

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING

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Preface

This booklet on Church planting was written to accompany the series of Serving Today radio programmes for pastors and Church leaders which looked at this subject. For those programmes we had the help of Barry King and we are grateful to the Lord for his contribution.

Barry was born in rural Arkansas in the southern part of the United States. His father was a pastor who was involved in church planting and pastoral work for over fifty years. When Barry reached the age of fourteen he came to a strong realisation that just because he had been born to Christian parents that did not automatically mean that he was a Christian believer, and it was then that the Lord graciously opened his heart and brought him to repentance toward God in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In more recent years he has been involved in the Lord's work and particularly in Church planting. About ten years ago he began to have opportunities to go to various parts of the world: Africa, Asia and South America. He was teaching in the area of church planting and also biblical preaching, and as he was doing that the Lord gave him a heart and a desire to be involved in that type of work even more exclusively than he had been previously. The Lord opened a door for him and his family to move to London so that he could be involved in church planting and also where he could teach and train others to plant churches as well. While this book was being produced Barry was involved in five church planting projects and was also considering several other similar opportunities, so he has a wealth of experience in this kind of work.

The material in this volume is a summary of the teaching Barry gave in the radio programmes. It is our desire that as you read this booklet with your Bible opened before you the Lord will give you a vision for this vital work and encourage you to be involved in this important task yourself.

Derek French
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Introduction

As in all tasks the Lord's people are to be involved in we must turn to the Scriptures for instruction on Church planting. We shall be referring to a number of Bible passages throughout this book and one which will be referred to often is Acts chapter 17. There we have the account of Paul's planting of the church in Thessalonica and it will give us the basis for our studies.

This is what we read in Acts 17:1- 9

“When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: ‘These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come

here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.’ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.”

Chapter 1 - The Sower

For Church planting to begin there is the need for a suitable Church planter who will sow the Word of God in people's hearts as they take the gospel of Christ to them. In this chapter we consider the kind of person that is needed.

a. A burdened worker.

You need to have someone who has a desire to plant a church by preaching the gospel in a given area. In Thessalonica Paul was the sower along with Silas. The Church planter needs to have a conviction from the Lord that this is the work he wants him to do. When people come to know Christ through the preaching of his Word, the Church planter will need to lead them to covenant together to form a church. There is the need for a leader, someone with a burden and a desire for this matter of church planting

b. A godly worker.

Having a burden for the work is the first step because more is required. This leads us to consider the kind of person the Church planter should be. Sometimes it is suggested that as the Church planter is not necessarily going to be the pastor of the Church that is planted, they do not need to meet the same qualifications as a pastor, like those that are set out in Titus 1, and in 1 Timothy 3. However, so often a church planter does serve in a pastoral role for at least a period of time, and so he needs to be a man who is full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and a man whose character lends credibility to the church planting effort. A man of godly character is required. And it has always been so in the Lord's work. Church planting is not so much a matter of the chronological age of the worker but it definitely is a matter of spiritual maturity. We know from the New Testament record that Paul and Silas were certainly godly men. Also a measure of practical ability to be involved in the unique work of church planting is very useful for pioneering work.

Paul was a mature believer, well versed in the Scriptures when he came to Thessalonica. As he and Silas went into the synagogue, which was Paul's pattern at this time in his ministry, we read that he reasoned with the people out of the Scriptures and that he was speaking to them concerning Jesus as the Messiah. He had to have a level of understanding of the Scriptures in order to do that. To reason with someone means that you understand even the nuances of a truth or of a passage of Scripture, and so it is

very important for a church planter to be someone who has an understanding of the Scriptures that is growing and reflects that they have been with the Lord and that they have spent much time in his Word. Paul urged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

c. A distinction.

Having said that the Church planter must have a pastoral heart, there is none-the-less a distinction between the Church planter and a pastor. For instance Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”

Paul seems to have been very much a pioneer. He was what we would call today a missionary. He was a church planter whereas the role of giving further instruction from the Scriptures and further guidance and direction in growth and discipleship is something that is typically done by a pastor who is committed to be with a group of people over a longer period of time. The role of a church planter is described in another way in the opening verses of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. There he actually addressed this letter to the members of the church in this way in Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

The leaders of the church were the overseers (pastors) and deacons, but about himself Paul wrote

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus...”

So as church planters, Paul and Timothy were serving the Lord by going into a local area such as Philippi, by seeking to raise up a local membership with local leadership who would pastor the church on a longer term basis. So it seems that the church planter should definitely have a pastoral heart just in the same way that a pastor should have a pioneering spirit, but there is a distinction to be drawn between these two roles.

d. Team work.

