

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HOMEGROWN PASTORS: SEVEN TIMELESS REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER
STARTING A CHURCH IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

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LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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ABSTRACT

HOME GROWN PASTORS: SEVEN TIMELESS REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD
CONSIDER STARTING A CHURCH IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

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This thesis is an investigation into the advantages of planting churches in the lead planter's hometown. According to Dr. Jim Slack, missiologist for the International Mission Board, "The only feasible and viable means of planting enough churches to gain on the yearly population gains and the primarily unchurched/unsaved basic population is to plant indigenous, generationally multiplying neighborhood, 'house' churches initiated by neighborhood laymen who can pastor those new churches."¹ This claim is reinforced by the understanding that the best person to reach a national is a national within that people group who already possesses valuable connecting resources through family and friends. As a church continues to plant other churches, it will help the leaders identify and train future indigenous planters. A survey of 25 recent and experienced pastors who have stayed in their hometowns will be examined. The potential advantages of networking afforded to them because of their status will be addressed. The survey will seek to illustrate seven key reasons why pastors should consider planting a church in their hometowns.

Abstract Length: 171 Words

¹ Jim Slack, "Doing the Math!" on *Lostness in the United States Based on Copngregational and Affiliate Growth from 1990 to 2000 A.D.* (Global Research Department of International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, March 14, 2008) (accessed March 1, 2012).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SBCV – Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia

CPN- Church Plant Network

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago as a new church planter, the author was attending a Church Plant Network (CPN) sponsored by the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV) at the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. As Dr. Jim Slack, missiologist in the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, spoke on the deficit of churches to population growth, the author became aware that the church was losing numerically in its effort to evangelize the lost in a manner that would hasten the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The numbers awakened passion, urgency, and resolve as church planters were encouraged that they must plant other churches if a difference were to be seen in our lifetime. While the mood of the meeting that day was somber as the numbers were presented, the facts did awaken a room full of church planters who knew that they could make a difference by planting more churches and raising up more leaders to go into the harvest field.

Not only was the need for more churches awakened, the need to have them quickly was also made evident. If seminary and cross-cultural training were a prerequisite before churches could be planted, there was just not enough time to reach the lost and make a difference. Dr. Slack asserted that the best solution to the problem would be to raise up indigenous lay leaders within existing churches to plant more churches. Certainly seminary educations are important, but the local church has the tools and the ability at her disposal to get these church planters on

the field within a reasonable amount of time. In addition, with the recent boom in online seminary education and practical training through effective CPNs, receiving proper education is not an obstruction to begin planting churches immediately.

Through a partnership with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, the writer was able to obtain invaluable advice and learn the necessary skills to lead a church plant in his hometown. After ten years of ministry in his hometown, the author is convinced that more church planters should consider returning to their hometowns to start a church. He is also convinced that hometown church planting can make a difference in the ratio of churches to population growth more swiftly, realizing a greater impact on lostness within a reasonable amount of time. Not only may churches be planted more swiftly, but the overall health and experience of the church planter may be rewarded if he were to plant a thriving church in his hometown.

The Statement of the Problem

In 2008, Dr. Jim Slack published an article entitled “‘Doing the Math!’ on Lostness in the United States Based on Congregational and Affiliate Growth from 1990 to 2000 A.D.”¹ His conclusion was an astonishing eye opener to the evangelical church: “As the unchurched/unsaved population continues to rise, compared to the few new churches planted and their new members, the number of new churches needed to gain on the lost population continues to rise to staggering levels annually.”² In essence, evangelical churches in America face an astronomical challenge in reaching the lost and discipling the saved as more and more people are born. Slack states, “The only feasible and viable means of planting enough churches to gain on the yearly population gains and the primarily unchurched/unsaved basic population is to plant

¹Jim Slack, *“Doing the Math!” on Lostness in the United States Based on Copngregational and Affiliate Growth from 1990 to 2000 A.D.* (Global Research Department of International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, March 14, 2008), (March 1, 2012).

²Slack.

indigenous, generationally multiplying neighborhood, ‘house’ churches initiated by neighborhood laymen who can pastor those new churches.”³ Cultural and contextual training for church planters who feel called to plant outside of their contextual hometown may realize an unnecessary extended amount of time in the process of planting more effective churches. Sending church planters back to their hometown to start a church can make a difference in this staggering number. The mandate is clear for the evangelical church: Wake up and empower indigenous church planters to plant more churches in their context of ministry. There is a physical urgency because death is the end of the opportunity to use our free will; after this life all of our decisions will be final and it will be too late to make a decision for Christ.⁴

In addition, Dave Olson, Director of Church Planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church says that “3,200 churches close their doors each year in America, while 3,600 new churches, that ultimately survive, are started each year.”⁵ In order to keep up with the current population growth during that same period, we would have needed a net gain of 38,802 churches. Clearly we are losing ground with each passing year and we have a strong evangelistic deficit in America that will best be answered by starting new churches.⁶ Since time is of the essence, starting new churches in the context of hometowns must be considered as an option for church planters. The start-up process may be faster, the networking more explosive, and the general cost may be much less expensive than a parachute launch into an unknown community. As Ronnie

³Slack.

⁴Ronnie Floyd. *Our Last Great Hope: Awakening the Great Commission* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 61.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ron Sylvia, *Starting New Churches on Purpose*, (Lake Forest, CA: Purpose Driven, 2006), 20-21.

Floyd, pastor of Cross Church, located in Northwest, AK, states, “The most exciting and miraculous result of any investment of church time and resources lies in the planting of new churches. We need many thousands of new churches to be planted, and we need them immediately.”⁷ The mandate is clear and the sense of urgency cannot be overstated for the need of more church plants with a church-planting DNA.

