "control freaks." They always have to be in control. But we must realize: it's not about *us* ... it's all about *Him*. Psalm 115:1 says,

*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth*

But I have to ask this question: *why is it that some church plants succeed and some fail? What makes the difference between a church that makes a lasting impact and one that doesn't last?*

I have a friend who started a church in the Seattle area that never grew beyond a core of people, eventually closing its doors. He has been part of a team starting a new church here in South West Florida that has grown to close to 1,000. Same person. Same training. Basically the same philosophy of ministry. And yet in one situation Jesus has chosen to bless and bear fruit. How can you explain that? I'm not really sure. But remember this: the church planter might be the human leader of the church – but God is still the Lord. And we must submit to His sovereignty and trust Him for the fruit in ministry.

Take some time and read Acts chapter thirteen. In verse 2, the Holy Spirit says to the church at Antioch, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" He is the Lord of church planter **selection**. We talked about that last week when we discussed making sure you are called to plant a church.

In verses 4-12 and 47, we also see that Jesus is the Lord of church planting **strategy**. They had a connection in Cyprus and went there to proclaim the gospel. Led by the Spirit of God, Barnabas and Saul went to the synagogue and proclaimed the message of grace to the God-seekers that were present.

In the midst of the pressures and trials that accompany church planting, we need to realize that Jesus is also the Lord of the **set-backs** that frequently occur in church planting. Verse 13 tells us that John left. Perhaps he was weary of the spiritual battle. Maybe he was homesick or disillusioned. Some have even suggested that he might have been jealous of Barnabas and Saul. Whatever it was, there was a set-back in the ministry. We have them today, too. Problems, surprises, disappointments and trials can de-rail us from our intended destination. Have you ever been hurt by a colleague or team mate? Has anyone ever hurt you by neglect or criticism? Ever been misunderstood? Sure, we all have. It is comforting to know that the same God who was present with the church in the first century is also present with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He will comfort us with His peace and direct us with His supernatural guidance.

Jesus is also the Lord of church planting **success**. In verse 48, the Gentiles heard the gospel and rejoiced, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. We all like positive results. But success goes way beyond numerical success. It is as to do with God's people being faithful to what He has called them to do. We must occupy ourselves with being faithful ... and God will bring the fruit.

Finally, we must realize that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the **spiritual warfare** that takes place when we are planting churches. See verses 6-12 for one indication of the spiritual battle that Barnabas and Saul faced almost everywhere they went. Years ago, Pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse authored a very famous book on spiritual battle. He titled it, *The Invisible War*. Are you aware there is a battle going on? Though it is true and comforting that "*greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world,*" we need to be aware of the battles and fight with spiritual weapons – Ephesians 6.

So what philosophy of ministry does Jesus want to use in His new church? What is His vision statement for the new church? What are His unique values for the new body of believers? What kind of people does He want His church to reach? What is Christ's vision for your new church? Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, will guide you to the answers as you and your leaders wait upon Him in prayer.

The only way we will realize His vision for our church is by applying the second principle to our lives and ministry:

**(2) Prayer is the indispensable source of God's power and wisdom in each phase of church planting.**

Prayer allows us to **experience intimacy with God and to realize His power in our lives and ministry.** Philippians 3:7-11 says,

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Prayer is important because it **puts us in touch with Christ's vision and plan for His church.** In Joshua 5:13-15, Joshua meets up with a powerful individual. Remember this familiar story?

*Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.*

This spiritual warrior (I believe it was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ) basically told Joshua, "I'm not here to take sides. I'm here to take over." And Joshua responded by saying, "That works for me ... where do we go from here?"

That set the stage for what happens in Joshua 6, where they embark on their conquest of Jericho ... certainly not by the means that you or I would have thought of. God led them to walk around the building six times in six days, and then on the seventh day, they walked around seven times, blew some trumpets, shouted loudly ... and watched the walls fall down. How did Joshua come up with that strategy? Only by recognizing the sovereignty of God and listening to Him carefully in prayer.

In church planting, we must pray. As a friend of mine says, we must *pray hard*. (I always laugh at him because I think we should pray "hard" all the time ... but I think I know what he means.) We need workers ... laborers ... and Jesus invites us to pray for them:

**Matthew 9:35-38** <sup>35</sup> *Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. <sup>36</sup> Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is*

*plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

Can you identify with that passage? Are the "fields" in Nigeria white for harvest? I believe they are. But we need more workers. If we are going to see one thousand churches planted throughout Nigeria to reach every man, woman and child for Jesus Christ, we're going to need to pray that God will raise up laborers – workers that He will call into the harvest mission. So pray! Pray for laborers. Pray for God to bring gifted people to help you build your church.

**(3) God's vision for church planting must lead to prayerful planning for planting our church. We must follow a comprehensive Time Line that will detail what must be done to accomplish the vision God has given us.**

When I was considering planting NorthPoint Community Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, I remember asking, "*Why do we need another church here?*" I would pass 13 churches on the way to the large church where I was a teaching pastor. Did we really need another church in our city? God eventually led me to answer that question with a strong "yes," and it was based on the fact that the churches in our area were not doing the things they needed to be doing to effectively reach our area. It was out of that conviction of the necessity of church planting that came our strategic plans for planting NorthPoint Community Church.