An important thing to remember is that even when we work alone we should not work independently. Sometimes in church planting work we do work alone, but working alone and working independently are two different things. Even when we work alone, we should be under the authority of our local church that has overseers and deacons who are responsible for us in the Lord and ones that we are responsible and accountable to as well. To have their fellowship, prayers, guidance and support is so important. This is brought out for us when Paul, along with Barnabas, was sent out on his first Church planting or

missionary journey. At that time Paul was called Saul, and this is what we read in Acts 13:1-3

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

So we see that the Church in Antioch were the ones who, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sent Paul and Barnabas out to do this Church planting work. You can read the details of that journey in Acts 13 and 14. What is significant is what happened when they finished this task in Acts 14:26-27

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”

Undoubtedly having the prayers and support of the Antioch Church while on this journey would have been a real source of encouragement to these Church planters because their Church stood with them in the work. Likewise for the Church, when they heard of all that the Lord had done,

their hearts must have been filled with praise to the Lord. Church planting work is team work between the Church planter and their sending Church. Paul and Barnabas were accountable to their sending Church which was most refreshing.

e. Training

A church planter can certainly benefit from general theological training which might be gained through his home church or by correspondence course or attending Bible college, but he also needs some specific training and direction in the area of church planting and this is best achieved by working with a more experienced church planter. Paul had thirty different people in the New Testament who were his fellow workers and all of these were people who began by going **with** Paul. Encouragingly by end of their ministry many of them were going **for** Paul because they had been trained and mentored by him. There is huge value in ‘on the job’ training under a more experienced church planter.

d. Support

There are a number of areas of support needed by those involved in Church planting. Perhaps the first and most obvious is that they ought to be supported by prayer. This is something which their sending Church can encourage on a regular basis. The Church planter also needs to be supported financially. This is an issue that needs to be addressed straightforwardly and needs to be addressed

Scripturally. There are several ways that we could go about it. One is that the church planter could be self supported by the labour of his own hands. Paul at different times in his ministry plied his trade of tent making (see Acts 18:3). Indeed, over the centuries many of the Lord’s servants have done similarly. It is important to say that while Paul returned to his tent making trade to raise his own finance at times, he was always glad when he could exclusively devote his time to the ministry of God’s Word. And this leads on to the responsibility of the Church planter’s sending Church who really should take the bulk of the responsibility to financially support not only their pastor but also their missionary or Church planter. In John’s third letter he wrote about those who had gone out for the sake of the Name. John said his readers ought to support men like these. We need to say to our churches that if they are going to be involved in church planting they have to support it financially. There are instances in the New Testament where one church was not able to support a church planter fully so other churches in partnership shared this responsibility. It seems that the churches in the Lycas Valley at Colossae and Laodicea and Hieropolis tended to work this way. Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia admonished them to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). In Galatians 6:6 he specifically writes about the support of those in gospel ministry:

“Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.”

Paul deals with this in an extended way to the Corinthian Church in 1 Corinthians 9

“Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the ploughman ploughs and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

Financial support is often limited. Churches are often reluctant for whatever reason to become involved financially. Indeed, when Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he said in the fourth chapter that they were the only church that partnered with him in the matter of giving

and receiving. Paul had planted many churches and some of those churches had grown and were of sufficient size numerically and financially that they could have really helped, but it was the poor Macedonians who gave out of their poverty. Significantly so often it is small churches who have given sacrificially to support their pastor or their church planter. While this is to their credit, how sad that Churches who both could and should have helped financially did not do so. The Church planter needs the support of their home Church in as wide a way as possible.

Chapter 2 - The Seed

a. The Bible

The Church planter needs to have the right seed to sow, and that seed is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the message of the Scriptures from beginning to end. All of the Scriptures testify of Christ and so when the sower goes forth to sow, he goes bearing precious seed – the most precious seed of all – the seed of the Word of God in general and the seed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in particular.

b. The correct doctrine of the Bible

It is vital that the church planter has the right view of Scripture. This is important for two reasons:

- i. The Church planter is going to need to be able to defend the faith that has been once and for all delivered to the saints. This requires him to have confidence in the reliability of the Bible. In theological terms we speak of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. Each Church planter must believe in the full trustworthiness and reliability and authority of the Word of God.
- ii. The Church planter also needs to be convinced that the Bible is sufficient for the work God has called him into. He must be sure that it is adequate and that he does not need anything extra. It is this which will strengthen his own spiritual life and is also the very means through which he will aid the growth and development of others in Christ.

If the prospective Church planter does not believe the Bible is God's Word, he needs to find something else to do because his ministry will be more harmful and detrimental to the cause of Christ than beneficial. Church planting should only be undertaken by those who accept the full inspiration, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ, in his high priestly prayer in John 17, declared in v17 that God's Word is truth, and therefore we can depend on it completely and dare not alter it. Those who want to throw doubts on some parts of the Bible need to remember that Jesus himself accepted its historical reliability fully and completely. We dare not do otherwise.

c. Use all of Scripture

Knowing that all of Scripture is true raises this question, 'Are there parts of the Bible that are more suitable for a Church planter to use, or should he be someone who uses the whole breadth of Scripture?' Certainly a Church planter first and foremost is to give himself to the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is an evangelist. Although the New Testament begins with the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in reality there is only one gospel and it is communicated in the sixty six books of the Bible. So we cannot relegate the gospel just to the opening four books of the New Testament. There is one gospel and it is contained in Old and New Testaments alike. There are sixty six instalments, all of which are intended to help us to better understand it, and if we can begin to think this way it will help us. Mark Dever has helpfully said that the Old Testament is promises made and the New Testament is promises kept. In the Old Testament we see that Jesus is coming, in the New Testament we see Jesus has come and indeed is coming again. And so that is the great message we are to proclaim because it is the whole counsel of God.