George Barna heads a polling and research group that specializes in findings about spirituality and people’s views of the church; he recently completed five thousand interviews from which he isolated six great themes:

1. Theological literacy is plummeting in the church.
2. Churches are becoming more ingrown and less interested in reaching out to others.
3. Members want “practical” formulas rather than profound spiritual truth.
4. Christians are showing more interest in community action.
5. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is gaining ground quickly among Christians.
6. Christianity is having near-zero impact on the surrounding culture.⁸

⁷ Floyd, 190-91.

⁸ Ibid., 32.

Themes two and six stand out as to why more churches are needed in an urgent manner. Planting churches in a planter's hometown will hasten the process of reaching the lost and establish a gospel community more quickly than if years of planning, cultural training, and networking are needed. The church must have an impact on its surrounding culture and the best and most effective way to do this is to send gospel-minded hometown church planters back into their communities to start new churches.

The Statement of Limitations

The thrust of this study will be to place emphasis on the urgency of the task and the need for church planters to see the possible advantage of starting a church in their hometown. This study will attempt to bring insight and understanding as to why pastors should consider whether God might be calling them to return to their hometown for the purpose of planting a church there in the midst of childhood friends and family. For research purposes, "hometown" will refer to an area where the planter grew up or spent the majority of his formal schooling years. In addition, hometown would refer to an area where the planter has a significant family and friend base that could prove to be a great advantage in starting a gospel-centered church. The researcher understands that God calls the pastor to start a new church and that the location will be confirmed by God just as strongly as the call is given. The researcher also understands that there are sometimes reasons why planters should not return to their hometowns. This thesis will not attempt to examine those or to study the success of planters who have planted outside of their

hometown and are doing phenomenal works in other cities; it will simply give seven reasons why a church planter should first consider planting in his hometown.

The researcher also accepts that the term “hometown” has become more and more difficult to define as we see more military and traveling families who have spent their whole lives going from base to base and town to town. In these cases, the very minimum would be to encourage church planters to know who they are and to commit to reaching people like them. This would eliminate costly cultural training and, in some cases, language barriers that could take years to overcome. For most people, however, hometown is an identifiable city or town. This paper is written as a blend of biblical principles of ministry and personal experience. It is not an arrogant expression of the writer having “arrived,” but rather as a reflection of his desire to see more church planters consider their hometowns as a great place to start a church.

The Theoretical Basis for the Project

The urgency of the Gospel is to reach people before they die so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If there were no end to life, time would not be a factor and there would be no sense of urgency to the task at hand. If time were not a factor, there would be no point in having concern for unbelievers since they would live forever; there would be no need to evangelize. However, if as Carl F. H. Henry declares, “The Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time,” then the church must ascribe not only to a theology of evangelization, but also to a theology of urgency. The church must share the Gospel and it must share the Gospel in time. If the amount of time that an individual

has on earth could be identified, it would be known exactly when that person needed to make a decision for the Gospel and it could be shared and a timely decision made. However, the unknown factor of time creates a challenge that shakes the evangelical resolve. Not only does the church have the task of evangelizing, it has the task of doing it “before the deadline.” Rescue personnel know that time is a factor for physical emergencies and that they must rush to get there before it is too late. Are Christians not rescuers and have they not realized that time is running out? In the New Testament, the church is called to make proclamation of the things that God has done urgently, boldly, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This proclamation would then be followed by inviting people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The church’s desire is that every man, woman, boy, and girl will hear the Gospel and make a decision that will allow them to be living in the light of heaven before they die. Jesus states in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”⁹ The full and abundant life begins at the moment of salvation, the moment of rebirth. The sooner the rebirth occurs, the sooner this abundant life can begin to happen for the new believer. Not only is eternal life good for the afterlife, it is also good for this life. The church has a moral and biblical responsibility to proclaim the answer to this dilemma in a timely manner.

In the meantime, infected people are leaving this world, dying without a cure. The sense of urgency for the patients to be exposed to the remedy quickly is overwhelming. The solution is planting enough churches and doing enough evangelizing to get the Gospel to the world in time. As Ronnie Floyd states:

⁹John 10:10 (New King James Version).

I believe the message of the Bible that tells us there is a heaven and a hell. I believe that the sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have made it possible for as many people to be rescued as we are willing to attempt. I believe there are limitations of time and opportunity, and that the vital signs of the world and the church indicate that we have one last great hope—to awaken the Great Commission in all His disciples. Therefore I have a sense of urgency, and I want to recruit other rescue workers who share it. The task is staggering: to present the gospel to every corner of this planet and to make disciples of the nations. With such a colossal goal and so little time, we need millions of committed, Spirit-filled Christians working together with a passion for evangelism and a dedication never to stop until we have finally obeyed the command of Jesus.¹⁰

Was there ever anyone in the Bible who was specifically told to go home and share the good news? Could location be just as important as calling? The story is told in Mark 5:1-20 of a crazy demoniac who has been tormenting the town for years. Over the years, there have been attempts to tame the demoniac but his strength was too much for the chains and he would break them. This man was quite a sight to behold: riddled, wild and boisterous, wailing in the hills, and causing quite a scene when Jesus showed up. He must have been a mess, covered in blood due to his own self-mutilation. Even after the Lord freed him from the demonic possession, he probably felt embarrassed, unworthy, and very unlikely to succeed where he was at. Starting a new life somewhere else, away from those who knew him so well, might have made more sense to him. Likewise, the lost soul who grows up in his hometown, ranting and raving, causing trouble and becoming well known as quite a rouser has a reputation, good or bad, just like the demoniac whose identity was known throughout the town. People may talk about that pre-Jesus devilish reputation, especially the righteous and religious rulers in the town who could not “clean him up.”

¹⁰Floyd, 56.