If God is central (principle #1) and we are desperately seeking Him in prayer (principle #2), He will reveal the plans we need. Listen to these statements:

**1 Chronicles 28:19** *"All this," said David, "the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern."*

**Proverbs 16:3** *Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established.*

**Proverbs 16:9** *The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*

**Proverbs 11:14** *Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

The leaders of Summit Church, the church my family and I attend here in Florida, came from a church that was very "program-driven." There were hundreds and hundreds of programs designed to meet everyone's needs ... the calendar was full! But eventually the "programs" became more important in the church instead of the people! And it was all about meeting the needs of those who were already members of the church, rather than reaching out to the community to see people come to faith in Christ. As a result, when our founding pastors started Summit Church, they wanted it to be built on a very different paradigm. Summit Church is very "**relationally driven,**" rather than "**program driven.**" We strive to connect people with Jesus Christ and with others. But the plans for such a church came out of the convictions these founding leaders received from God. We must always make sure that our vision is from God ... and that our plans flow out of that vision and help to accomplish it.

#### **(4) Every church planter needs a mentor to build into his life on a continuing basis.**

Church planters need effective mentors to come alongside and help them establish the new church. A mentor brings wisdom, protection, care, resources, networking, support, accountability, and prayer to a church planter.

A friend of mine put it this way: *Mentors are there to talk us down from the ledge!* That means sometimes things get crazy. We're tempted to quit, to pull the plug ... and mentors give perspective.

Mentoring is an ancient art. Most of the training of leaders in the Word of God occurred in mentoring relationships. Moses mentored Joshua. Elijah mentored Elisha. Barnabas mentored the Apostle Paul. And Paul poured his life into a team of leaders ministering throughout the New Testament world.

Before he became Timothy's mentor, Paul needed to be Barnabas' protégé. When Barnabas discovered that they new church in Antioch was in great need of leadership, he remembered Saul. It was a long, hard journey from Antioch to Tarsus. But Barnabas was willing to make that journey to recruit Saul as his protégé and as a teacher for the new church in Antioch.

When Barnabas found Saul, he brought him back to Antioch. For a whole year Barnabas and Saul (who became the Apostle Paul) met with the church and taught great numbers of people (see Acts 11:25-26).

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit said, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" The mentor and his protégé set off on their first missionary trip together. Acts 13 and 14 reveal that the work to which the Holy Spirit called them was preaching the Word of God and planting churches. Great learning adventures happen when a mentor and protégé are able to minister together.

The Apostle Paul took the practice of mentoring and expanded it to a team of men that he recruited and trained for his church planting mission. Chief of his proteges was Timothy.

**Acts 16:1-3** *Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

Paul discovered a young Christian who had impressed those who knew him best. Paul was able to get a clear picture of a young, emerging leader through the references of others who "*spoke well of him.*"

Paul began to travel with and mentor his team of church planting proteges. Acts 20:4 tells us that Paul was accompanied by "*Sopater, son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarcus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.*" Church planting is an incredibly difficult ministry. One of the greatest assets that a church planter can have in successfully establishing a new church is a mentor who will help him all along the way.

Can a speak a word of challenge to Ken and Olu and the other leaders of the Living Spring Ministries movement in Nigeria? Ken and Olu, you are good mentors. You have trained other young men well. But you now need to start developing other mentors within the movement of Living Spring. It may be scary at first ... you may feel like you are losing control as you send out these new mentors to work with young church planters. But if you have mentored those mentors well, they should carry your same values, strategies and convictions as they go out and work with the next generation of leaders. This is one of the CRITICAL and ESSENTIAL elements in gaining momentum toward developing a movement in Nigeria.

**(5) The church planting pastor is most effective when he is part of a team. He should be the visionary leader, but he needs other gifted, qualified leaders to be part of his team.**

In the book of Acts, Holy Spirit-prompted church planting was done by teams. It's that simple. I know there are certain situations where we should send out one man (or one family) to plant a new work ... but the over-riding pattern in all of the New Testament was that ministry was done in teams.

The Antioch church, for example, commissioned Barnabas and Saul as a daughter church planting team. And the Holy Spirit called these church planters through a leadership team of five prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1-3). The Antioch church thus became the mother church for many, many generations of churches!

Paul soon emerged as the lead church planter. In the beginning Barnabas is mentioned first (Acts 13:2, 7), but soon it became clear that Paul was gifted to be the lead church planting pastor. Starting in Acts 13:13a, he is recognized as the team leader, as his name is mentioned first: *"From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia."*

In the same way, church plants today need a lead pastor. Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest churches in the U.S. at this time, had no senior pastor in its early days. Bill Hybels was called the "coordinating pastor." But it soon became clear that accountability, authority and responsibility were sorely lacking. So Hybels became the lead pastor. (See *Re-discovering Church*, by Lynne and Bill Hybels, pp. 73-75.) The rest is history!