One day Paul gathered the elders in the Ephesian Church at Miletus (Acts 20). He had been at Ephesus just about three years. In that period of time he had been involved in church planting that had spread even beyond Ephesus into the entire region. When he spoke to the elders there that day he said in Acts 20:26-27

“Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

If we want to be able to say that we are free from the blood of all men, we need to be able to say even as church planters that we have declared the whole counsel of God. In our passage in Acts 17 and the church plant at Thessalonica, it states specifically that Paul was reasoning with them out of the Scriptures. The only Scriptures that they would have had at that time would have been the Old Testament Scriptures. They were sacred writings that make us wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ. On the evening of the day when Christ rose from the dead he walked alongside two of his disciples who were travelling to Emmaus. Luke tells us what Jesus did in Luke 24:27

*“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said **in all the Scriptures** concerning himself.”*

Somebody has said it must have been the most wonderful sermon ever preached, and Jesus used all of the Old Testament to show that it foretold his coming and his sufferings and much more. He used the entire Scriptures, and so must we.

Having said that, there are perhaps some Scriptures which lend themselves to being a good starting point in church planting as you begin to preach. One of the books that is

particularly useful is the Gospel of Mark because you are aiming to reach people who have never heard the gospel. Mark can be divided into two main parts: the first eight chapters tell us about who Jesus is and the last eight chapters tell us why Jesus came. So working through Mark beginning with the first verse all the way through to the sixteenth chapter verse by verse you begin to give people a real understanding of who Jesus is and of why he came.

If you teach and preach expositionally through books of the Bible you will find that you are teaching and preaching the whole council of God. For instance, if you begin with working through Mark, you will discover many references to different Old Testament books and passages and will need to take your hearers to those. So by starting with Mark you are not setting aside any of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. It is important for us to begin to understand the New Testament in light of the Old. Let's take another example, this time from the Gospel written by John. In chapter 3:14-15 we discover Jesus said this to Nicodemus

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

Jesus was referring to the historical event recorded in Numbers 21 and so you will be able to show how you can actually see both the Old and New, the promise and the fulfilment, the symbol or the type and then the glorious reality that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

d. Bible exposition.

Expositional preaching might be a new concept for you. This is preaching which seeks to read out of the Biblical text what it actually says rather than reading into it one's own preconceived notions. Expounding a text is explaining it in light of its historical context, of its grammatical context, and even of its cultural context by delving into the actual content of that passage. The Bible expositor seeks to answer questions such as, 'What does this Bible passage actually say?' 'What does it mean by what it says?' In addition exposition is not complete without application so the expositor seeks to answer the question, 'How does the meaning of this Bible passage affect my conduct?' Really all preaching should seek to be expositional if we are going to handle the Scriptures correctly and let the Word of God direct both what we believe and how we behave.

Earlier we suggested working through Mark's Gospel as a good place to start, but it may be that you have never preached a series of messages before and the thought of having to work through sixteen chapters may seem too difficult. With that in mind, it might be good to start with a much shorter Bible book. One of those would be Paul's letter to Philemon. It has only twenty five verses and is one of the shortest letters in the New Testament. In it you have the wonderful story of how a run-away slave named Onesimus came to know the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of Paul during one of his imprisonments, and how after becoming a believer in Christ Paul helped him to

know what he ought to do next. Paul told him he needed to return to Colossae and to his master, Philemon. At the same time he sent this letter with him so that he could plead with Philemon to receive him, not as he would a returning slave but as he would a returning brother in Christ. It is a wonderful story of how the Lord Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man, enables us to be received by his heavenly Father. Because of the simplicity of its content almost anyone called to preach could take the book of Philemon and over a couple of meetings give their people a wonderful picture of the Gospel and also a wonderful example of some of the practical changes that salvation brings to our lives and to our relationships with others. It shows us how we sort out various wrong things from our past with the Lord's help. Philemon lived in Colossae and Paul wrote another letter to the church that met at Philemon's house and that is another short book, so you could move in to studying Colossians which deals with the pre-eminence of Christ.

Sometimes we can address topics, but when we do we ought to do so expositionally. We ought to take a text that deals with that topic and expound it. In the church planting situation this verse by verse consecutive ministry through books of the Bible will lay a good foundation for the pastor who will be coming along to nurture the new Church. When you are planting a church in an area, one of your first converts in that area may at some point in the future become the pastor of that church. If we look at the biblical precedence, we do not see any church outside of the church at Jerusalem that is planted with an established leadership

in place. There is none, and so it is after that work has been established, leaders begin to emerge from within that group. If you as a church planter have been modelling verse by verse, consecutive ministry through the Scriptures, this pastor in waiting is going to be taking all of this in and he will have that same commitment and that same approach when it is time for him to take the reins of pastoral leadership in the church.

e. The Church planter's personal Bible study.

This is so important and often neglected. Church planters are often very busy. There are not only the pressing responsibilities of the church plant itself, but sometimes they have to work to support themselves financially. These pressures on time can regretfully cause time spent in study of the Scriptures to suffer and it ought not to be so. A good suggestion that Barry King has made is that the church planter study the Scriptures in the same way that he is going to teach the Scriptures. Take a book of the Bible and read it straight through, and then go back to that same book and read through it a second time, this time asking some basic observation questions of the text, such as, 'Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?' He should really grapple with what the text actually says and then after having done that a second time work through the book a third time but this time writing down your observations, your thoughts, your impressions as you work through the book. Before long you will have worked through that book three times on your own and you will be much better able to take someone else through that book.