The day the demoniac meets Jesus changes everything as Jesus casts out the source of the problem. The Bible says in verse 15, "...the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, was sitting and clothed and in his right mind."¹¹ This encounter with Jesus made all of the difference in this man's life and changed his personality, and eventually his reputation.

After this encounter, Jesus got into the boat to leave. Verse 18 states, "...he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him."¹² This man's desire to stay with Jesus and physically be with the one who had changed his life was natural. It would make sense for Jesus to disciple him so that he could really make a difference in the world. But the Bible says, "Jesus did not permit him."¹³ Jesus had a better and more effective plan than what the demoniac had. What could possibly be more important than getting in the boat with Jesus? Jesus reveals to him a different purpose and location, where the man's testimony would have a greater impact. His ultimate destination for this changed man is revealed in verse 19: "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."¹⁴ Jesus wanted the demoniac to "go home." That was where he was to evangelize and share the good news of the Savior. God knew a much better place for this demoniac to do his missionary work.

This story shows how the place God calls an individual to is just as important as the calling itself. How effective was the demoniac in his hometown? Verse 20 gives us the result of his missionary effort: "And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had

¹¹Mark 1:15 (NKJV).

¹²Mark 1:18 (NKJV).

¹³Mark 1:19 (NKJV).

¹⁴Mark 1:19 (NKJV).

done for him; and all marveled.”¹⁵ This unlikely convert without any formal training or seminary work returned to his hometown and proclaimed the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

To be a missionary for Christ, in the region he was so well known and so long dreaded was a far nobler calling than to follow Jesus where nobody had ever heard the demoniac’s story, and where other individual testimonies, no less illustrious, could be raised by the same power and grace.¹⁶ Jesus already knew the targeted people group for this new missionary to reach. Targeting is actually a process of determining who the planter can most effectively reach first, but welcoming all seekers and expecting target groups to multiply as the church grows.¹⁷ This man was not a stranger to the town but his conversion was certainly strange. This strangeness is what caused everyone to marvel at the amazing change. His testimony was used to draw people to Jesus and bring glory to the Lord. He began to “proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.”¹⁸

The Statement of Methodology

This thesis will attempt to show that the most effective way to get the Gospel “there in time” is for church planters to consider their hometown as a viable place to plant a church. It will list seven reasons why a hometown should be considered and will use some of the author’s own

¹⁵Mark 1:20 (NKJV).

¹⁶“Commentary on Mark 5,” BibleStudyTools.com, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/mark/mark-5.html?p=2> (accessed February 24, 2013).

¹⁷Sylvia, 35.

¹⁸ Mark 1:20 (NKJV).

experiences starting a new church in his hometown. This study recognizes that the church planter has been called already to plant a church and seeks to respond to the question of “Where?” Once a call has been identified and confirmed from the Lord, this next step is just as important as the first. In many cases, the church planter will simply find out where he can find the most financial support and then determine where God has called him. Many church plant organizations are applauded for the “number” of new churches started, but fail to take into account the danger of placing a planter in the wrong location. The wrong person can be in the right location or the right person can be in the wrong location. Church planting associations and networks hold the responsibility of helping the church planter discern a confirmed location from the Lord. This important decision simply cannot be compromised or diluted.

The numbers that are rarely reported among associations are church plant failures and why they failed. Could this failure have been prevented and was the reason for failure that the church planter was simply in the wrong location? The reason for the failure may not be that he was not called or that he was not effective; it may be that he was simply in the wrong location.

This project is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter Two: A Personal Experience will relate the writer’s experience in planting a church in his hometown of Louisa, Virginia and the practical ways that hometown church planting has helped reach people in this community. Part of his personal experience is what lead the author to investigate the advantages that may be available to other church planters who choose to return home and plant a church. While the author has no experience planting a church outside of his home, he does have experience in sending others out near their hometown and has seen how these reasons have worked for those individuals as well.

Chapter Three: Seven Timeless Reasons will list seven reasons church planters should consider returning to their hometown to start a new church. Some of these reasons will be based on personal experience and some of the reasons are based on a survey that was sent to 20 other hometown church planters across America, asking them to answer key questions which support these conclusions. These reasons are fundamental and should be valuable in application across cultural and time barriers.

Chapter Four: A Place of Calling is a practical chapter to help church planters begin the process of determining whether or not God may be calling them to return to their hometowns. That calling should begin with a plan and a prayer, and then be followed up with preparation. This will help the planter determine if God indeed is calling the church planter to return home.

Chapter Five: Conclusion will summarize the results, provide encouragement, and then offer realistic expectations for the church planters who are considering whether or not to return home for a church start. For some, returning home may not be a wise choice and God may simply be calling the planter to start where he is currently located. The summary will help the planter determine if these seven things apply in the current city where the church planter resides. The purpose would be for church planters to not waste valuable years of preparation and networking if they already have these things at their disposal.

The Review of the Literature

Church planting literature in recent days has risen to an exorbitant number of volumes being published. In fact, one may look on the market of literature and conclude that church planting is a major church trend. Starting new churches has become one of the most popular

ideas in modern religious circles. While there are numerous volumes on the methodology behind planting new churches, there remains to be seen a helpful volume about where a church planter should plant a church; there are even fewer volumes that would suggest anything close to planting a church in one's hometown. This may be due in part to the difficulty in defining a hometown as mentioned earlier.

Books

Launch by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas represents one church planter's parachute journey into one of the toughest regions in North America: New York City. It shares the story of a man who was called to a diverse city to reach a particular group of people. There are several chapters in the book on the place of God's calling that will be used to support the research. The book concludes with the place of calling as being a primary concern for the church planter. While Searcy and Thomas do not specifically point to planters considering their hometown, they assert that the demographic of that town must be in sync with the planter's calling and giftedness. They state, "While a few exceptional people are called to cross-cultural ministries, most of us are called to places that match our personality or life experiences."¹⁹ With time being of the essence, limiting the time it takes to train pastors for ministry in a different culture is vital.