Some lead pastors are called the "senior" pastor. I really don't worry about titles most of the time ... but I think the terms "senior" and "associate" can create a false hierarchy that is not biblical. I was the "teaching pastor" at a large church in North Carolina, because that's what I did: I taught the Word of God. I usually prefer the title "lead" pastor for a new work, because that's what the church planter needs to do: lead the people of God.

New Testament church planting was done as a team effort. Paul was accompanied at different times by various teammates: Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke and others. Why did the Lord direct them to work as a team?

I can suggest a few reasons:

- accountability
- balance of gifts and strengths
- mutual encouragement

- multiplied efforts
- prayer support
- companionship

If a church plant starts with a team, it has a much better chance of surviving and thriving. God uses solo and team efforts, so if you are unable to plant with a team, go forward in faith and God will use you. But one of the first things you will want to do when you get to the field is begin forming a team of gifted leaders.

**(6) The central work of the new church will always be (1) to help people put their trust in Christ (evangelism), and (2) grow into maturity as His followers (discipleship).**

In Luke 15 Jesus told three parables all with the same point: lost people matter to God and heaven rejoices when the lost are found.

The first parable is of a lost sheep. Though ninety-nine are in the fold, the shepherd leaves them all to find the one who is lost. When the lost sheep is found, the shepherd calls his friends and neighbors together and celebrates. Jesus applied His story this way: *"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent (15:7)."*

So is winning the lost all the church needs to do? Of course not! Indeed, some churches become so focused on evangelism that they neglect the nurture of the saints. As I wrote several weeks ago, Jesus' Great Commission balances both evangelism and discipleship.

**Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Remember what we said about this passage? The main verb in this passage is *make disciples*. The three participial phrases that describe *how* disciples are to be made are:

- Going into all the world
- Baptizing them in the name
- Teaching them to observe

New churches need to balance evangelism and discipleship. A good resource to help evaluate this balance is *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwartz.

Which direction do most churches lean? It's been my experience that most established churches lean toward discipleship. Christians want to grow, they want to be taught the Word of God ... and those are good things ... but not at the expense of evangelism. Newer churches and church plants often have a better balance, but some may lean too heavily toward evangelism and neglect discipleship.

One of the things Living Spring Ministries must be careful of is that when a vision captures your heart, like the vision of reaching every man, woman and child with the gospel, you can quickly forget all the other things that must take place in a church. Go back to our lesson on F-L-O-W-S several weeks ago ... the purpose-driven church must be in **balance** ... especially between evangelism and discipleship

"Focus" is important ... but if I could coin a new word, what I think we need here is "focii" – focusing on two things and keeping them in balance: evangelism (reaching out) and discipleship (building up). Remember that these are not mutually exclusive. Part of the training program Jesus put His disciples through was evangelism. Jesus did evangelism in the context of spending time discipling the Twelve.

How do you know if there is the right balance? Ask these questions:

- Are we leading people to Christ on a regular basis?
- Are believers stronger and better equipped than they were a year ago?
- Do new believers "catch" the vision?
- Are people regularly employing their spiritual gifts?

Well, there are the first six principles planting healthy churches. There are twelve in total – and I recently taught those twelve church planting principles at a conference for church planters. I wish I had time and space to teach you all of them ... we'll cover all of these principles – and more – at the church planting conference in November. But for now, let me simply state the remaining six principles and give you a couple of Bible references to study them for yourself.

**(7) Leadership Development is critical for a new church to succeed. The most important leadership quality to develop in people's lives is spiritual maturity.**

Ephesians 4:11-12  
2 Timothy 2:2  
1 Timothy 3:1-13  
Titus 1:6-9

**(8) We must understand the people we are seeking to reach, and speak the gospel clearly to reach them effectively.**

Colossians 4:2-4  
1 Corinthians 9:22-23

**(9) There should be wide-spread community awareness and interest when God plants a church.**

Matthew 5:14-16  
Acts 2:47b  
Acts 4:16b

**(10) The church planter's spiritual life, family life, and ministry life must be in biblical balance.**

1 Timothy 3:4  
1 Peter 3:7  
Ephesians 5:25

**(11) Healthy churches will reproduce, and daughter church planting should be envisioned and planned from the new church's beginning.**

Acts 8:1, 4  
Acts 11:20  
Acts 13:1-3

**(12) Proper organizational and administrative policies and procedures will protect and stabilize the new church, enabling it to grow in a healthy way.**

Acts 6:1-7  
1 Corinthians 14:40

### **Bible Study: Responding to failure**

As always, I am attaching a Bible study for your growth ... and to pass on to those in your congregation. This one is on responding properly to failure. What do we do when things don't go as we planned? How does God want us to respond? I hope it is encouraging to you ... and that you will trust God to turn your failures into His successes.

Enjoy this week ... trust God fully ... and pray "hard"!

Till next week,  
Henry Oursler