We have rightly stressed the importance of the Bible and proper study and use of it in this chapter, but that does not diminish the important area of prayer in the Church planter's life. Ideally the Church planter is to both study the Scriptures and pray. F.B. Meyer said on one occasion

"If you must choose between prayer and Bible study, choose Bible study because it is infinitely more important for you to hear what God has said than for God to hear what you have to say."

And so if the church planter will give himself to daily, devotional reading and study of Scripture then since he has studied this way, it will be much easier for him to preach this way and he will simply be showing people ground that he has already covered. This will be a great blessing to him as well as to the people he is teaching. Indeed, the Church planter will discover that his own study of the Scriptures will actually stimulate and guide him in prayer. Prayer and the times spent in the study of the Word are not competing with one another, they actually compliment one another. When we read the Scriptures God is speaking his Word to us and when we pray we are speaking God's Word to him. The most important thing that a church planter can do is to give himself to the reading and study of Scripture and bathe that in prayer. One writer has said, "Really it is not church planting at all but it is Christian planting. You take someone who is in the Word and in prayer and they are planted in an area and they begin to reproduce after their own kind." What a blessing.

Chapter 3 - The Soil

In our consideration of church planting work we have so far looked at two broad areas, namely the sower and the seed. By the sower we mean the kind of man who is to be the Church planter and the biblical requirements demanded of such a person. By the seed the Church planter is to sow we mean the Word of God. We need now to give consideration to the soil, the actual place where the Church planter is going to be preaching the gospel and aiming to plant a church. Where does the church planter need to go?

a. Seek the Lord

By 'soil' we mean the place where you are going to work and in particular the people you are going to reach with the gospel. Significantly Jesus used this concept of soil when he taught the parable of the sower (see Mark 4) he described the different types of soil that exist. He explained these were the different kinds of people we will meet in Church planting work and the different responses each make to the Word of God. At Thessalonica (Acts 17) Paul passed through two other places before coming there and settling into his Church planting work. So how do we determine which is the place to go? For Paul there was a synagogue in Thessalonica which would have been a good starting point as at least there were people who would have been familiar with the Old Testament. We do not have synagogues in every town and city and village these days, so we are in a different situation, so how do we determine where we ought to go?

Barry King has noted that it is quite normal for the Lord to put into our hearts the desire to go to a particular people. We read in Psalm 37:4

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

If we are reading his Word and if we are praying and if we are walking with him, and he gives us a desire to minister in a certain city or in a certain region of the country or amongst a certain people group then we should prayerfully take note of what the Lord is doing. We should do what Paul did in Acts 16. We read there that he tried to go to several places but God stopped him and directed him to Philippi. If the Lord has given a burden to reach a certain people we should proceed and wait for him to say no. He is able to do so providentially, as he did with Paul. If we have a desire to preach the gospel wherever he gives us the opportunity to do so, we probably will not go wrong in this area of finding the soil. For some the Lord will direct them to a village, whilst others to the towns. Being able to pray about this with your own Church leaders is vital as their fellowship and support will mean much as the Church planting project proceeds. Remember it is your Church who is to send you out.

b. Do research

When the Lord has given you a desire to take his Word to a certain people you should want to know as much as possible about them and the area. What is required is a

little bit of sanctified soil analysis so that you can know who these people are and what they are like. We are not going to change the gospel but we do need to consider how we can present the gospel to them in a way that will be very effective and we trust by God's grace very fruitful. Doing background research also helps us in praying for these people as we discover their spiritual needs.

If in our research we then discover there are other churches present in the town then we need to carefully take that into consideration. We need first to see if these are Biblical churches who preach the gospel. This is done by visiting them and if there is a pastor by meeting with him to share the burden that we have, and seeking to discern how they are trying to go about impacting the lost in their particular town or city. It could be that it is already an established church that is very biblical in its orientation. Indeed, it could be that they have been praying that God would send someone with evangelistic gifts, with pioneering abilities to help forward the work there and in reality they could be an answer to your prayers and you could be an answer to theirs as well. We will need to ask questions to see if it is a church that patterns itself on the teaching of the Bible. If so you might do well to join them and help them in the work of spreading the gospel that they are already doing. You may sadly find that this is not a Biblical Church where Christ is not honoured and the gospel is not preached and the Scriptures are not loved and cherished. It might be a church that has unbelievers in its membership, and which even denies parts of the Scriptures. If that is so then you can plant a new church in that place in good conscience

that you are not competing with them because their whole approach is completely different from the Scriptures and you are not doing the same work and you are not doing it in the same way. But if you come to an area and there is already an established biblical church and in consultation with them you really find no scope for additional church planting work in that area, do not despair. There are untold hundreds of places that still need the work and ministry that God has placed in your heart to perform and you have probably gained yourself an ally by approaching this existing church first. They may be a means of helping you go into an area you have not discovered yet and begin the work of church planting there.