Kingdom Matrix: Designing a Church for the Kingdom of God by Jeff Christopherson is a relatively new work challenging pastors to think outside of the box when planting their

¹⁹Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), 40.

church, in some ways redefining just what success really is. This work challenges the reader not to look at success as a large church in a prominent town but very simply as a church that is reaching its demographic for the kingdom of God. This book supports the work by challenging the reader to redefine what it means to be successful. Sometimes, in order for a church planter to consider his hometown as a possible place to start a church, he must be convinced that the number of attendees is not necessarily the means to the end. Numbers and influence correlate only to the extent of our participation in God's kingdom agenda and so we keep score: nickels and noses are the tokens that count.²⁰

Falwell: The Inside Story is an autobiography on the life of hometown church planter Jerry Falwell. As Falwell was moving to a prominent city in the South to start a church, he made a stop by his hometown of Lynchburg, Virginia. While he was in Lynchburg, God began to break his heart for the people there who needed a pastor. The story of Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University will challenge the reader to consider their hometown as a viable place to start a new work. This autobiography supports the idea that the hometown of any church planter should at least be a consideration when praying over the location of a church plant. While reading the story of Jerry Falwell and how God convinced him that Lynchburg was the place he should be, other church planters will be encouraged to consider their hometown.

Starting New Churches on Purpose by Ron Sylvia supports the research of Jim Slack, on whose research this thesis is based. Ron Sylvia states, "Clearly, we are losing ground with each passing year and we have a growing evangelistic deficit in America that will best be

²⁰Jeff Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix: Designing a Church for the Kingdom of God*, (Boise: Russell Media, 2012), 47.

answered by starting new churches.’²¹ The overall problem is that there are not enough churches to keep up with the amount of people who are being born and leaving the church today. Existing churches in their current state of decline cannot keep up with the measure of lostness. Time is of the essence and Sylvia’s work points to the idea that new churches grow faster than established churches. It also supports planting within your context, which would include considering your hometown. The message of urgency is also presented in this book, supporting the minimalization of cultural training and networking.

11 Innovations in the Local Church by Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird contributes to the idea that a hometown pastor can reach a city for Christ quickly. Although Falwell employed Saturation Evangelism as a viable technique to reach his city, the idea that he was a hometown pastor in Lynchburg, Virginia was part of this great success. The book supports the idea that hometown pastors have a unique advantage in reaching a city for Christ. There is a benefit when people have heard of the pastor and an even greater advantage if people have heard of the pastor’s changed life. This can create a willingness or desire to come and see what could cause such a change. This “coming and seeing” will allow the church to build credibility more quickly, adding momentum early on in the life of the church. When momentum is built and critical mass is developed, the church will begin to grow and reach more and more people with the gospel of Christ.

Pursuing The Mission of God in Church Planting published by the North American Mission Board supports the idea that the most effective way to begin a new church is to train and send local indigenous pastors who have a voice in the community. The need for church planters to have demographic and cultural training in order to reach a people group is recognized. But

²¹Sylvia, 21.

what if the church planter is one of the people group? And what if the church planter can start immediately gathering a group of believers in what will very soon be called a church? This book supports and promotes indigenous church planting, but comes just shy of endorsing hometown church planting. Missional churches see that their structures, customs, and languages are possible barriers to the Gospel; therefore, they seek to penetrate the culture in which they are called to serve with the Gospel by becoming bilingual, speaking the language of their context in worship, community, and discipleship while maintaining faithfulness to the Word of God.²²

The Disciple-Making Church by Bill Hull supports the thesis by showing how the Apostle Paul planted churches and raised up indigenous elders in each church to pastor those churches, giving spiritual oversight to the local group of believers. “Paul went to Cilicia and Syria where he preached the Gospel and there are very few details about his activities are available for this period, but it appears that he planted churches he would visit later during his ministry. In this area, specifically his hometown of Tarsus, Barnabas recruited him in AD 42.”²³ These local leaders served as the best way to lead a group of people just like themselves. Hull writes, “Through their association with Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla became close friends and effective ministers and we can see that he did a good job with them, because they did a wonderful job of instructing Apollos.”²⁴ These were all leaders in the local church and led local people who knew them even before they became leaders in the church.

²²NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter..So What Will that Make Me?*, 47.

²³Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 52.

²⁴Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1990), 135.

In *Planting Missional Churches* by Ed Stetzer, statistics are presented and serve as reinforcement that there is a dilemma that needs resolving in relation to lost people. One of the solutions to keeping up with the population is overcoming the notion that all churches must have seminary-trained pastors to be legitimate; instead, showing that years of seminary training are not necessary to start a church.²⁵ If the Body of Christ waits for all church planters to be seminary-trained, the population will be lost through a rapid state of decline. The wise option is when denominations provide another choice: offering training by extension for interested lay leaders and bivocational pastors.²⁶ This resource will prove to be valuable in supporting the abstract of the thesis in concluding that time is of the essence, or we may never reach some parts of North America. If progress is to be made in reaching the lost of the world, then the church cannot wait for all of its leaders to be seminary trained.

The Cell-Driven Church by Billy Hornsby states that “as Christians, we have an obligation in our time to see that every inhabited dwelling receives the Gospel of Christ before he returns and there is no other way to guarantee that the Gospel is truly preached to all the world except through house-to-house ministry.”²⁷ The effectiveness of the house-to-house ministry is based on the idea that individuals are responsible for reaching their personal sphere of influence. For homegrown church planters, this may mean the communities where they grew up, lived, and went to school. Again, because time is important, we must be willing to do whatever it takes to get the Gospel to the nations.