Before leaving this issue of the soil we need to consider two questions. First, are there too many churches in some areas indicating you should not go there but look elsewhere? Second, is it possible for an area to be too small to plant a church? Answering the first question takes some discernment. It is certainly possible for there to be many Churches who are doing a God honouring and Christ centred work and are effectively reaching their area. In such a case it would be wise to seek a place where there are no or very few Churches. What is important to remember is that just because there may be buildings with signs saying the people who meet in them are Churches, sadly it does not necessarily mean they are true Churches. Someone who lived in such an area has said, 'You will see many church signs here but very few signs of the church.' What we need to do is sensitively look not just at the outside but a little bit beneath the surface to make sure if it

is a true Biblical Church. We might see that sometimes it's possible to have a church building without actually having a biblical church. The second question about whether an area is too small in which to plant a Church likewise needs careful thought. If you are expecting to have a large Church with its own building and busy programme each week from the start, then you are going to be disappointed. But if you begin to understand that wherever even a small group of people have covenanted together under God and under the authority of his Word they should have a biblical church. Further, the Lord has often worked in small insignificant places and over time has establish a Church with just a few believers to start with, but which has grown to have a much wider influence as time has gone by. We often do not see things in the same way that the Lord does, so we should not despise the day of small things.

Chapter 4 - The Holy Spirit

Although this is our fourth chapter in many ways it could have been the first, because it is really the most important of all. In every aspect of Church planting we need the help and the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Without his aid and blessing all our best efforts and our most diligent work will be in vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.

a. **The Holy Spirit's work is essential.**

The Holy Spirit is involved in all aspects of Church planting. For example, it is the Holy Spirit who calls out the sower. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the seed. It is the Holy Spirit which cultivates the soil. In Church planting we are utterly dependant on him. In Thessalonica where Paul and Silus were so mightily used in a relatively short time, it is said that after they had preached the gospel and proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ in Acts 17:4

“Some of the Jews were persuaded...”

It was the Holy Spirit who had graciously worked in their hearts and minds and had lovingly persuaded them of the truth of the gospel. Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts and minds of those whom God has chosen to be his own. It was the Holy Spirit who granted them the gifts of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Church he confirmed this in 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

*“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, **with the Holy Spirit** and with deep conviction.”*

b. The Holy Spirit calls the Church planter.

Clearly the apostle Paul was wonderfully led by the Spirit of God. We have already mentioned how in Acts 16 Paul tried to go to several places with gospel but the Holy Spirit prevented him. This continued until he had a special vision one night when a man from Macedonia begged him to come there (Acts 16:6-10) resulting in Paul going to plant a Church in Philippi and beyond. The question for us to consider is, is this is the normal way the Holy Spirit calls someone into church planting work? Our use of the term 'special vision' perhaps gives the clue to the fact this is not the normal way in which the Spirit of God guides his people. Let us consider some basic principles about the way God guides his people generally and that might help us to have a better understanding of how he guides church planters more particularly. We begin by noting that God does guide his people and we are so thankful for the leadership, direction and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that ordinarily God guides his people by his Spirit through his Word, not by miraculous signs. Those times recorded in Scripture where the Holy Spirit did guide in that unusual way were exceptional so we must not consider them as the norm. Yes, it is true that occasionally God will confirm his guidance through means of some sign or vision, **but** the absence of these is no excuse for disobedience because God's normal way of guiding his people is through his Spirit, by his Word. If God has commanded us to do something in his Word we do not need any special or extraordinary means of

guidance, but simple obedience to what God has clearly stated in the Bible.

Often when guidance is under consideration many will mention the Old Testament character Gideon, one of the judges. The details of his ministry are found in Judges 6-8. When the Lord first called Gideon to serve him it is pointed out that he asked God to confirm his guidance in an exceptional way by giving him a sign, and he asked more than once. He asked God to make the fleece of a lamb he would place on the ground to be soaking wet the following morning while the ground was dry. This was granted. Then he asked for the reverse to be the case, for the ground to be wet and the fleece dry. This was granted also. Many have used this incident to suggest the passage is teaching us that we should seek signs from God in this miraculous way. But if we look at the context Gideon was not laying the fleece because he was trying to discern the will of God because God had already spoken to him. His Word had made it abundantly clear what God wanted him to do. Instead, Gideon was laying the fleece because he doubted the Word of God! We must not forget that Jesus said it is a wicked generation that seeks after a sign (Luke 11:29). If we are going to say we are not going to be involved in evangelism and church planting until God does something spectacular and out of the ordinary we really are failing to take account of the commands God has already given us in his Word. We can add further that the Lord has already done the most spectacular and miraculous thing of all. He has taken on human flesh and he has dwelt among men and lived the life we could not live. He died

the death we deserved to die and in his resurrected body he gave his disciples this commission to go into all the world (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). He has already told us to go and so we are simply obeying the words of our Lord, the command of our master when we go. We do not need special experiences before we engage in evangelism because it is a simple matter of our obedience to the commands of God already given. The Bible has the authority of God behind it and it is through this book that he instructs us.

Having said that, it is also true that those who are to be engaged in Church planting work do need to be aware that the Holy Spirit has directed them to this particular form of ministry, because it brings its own demands. The question we now have to answer is how does someone know God is calling them to be a church planter or God is calling them to be a pastor? When Paul was writing to Timothy he said in 1 Timothy 3:1

“If any one sets his heart (or desires) on being an overseer...”

It is just as we have said in chapter 1 of this book that the Lord must give a desire for this work. We must ask, ‘Has he given me a burden for this task?’ If he has then it is the responsibility of our Church to assess our character, to see whether or not we have a life that is consistent with this desire. Character qualities must precede gifts and abilities. It is not that God calls the gifted, but that God gifts the called, and those called will have a godly character. Paul

did not minimise the desire a Church planter should have to preach. He indicates that desire was a necessary ingredient. So if you desire to do this work then your character and spiritual maturity and your own personal walk with the Lord and how you are viewed both by people within the church as well as outside the church, must come under scrutiny. Further, if that desire is there and if you are suitably qualified biblically in terms of character and reputation, then you can reasonably expect that you are going to have gifts and ability. A person called by God to be a Church planter will already be involved in the life and ministry of their sending Church. As they begin to go out and begin to get their hands dirty in the work, then the other believers will begin to see the hand of God on that person and recognise God has set them aside and has called them to this work.

Barry King expresses it like this:

“Sometimes when people ask, ‘How is the fullness of the Spirit manifested?’ or ‘How can you discern when the Spirit is at work in someone’s life?’ then we are looking for all the wrong things such as remarkable gifts and abilities. If the Holy Spirit is really at work in someone’s life we ought first thing to look at their family, their relationship to their wife and their relationship to their children. We need to look at their own personal walk with the Lord. We need to look at the reputation that they have both within the congregation as well as even with outsiders. We should see the Holy Spirit’s work in conforming this

person's character to the likeness of Christ. Maybe not so much speaking in an unknown tongue but learning to control the one tongue that they have. Sometimes we look at all sorts of things that really are quite peripheral and we miss the things that are most essential. The heart of the matter is often left completely out of the equation."

c. The Holy Spirit changes the lives of our listeners.

As mentioned earlier, when Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the Church that he planted in Acts 17, he said to them in the first chapter of his first letter that he had come to them not in word only but with power and with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people try to draw a strong line of distinction between the Word and the Spirit when in reality it is the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Word of God and who inspires the preaching of the Word of God. When we come, we do not come as professors to give a lecture but we come as preachers to deliver a message and that message is from the Word of God and it is empowered by the Spirit of God and it has the wonderful work of affecting life change and transformation in the hearts of those who hear it. Peter confirms this by telling us that it is the Word that the Holy Spirit uses. We are born again through the Word and Jesus says we are born again through the Holy Spirit and the two are just inseparable. (See 1 Peter 1:23 and John 3:3-8.)

There are so many examples in the Bible of people whose lives God changed. In Acts 16 Lydia became a follower of Christ because (Acts 16:14)

"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

The Holy Spirit of the living God was at work and she repented and placed her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptised. Really the Church at Philippi was actually planted in her house and amongst the members of her household. Another transformed life in Philippi was the jailor. During a dramatic earthquake he was brought to cry out in Acts 16:30,

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

So we see the Holy Spirit at work in a seemingly quiet way in the conversion of Lydia by just opening her heart and then in a much more dramatic way the conversion of the Philippian jailor. It was all the Holy Spirit's work from start to finish and it is meant to be that way because then we can take no credit and we cannot glory in ourselves or in our abilities but we can just say this is God's work and it is marvellous in our eyes.

d. A danger to avoid

Knowing we are absolutely dependant on the Holy Spirit has wrongly led some to think, 'As it is the Holy Spirit who called me and it is the Holy Spirit who will work in

people's hearts, I do not need therefore to prepare messages or to study the Scriptures or do anything to point others to Christ. All I need to do is to just wait and rely on the Holy Spirit. In fact the opposite is to be the case. Knowing we are completely dependant on the Holy Spirit then we should prepare more than anyone else. The Church planter is going to labour harder and longer than anyone else. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10

*“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, **I worked harder than all** of them yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”*

It is not that we should use our dependence or our reliance on the Holy Spirit as an excuse for our own inactivity and laziness, or our own lack of preparation or zeal in the Lord's service. Instead it is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit that drives us forward and propels us into those areas. Indeed in 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul wrote to Timothy

*“**Do your best** to present yourself to God as one approved, **a workman** who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

The Bible teaches that our dependence on the Holy Spirit will drive us to study the Word of God more.

e. **Evidence to look for.**

In Church planting it is essential that we look for the evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work in the heart of someone who has been listening to the gospel being preached. This is important because Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21 that

“Not everybody who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven”

So how do we discern when there is a real genuine work of God's Spirit in the heart of an unbeliever bringing them to genuine faith in Christ?

There are a number of answers to that question, and one of the first evidences of the Spirit's work is in a person's attention to the preaching and teaching of God's Word and in their desire for heartfelt obedience to the Word of God. It is not merely an emotional response that results in a person making a decision for Christ, but it is a response of the entire being that results in a person becoming a disciple. A person in whose life the Holy Spirit is working, is going to have a real hunger and thirst for righteousness. God himself has created this hunger and thirst within them and has given with it the promise that if they hunger and thirst after righteousness they will be filled. This gives them a desire to hear his Word and know his Word and obey his Word. They come to a realisation of their own inability to obey the Word of God and they recognise their own need of full dependence upon the Holy Spirit. When

Paul was writing to the church at Philippi, he gave them tremendous examples of humility. First, the example of Jesus, and then later the example of Timothy and at the end the example of Epaphroditus. In Philippians 2:12-13 he then gives this exhortation to obedience

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed— not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence— continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