²⁵Stetzer, *Missional Churches*, 9.

²⁶Stetzer, *Missional Church*, 10.

²⁷Bill Hornsby, *The Cell-Driven Church*, (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 2000), 108.

Taking Risks in Ministry, authored by Dale Galloway, is a collaboration with many ministry leaders; each shares how they were used by God to gather people and see God transform their community. The place of that calling must be identified and passion must flow forth to do the work of the ministry in that area. Taking a risk may mean the church planter should return to his hometown and trust God with his reputation, his finances, and the results of planting a new church where he is from.

Hope for my Hometown, authored by Dave Teis, is one story of how a church planter went to college and, after being challenged by Jerry Falwell to return to his hometown, took up the call and returned to his hometown to plant a Baptist church in the middle of one of the hardest cities in the world: Las Vegas. While his methodology may be at odds with contemporary church plants, this church has proven to be successful in reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Although Teis planted over 30 years ago, the principles of planting in his hometown are still the same as today. This literature will serve as encouragement to those church planters who may be considering their hometown as a place of starting.

Our Last Great Hope by Ronnie Floyd ignites the church to not only have a Great Commission mentality but to have an urgent Great Commission mentality. As he cites statistics, it becomes apparent that the job at hand is daunting and the only solution is to plant more churches that preach the Gospel and disciple the saved. Floyd will also discuss the importance of planting churches in the context of the culture in which they are planted. Floyd states that the task is so demanding that “In a typical American city, we need many thousands of new

churches.”²⁸ Once again, this book will point to the urgency of the Great Commission and instill the need to plant churches quickly.

The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith by Thom S. Rainer brings missional insight into why the church is not reaching this generation and what the church needs to do in order to turn this trend around. The studies involved in this literature can help bring insight into how a hometown church planter can reach his culture and his community with the Gospel of Christ. The missional motivation behind this book will aid in training the church planter who is studying his culture. After surveying lost people, Rainer makes some startling conclusions about how the unchurched are behaving and what their thoughts are about church. He says, “The more we research, the more we interview, and the more we listen, the more I become convinced that the answer to all the troubling questions about the church in America is very simple: we Christians have become disobedient and lazy.”²⁹

In his book *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey*, Charles Brock reinforces the idea that community leaders can plant a church. This work incorporates the concept that church planters do not have to be ordained pastors or carry some of the credentials that man has traditionally placed on the church planter. Winston Crawley, a leading missiologist, has said, “We have to get away from the feeling that the preacher must do it all, and that we can’t carry on a worthy program unless he has been to seminary.”³⁰ This idea supports homegrown pastors

²⁸Floyd, 67.

²⁹Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 33.

³⁰Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey*, (Neosho, Missouri: Church Growth International, 1994), 43.

returning to their hometown to start a new church and will also support the concept that seminary training cannot delay the task of the Great Commission.

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, writing in *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*, reveal some simple truths that point to the importance of loving and praying for the community where the church planter will be. This idea of connecting to the community is essential for the church planter. That connection can take place much more effectively and rapidly if the church planter knows the community and the community knows him. Too many pastors love someone else's community and they long to minister to the nice, happy, affluent families in the suburb, thinking that they have fewer problems.³¹ *Comeback Churches* will give credence to the concept that the church planter knows his culture and knows who it is that God has called him to reach. Once again, the homegrown church planter will need minimal cultural training and will also have some foundational networking already in place.

Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend by Andy Stanley does not specifically deal with hometown church planting but will help develop the idea that gospel community must be created very quickly. The importance of assimilation into the life of the local church plant will be stressed throughout the book. Assimilation is a key concept for any church start, whether in the hometown or outside of the hometown. When this process is broken, people who are willing to serve the Lord find that finding a way to serve is very difficult. The result is a disinterest in the church and discipleship ultimately suffers the most resulting in Christians who are not being developed. *Deep and Wide* is a good practical church-planting guide that will help the church planter reach the unchurched in his neighborhood.

³¹Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 60.

Relationships are the primary growth accelerator in any church and church plant. In the book *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry*, Stephen A. Macchia lays out the importance of building community and the hindrances of community in any church. He asserts that many of the programs in the church, when done ineffectively, create a busy atmosphere and actually become inhibitors to authentic relationships being formed. The church is the central force for Christian action and service; the local church is the place where issues and causes must be hashed out so that the living church, mobilized effectively in each community, is in the limelight.³² The church planter must resist the urge to become a busy church and instead focus on the mission of reaching the community for Christ.

A Legacy of Church Planting: Passing Truth from One Generation to the Next by Robert D. Miller, is a collection of stories of how God used church planters from many different backgrounds to plant churches. Some of these churches were planted in hometowns and the authors testify as to the great benefit of planting churches in their hometown. Hometown church planter Jerry Falwell immediately claimed Acts 1:8 as his “Master Strategy Plan” for Lynchburg, Virginia: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”³³ Today, Liberty University is the largest Christian university in the world and it all was birthed by one man’s vision to reach his hometown for Christ. This book tells other stories with the same impact from church planters who took a risk and trusted God with the results.

³²Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 82.

³³Robert Miller, *A Legacy of Church Planting: Passing Truth From One Generation to the Next*, (Bloomington: CrossBooks, 2009), 156.

Wrestling with Dark Angels: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare by C. Peter Wagner and Douglas Pennoyer describes the spiritual component of church planting and how the enemy has territorial spirits that prohibit and even attempt to delay the planting of new churches. Church planters must understand the background of their communities so that they may know how to pray specifically for the breaking down of strongholds. Perhaps one of the most important literature pieces for church planters, *Dark Angels* will give the other side of the story and help planters determine which spirits may be going against them as they plant new churches in the communities. Any church that is evangelically minded will face spiritual opposition and the spiritual life of prayer will be the church planters' saving grace. This book is the spiritual glue that will bring all of the practical tips together.

Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free by F.F. Bruce will tell the story of context behind the greatest church planter that ever lived. The apostle Paul started new churches, raised up leaders in each church, and then planted more churches. His desire was to see the global community come to know Christ. His object in going to Jerusalem was to establish bonds of fellowship with the leaders of the mother church and obtain information which could be obtained nowhere else.³⁴ F.F. Bruce describes the journeys of the Apostle Paul, explains his heart for church planting, and follows his journey throughout the region. Of all the New Testament authors, Paul is the one who has stamped his own personality most unmistakably on his writings. Thus, he is considered to be one of the greatest letter-writers in world literature, not because he composed his letters with a careful eye to stylistic propriety and the approving verdict of a wider

³⁴F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, Paternoster, 1977), 84.

public than those for whom they were primarily intended, but because they express so spontaneously and therefore so eloquently his mind and his message.³⁵

Scripture

The primary scripture passage that will be used to support the research is found in Mark 5:19. Jesus tells the demoniac, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”³⁶ There are times when Christians desire to go somewhere else to serve the Lord; but, there are also times when the Lord wants those individuals to stay where they are. Sometimes, it seems more prestigious to go somewhere else away from the life that an individual has known and on to something new and more exciting. However, the life of the demoniac reads differently. The Bible says in Mark 5:20 that “he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.”³⁷ As previously stated, sometimes after conversion God would have us to return to our hometown and do ministry there among the people who “know” us. The power of a human testimony proves to be amazing fuel for the Gospel. Although some people did not like Jesus being in this town, the power of the demoniac’s testimony proved to be more powerful than anything Satan wanted to do in this town.

In Acts 16:11-15, we read about a woman named Lydia who happened to have her own business:

³⁵ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, Paternoster, 1977), 15.

³⁶ Mark 5:19 (NKJV).

³⁷ Mark 5:20 (NKJV).

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.³⁸

Scholars believe that Lydia helped the ministry financially and that she was an influential businesswoman in her community who provided help and support to her local church leaders. The hometown church planter will already have a feel for who these community leaders are and perhaps share the vision with them on starting a new church. Some of these community leaders may feel led to come along side the church planter and help finance or network the church plant in the community. Lydia’s whole house was baptized and she begged the disciples to stay at house. The disciples recognized her sincerity and went back to her house. This may have been one of the first church business meetings in the church at Thyatira; God was already working in this town.

The vision to rebuild the temple that Nehemiah received from God serves as a reminder that with God all things are possible. In Nehemiah 1:1-4 we read:

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.” So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

³⁸Acts 16:11-15 (NKJV).

Every church planter should go through a Nehemiah experience: concern, reality, and brokenness. Nehemiah's words show that he had a heart for the people and the city, so much so that he mourned and began to pray and fast. If a church planter does not have concern for that community, an inaccurate assessment will take place along with artificial brokenness. The people will ultimately sense that this pastor is not about them but about himself and building his church. Nehemiah eventually put a plan in place to help the people in Jerusalem return and build the gates once again. If he did not have a heart for the people he would have quit when the first wave of resistance came along. The result of quitting the rebuilding of the temple would have been devastating and much morale would have been lost.

Nehemiah 2:1-6 continues the story:

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

Nehemiah financed the vision by sharing it with his current employer. The king was willing to use his influence, blessing, and finances to fund the rebuilding of the temple. Likewise, modern day church planters must fund the work, whether they return to their hometown or move to another location. Supplies, salaries, and people are necessary for a church to get started effectively. Each church planter should recognize the unique opportunities that he has to connect in his hometown. He should also understand the importance of raising the financial support

necessary for the vision that God has given him. He will need to invite others to the table, share the vision, and ask them to join him. This verse serves as a great reminder of Nehemiah's brokenness and his ability to share vision with his employer who eventually helped provide the supplies to make it all happen.

Acts 13:1-3 says:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.³⁹

We read of the church sending out Barnabas and Saul for a work. Church planting is sending out prophets and teachers to do the work that God has called them to do. Although some individuals did stay at their home church, there was never a hoarding of people in one location; it was a general consensus among the leaders in the early church that people were to be trained up, prayed over, and then sent out. This sending out was never meant to stop or be thwarted in any way, but rather to be a continual, expanding process. Just as with the early church, when a new church begins now, there needs to be in the DNA from the beginning a plan to send out more people and to plant more churches so that the Gospel will go forth continually. The new church should have a sending mentality from the very beginning because scripture shows that the very first missionaries had a sending mentality.

Church planting is not without opposition, even when a church planter moves to his hometown. The sooner a planter realizes that starting new churches is a spiritual endeavor, the better equipped he will be to handle the spiritual attacks that will certainly occur. Once Barnabus

³⁹Acts 13:1-3 (NKJV).

and Saul were sent out to spread the Gospel, they often faced spiritual opposition in towns where they arrived. In Acts 13:4-12, we see the spiritual opposition played out:

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant. Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.⁴⁰

Because church planting is difficult and much spiritual opposition will come against the church planter, strong family support is vital. The enemy will always be looking for ways to discourage the church planter and pervert “the straight paths of the Lord.” During the first century, Satan opposed the church with riots, stoning, and confrontations.⁴¹ A healthy support system for the church planter is essential and the hometown church planter is likely to have the support of his family and friends when planting the new church.

Nehemiah 2:18 states, “And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ Then they set their hands to this good work.”⁴² The leader Nehemiah inspired others to join in an amazing project that would affect many people. He told them of the support he had

⁴⁰Acts 13:4-12 (NKJV).

⁴¹Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 113.

⁴²Nehemiah 2:18 (NKJV).

from the king and the way that God was going ahead of them; eventually the workers were eager and encouraged to begin the work. In much the same way, the church planter will share the vision, share the means, and encourage the people to get on board with what God is getting ready to do. Hometown pastors can share the vision with people that they know, because they already have established relationships in the community. The great advantage will be that these hometown pastors will recognize and have the liberty to talk with many more people than if they were not from that town.

The most famous Great Commission verse is found in Matthew 28:19-20 in which Jesus states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”⁴³ The church planter must have a clear vision of what it is that Jesus wants in His church. Most Christians would agree that seeing people saved and discipled would be two of the most fundamental commands for the church. But the geographical focus that churches have is often unbalanced. There are churches that focus on world missions while neglecting the local community. There are those who focus on local community outreach while neglecting the command to go globally. From a church planter’s personal mission standpoint, could Jesus be saying to reach the planter’s “Jerusalem” first and then from there, go and reach other areas? Just as the early church started in Jerusalem, the hometown of the Jewish and then Christian faiths, and from there moved outward, modern church planters should consider starting in their hometown and then expanding their impact globally. Some church planters desire to reach the familiar faces of the souls in their “Jerusalem”; this oftentimes drives church planters to return to their hometown under a Great

⁴³Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV).

Commission obligation. To see a thriving gospel-centered church in their hometown brings them peace and joy.

The church began in a central point and then from there expanded from town to town, locating and finding people in those towns who were receptive to the Gospel. Many people were evangelized and many more churches were started. This growth is described in Acts 14:21-28:

And when they had preached the Gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.⁴⁴

Elders were appointed, souls were strengthened, tribulations came, and the Gospel was spread from town to town. These were the beginnings of new churches that would become the central core of evangelism and discipleship throughout the whole world. This was a time when followers of Christ simply did what made sense to share and spread the Gospel. The modern church has made what is simple complicated with committees and evangelistic programs that may tend to make relationship-building an option rather than the natural outflow of reaching the lost with the Gospel.

In Romans 16:3-4, Paul specifically gives thanks for a couple who helped him do ministry in and through the local church. He writes, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks,

⁴⁴Acts 14:21-28 (NKJV).

but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”⁴⁵ In accordance with his regular practice, Paul had maintained himself in Corinth by his own manual labor. He found employment with a tent-making firm owned by a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla who appear to have been a well-to-do couple; their tent-making business may have had branches in several centers, with a manager in charge of the branches in those places where they themselves were not residing.⁴⁶ Paul used the support of local business not only to care for his needs, but also to serve as a network in other cities. Priscilla and Aquila proved to be very valuable in Paul’s church planting efforts; likewise, today’s church planter must consider the business world as an essential link to network with other people who may be interested in the vision of the church.

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”⁴⁷ Everyone needs the Gospel and everyone must make a decision for the Gospel; however, in this passage, it appears that the Jew should be the first to have been invested in. Paul himself asserts that the Gospel is to be presented “to the Jew first.” He might have said that, if only the Jews accepted the Gospel themselves, it would be for them to evangelize the neighboring Gentiles; but in fact he knew that the direct evangelization of Gentiles was his prime vocation.⁴⁸ Just as Paul knew his specific call, the church planter must consider who he is and, culturally, where he will gain a favorable hearing. The church planter who returns to his hometown rekindles relationships from the past and will likely gain a favorable hearing more quickly.

⁴⁵Romans 16:3-4 (NKJV).

⁴⁶Bruce, 250.

⁴⁷Romans 1:16 (NKJV).

⁴⁸Bruce, 167.

Acts 1:8 is a mandate for the church to be witnesses in certain places. The scripture reads, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁴⁹ In essence, the church would begin in a specific location and then spread outward. For some church planters, Jerusalem may represent their hometown. In other words, be sure your hometown is evangelized, and then work outward from there, planting new churches. This passage is referring to the church, but the church is made up of individuals. Location does matter, as seen in this scripture. The flow of the Gospel from inward to outward is evident; there was a responsibility to make sure that Jerusalem was healthy, established, and ready to reproduce so that other parts of the world could receive the same blessing of salvation.

In Ephesians 3:8, the apostle Paul writes, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...”⁵⁰ Paul was compelled to preach to a certain people group in hopes of them coming to know Christ. The challenge would not be without difficulty as many of these people groups were considered outside the ranks of traditional Judaism. Paul’s desire was that the Gentiles would hear clearly that this Christianity was for them also and that if they believed on the name of the Lord Jesus, they too would be saved. Planting churches among people groups who are like the lead planter will enhance the evangelization process.

Acts 11:19-21 states:

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

⁴⁹Acts 1:8 (NKJV).

⁵⁰Ephesians 3:8 (NKJV).

But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.⁵¹

Just as Paul was focused on preaching to the Gentiles, this passage shows Barnabus and Saul were preaching only to the Jews. At this given time in their ministry, the Jews were the focused people group they were to evangelize. Church planters must have a focused people group with whom they have common ground in order to be effective. The planter must communicate the gospel in the native tongue of those of whom he is trying to reach. When an unchurched person hears the gospel from someone like him, his eyes may be more open and attuned to what the Lord may be trying to say.

While this thesis focuses on hometown church planters returning to their hometown to plant a church because individuals are most like the culture and town that they grew up in, individuals also have the ability to some extent become like the culture that is around them. I Corinthians 9:19-23 is a prime example of how Paul became like the people he was trying to reach. The text states:

For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

The purpose of becoming like someone is to create a favorable communication language that will reduce barriers to the Gospel. If an individual can eliminate the many barriers that occur when

⁵¹Acts 11:19-21 (NKJV).

sharing the Gospel, then the hearer is more likely to come to faith in the gospel. These barriers are related to our cultural and/or language differences.