We see in these verses what we find in the heart of a person where the Holy Spirit has been at work. They are going to recognise keenly their responsibility to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Such a person will be exercising repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why it is essential for Church planters to have a Word centred ministry where they actually feed the people with the Word of God and preach the gospel which is the Word of truth. We do not have to use gimmicks that only entertain the people in order to gather a crowd. God’s Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Word of God in power that produces a real life change and this is what we should pray for and seek in the lives of our hearers. When Paul talked about the effect of the Spirit’s ministry on the people of Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 he said

“...you turned from idols to serve the living and true God”

This was not some superficial emotional high that soon evaporated, but something so dramatic that they actually turned from the worship of idols to worship the one and true living God. When we began to see genuine Holy Spirit produced repentance it will result in lives being changed. We should not be as interested in how many people came and how much money they gave as we are in how many people’s lives are being changed and transformed by the in-working power of the Holy Spirit of God. This will result in the fruit of the Holy Spirit being produced in them. Galatians 5:22-25

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Chapter 5 - Suffering

a. Suffering will come.

In Acts 17 when Paul was at Thessalonica, while there was a wonderful work of God’s grace in the hearts of many of the people, there was another reaction in others, namely opposition to the message Paul preached that resulted in suffering. The unbelieving Jews became jealous and filled with envy turned against the believers. They basically

incited a riot and they ultimately had Jason and some of the others who were serving as host to Paul and Silas brought before the political officials accusing them of turning the world upside down. They alleged they were proclaiming that there is another God other than Caesar and this resulted in real suffering and Paul and Silas had to escape at night time to Berea. On arriving they began the same type of work there in the synagogue when the Jews from Thessalonica followed them to Berea and continued to stir up strife and dissention against them. There was real suffering. Every Church planter must take this into account. Opposition and suffering for the Lord's sake is something we must be prepared to face. But what we must do when that happens is to remember the precious promise of Romans 8

“We know that in all things God works for the good to those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”

We see this worked out in numerous places in Scripture. One example is when Paul was in prison in Rome. The Philippian Church were deeply distressed about this but Paul was able to write to them that his imprisonment had turned out to the furtherance of the gospel. Paul was in deep affliction, but God was using that for the spread of his kingdom. God can make providential use of our suffering even to advance his purposes and so it is not a question of whether or not suffering will happen, but it is a question of what form it will take. The Scriptures tell us plainly that all who live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer

persecution; it is a part of the package (2 Timothy 3:12). Particularly when we are involved in front line evangelism and church planting work and pushing back the boundaries of darkness, we can expect to have much suffering.

b. Kinds of suffering.

Typically this persecution is going to come from religious authorities. We see this happened in Thessalonica because it was the Jews who did not believe who were stirring up all of this opposition. In addition, the political authorities may cause a lot of difficulty. However, almost invariably the end result is that the progress of the gospel is enhanced. An example is found in Acts 8:1 when many of the Jerusalem believers were scattered after the stoning of Stephen, and wherever they went and shared the gospel, churches were planted that might not otherwise have been planted had there not been a measure of suffering.

On a personal level there is other suffering involved in church planting. Sometimes church planting, just because of the pioneering nature of the work, can be very lonely and sometimes people can suffer greatly as a result of this loneliness. There often are times of real financial difficulty. We want to preach the gospel freely, but sometimes if we are not able to work to support ourselves or if our level of support from our sponsoring church is not sufficient or sometimes if it does not actually reach us in a timely way and manner we can enter some real financial difficulty. What is really tough about this is that we know we need to give a very positive impression of the gospel to

everyone that we have anything to do with. Having unpaid debts and not being able to sort our finances out properly harms people's view of our integrity and that affects their receptiveness to the gospel. So we sometimes suffer not only the financial difficulty but also that spiritual burden that we carry could reflect poorly upon us and upon the gospel.

Sometimes there is the suffering that comes from misunderstanding. Sometimes people do not understand our motives and so they question our reasons or attribute to us motives that we do not actually have. Sometimes in church planting they think we are trying to build our own kingdom, but in reality we are trying to build the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to rest in the fact that over and above all the opposition and hatred of men and the devil, we have a sovereign heavenly Father who controls all things for his glory and our good. We cannot fully understand all of God's ways during times of suffering, but we can rest assured he knows what he is doing with our lives. Remember even the devil cannot do to us anything except what our loving heavenly Father allows him to, so we know whatever kind of suffering we may have to face in gospel work the Lord is going to use this for our profit and his praise.

I remember one of God's servants sharing with me once that an area where he and his family were vulnerable to opposition was attacked on his children. He said that if it had been attacks on him he could have taken it easier but the fact that his children were being singled out was really,

really hard. He felt the only way he could overcome that was by just crying to the Lord for help and for protection and for strength to carry on, and the Lord in his mercy did uphold them even though their whole family suffered.

There is a real price to be paid and that is why the church planter should either be single or should have a family that is fully engaged in the work so that the family can be a source of strength and encouragement to one another when suffering comes. We remember our Lord Jesus Christ and his sufferings on our behalf on the cross and we would not for a minute say that the servant is greater than the master, so if our master suffered these things then it should not surprise us that we must suffer too. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:29

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...”

The Apostle Paul, perhaps the most prolific church planter, had these difficulties. For instance, there was John Mark who started on the first missionary journey but then turned back – how discouraging. Or consider the man Demas that he identified in Philemon 24 as one of his fellow workers. Later in 2 Timothy 4:10 he had to write that Demas had deserted him because he loved this present world. Then when he made his first defence in Rome he said no one stood with him, but everyone had left him. However he was able to say in 2 Timothy 4:17

“But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.”

Even in our darkest moments we need to remember that no true believer is ever alone, for the Lord is with us always to the very end of the age. Someone once said that God never uses a man greatly until he first hurts him deeply and there is definitely a measure of truth to that statement. We often see that God’s servants walk with a limp because they have had those experiences of suffering that the Lord has used to more fully conform them to Christ and to actually make them fit and more useful for the work that he has given them to do.

c. When to go, when to stay.

The great temptation when suffering comes is to forsake our calling and escape. Now this needs great wisdom because there were times in the New Testament when Paul and his companions had to escape, and did so, but they never forsook their calling and continued to preach the gospel. On some occasions they actually revisited the places where they had suffered most. But the call to Church planting includes in it the willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ. We should stand firm in the midst of suffering just like Epaphroditus who actually endangered his own life in order that he might faithfully carry out the charge that the Philippian church had given him to deliver support to Paul. We should be like those that the Scriptures speak of and hazard our lives for the sake of

Christ. There are parts of the world where the people have to be baptised in secret in the jungle in order to escape public notice because it may be illegal to be baptised and to publically profess faith in Christ. There are pastors who have been beaten by religious leaders because they were preaching the true gospel. There are servants of God who have had to spend time in prison because of their preaching but yet they continued faithful and steadfast.

It is helpful to think of Church planting like this. You go to a place where the people do not want you to be and stay until they do not want you to leave. This is what Paul did when he went to Ephesus (Acts 19). They did not want him to be there and the whole city had been set in an uproar and had this tremendous riot. It was a terrible situation and if Paul had gone into the crowd as he wanted to, they would probably have torn him apart but later, some of those same people came to repentance and faith. Some became leaders and were among the elders of the Ephesian church when Paul spoke with them at Miletus and told them he would not see their faces again. They wept and embraced him because they had come to love him so much. He had gone to a place where people did not want him to be and he had stayed until people did not want him to leave.

Sometimes, especially when there has been the Lord’s blessing on the work and a church has been established and is growing with new converts regularly being added to the membership; the Church planter may think he could stay in that place and take things easy for a while. Or he may have similar blessing and think that there is no one else in the

new church who could handle leadership responsibility so he thinks he will stay on as the pastor and give up his call to Church planting. Very often success is harder to handle than adversity. What should the Church planter do? Barry King suggests this should be our approach. First and foremost a church planter is a servant of Jesus Christ. He should then seek to develop the local membership of the new Church so that out of it will come a local leadership that will instruct these believers in the principles of biblical stewardship and he should stay until that is done, regardless of the difficulty that he might face. But when that is done and there is a local membership and they do have local leaders and they understand the principles of biblical stewardship, the church planter should move on to the next place and begin that work again and leave that work there in the hands of local leadership. There is also the danger of leaving a work too soon where someone goes into an area and does not see the new Church established properly then they leave before they have completed their task properly. Sometimes these hit and run tactics are because of the pride of the church planter who wants to be able to tell to his supporters he has planted so many churches. However, when they do this the new believers are left there like sheep without a shepherd with no one to help them and guide them into the precious truths of our salvation in Christ which is so gloriously detailed in Scripture. It appears sometimes that that approach is more to bolster the church planter's ego than it is to actually strengthen and foster spiritual growth and development in the lives of the people. These are not our people but the Lord's. They are the sheep of his pasture and we are to

lovingly feed them the Word of God. We are to lovingly lead them to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of God's Word. And we are, if necessary, to bleed for them. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, and we have to be prepared to stay as long as the work requires.

One of the dangers linked with the need to raise up a local leadership from the church, is that for the Church planter to think others cannot do the preaching and pastoring as well as he can and so he convinces himself he cannot leave them in the care of such leaders. The truth of the matter is they probably cannot do it like the Church planter, but they can do it as well as the Church planter can do it. If they have been properly taught and if the Church planter has walked with them and modelled for them, not just through word but also deed, then it will be amazing how they are going to blossom and flourish. The Church planter's continued presence might actually stifle their growth and their development and if he is absent it will give them the opportunity to grow and develop. By leaving at the right time the Church planter is not forgetting them, nor forsaking them, nor walking off never to return again. Often we see Paul and his co-labourers returning to the places where they had been. Acts 14:21-23 is such an example

“They (that is Paul and Barnabas) preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to

remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

They made sure that what they had seen had been a real work of God's Spirit and they saw it really stood the test of time, and we should do similarly. A lot of the time we cannot know that unless we do leave. Sometimes it can be inverted pride that makes us stay too long. Other times it can mask our own personal insecurities and our own feelings of inadequacy, especially if we know deep in our heart we have not done a good job of training up those who will follow us in leadership. Maybe we have done too much ourselves and taken more on ourselves than was wise. And deep down we know that and we say if we leave, it will show that too much of it has been built around us and not enough of it around the Lord Jesus Christ and the principles and teachings of his Word. We need to search our hearts to see if there is any wrong motive within us, and then by God's grace to put that right. We have the great encouragement of Scripture that the Lord will honour us as we seek to honour him, and we are so dependent on him for that work.

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