The Bible states in Proverbs 27:23-24, “Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations.” he oversight of the flock is the pastor and he will be challenged to raise up more ministry leaders to help care for the flock. He must know the state of his flock and the community in which he serves so that he can better minister and realize a great harvest. In addition, when he knows the flocks that are out there in his community, his worship service, evangelism methods, and discipleship model will each reflect the culture that he is trying to reach.

Acts 5:26-32 finds the disciples in trouble for teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus. It states:

Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so* also *is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.

Church planters will need to obey God rather than men; there are times when the community or the culture may be somewhat resistant to the new church in the community. While the church planter may be tempted to do just about anything to reach his community with the Gospel, he must not compromise the message of Jesus and the cross. Without this gospel message, there will be no need to plant a church and gather people. The gospel is the key ingredient for life-change.

In I Timothy 3:15, Paul writes, “...but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” This verse states the importance of the local church: it is “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.” Today’s society is battling for and searching for truth in a world where truth seems to be relevant. However, there is a place in the world where one should be able to go and find truth: the church. The church is the place of stability and freedom in a chaotic society. More churches are needed today in order to proclaim and reach people with the truth of God’s Word.

Ephesians 3:20-21 reads, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.” From this scriptural example, it is evident that the church is to serve a primary task of bringing Jesus glory. The church should be a gathering of individuals that point to Jesus as the life-change agent who does greater things than anyone could ever imagine. These great and mighty things occur in the context of the local church. The church planter will understand as well that it is God who is able to bring about life change in and through the local church. If God is not the central focal point in the church, there will be no real life-change taking place. Eventually, there will be no church without the “one who is able.” The church planter must understand the important role that the local church plays in seeing God get the glory.

In Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul requests prayer for himself as he does the work of the ministry. This same prayer should be the prayer of every church planter who is on the field of the harvest. Paul writes, “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that

utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, or which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” The primary focus of his prayer request is found in verse nineteen as he requests that utterance may be given with boldness. The church planter must “utter” the gospel with boldness and present the Word of God to the people. No matter what kind of methods or models that are used, if the gospel is not uttered with boldness then the church will not be doing what God has called it to do.

Chapter Two

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

When the writer started in ministry ten years ago, there was little discussion of planting churches or church growth movements or the modern-day jargon used to explain ministry using different strategies. All he knew was that there were people in his hometown who did not know Jesus and he had a strong desire to share with them the change that had taken place in his life. Every opportunity that he had to share the Gospel with former classmates was taken; watching some of them making a life change for the glory of God was amazing. Whenever he came home from college on the weekends, he would enjoy driving through town to see what was happening in the local parking lots. His goal was to find someone he knew and share the Gospel. God began to burden his heart for his hometown and, after a small stint out of state, he was able to land a job in his hometown living with his parents. At the time, he didn't realize the significance of moving back to his hometown; it just happened. Only after looking back can he clearly see God had an amazing journey for him, even though at the time life just appeared as normal and everyday.

After graduating from Virginia Tech with a Forestry Degree, the author worked his way back to his hometown through a job offer in the pulp and paper business. He got married to his college sweetheart and they made their home in his hometown of Louisa, Virginia. The forestry job allowed him to travel throughout Central Virginia, meeting landowners and getting involved in the rural life of community living. They attended a local church faithfully and served in some of the ministries through that local church, working in youth ministry and teaching Sunday School.

Eventually, God called him to preach and after serving about 18 months in a traditional Southern Baptist church, the writer realized that things in that church were not going to change. Now he understands that good people may desire change, but the mental anguish of change feels too risky for them, as if the church might lose something by changing. At the same time, the ministry demands that came with everyday church work prompted the author to start his own timber company and in the same year, the author and his brother started New Life Community Church in a public community center in Louisa, Virginia. Being self-employed allowed him to be flexible with church planting demands. The first worship service was the third week in November 2002 and they had no idea what offerings or finances would look like. After going before the board of supervisors in Louisa County, Virginia, there was an excitement surrounding this new work. One supervisor stated, “These boys are two of our own. Let’s give them a place to meet.” There was a sense of pride and accomplishment that two brothers would go off to college and then come back to their hometown to start a church. However, the thought of another church coming to town was challenging for some. Not everyone agreed that a new church should be coming to town and potentially upsetting many of the town’s religious people who wondered how their church might be affected.

As Gene Mims testifies, “I see many pastors and church leaders who have replaced God’s kingdom agenda with their own, and this is devastating and in so many cases, God is pushed aside as we seek to build our churches, our lives, and even our own little personal kingdoms.”¹ Looking back, it could be concluded that there cannot be too many churches because not everyone will attend the same church. Many different kinds of churches are needed

¹Gene Mims, *Kingdom Focused Church Church: A Compelling Image of an Achievable Future.* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 53.

to reach many different kinds of people. The Lord began to bless both the author's timber company and the church, allowing each one to compliment the other. As the author traveled through the state, he met many people who were looking for a church to attend. Many of them had been wounded and hurt by other churches in their past and skepticism was high. God used the author's vocation to connect him with people and eventually gather people for the beginning of a new church in this small town.

Louisa County is situated geographically in Central Virginia with a county population of about 34,000 residents and a town population of approximately 1,550 residents.² This town, although very religious and containing many churches dating back to the Civil War, had yet to see what a new church could do in the community. It had been a long time since a new church had been started, purchased land, and built a building within the town limits. The convenient location of Louisa, Virginia places it within an hour of the state capital, two hours of the nation's capital, an hour from Fredericksburg, and 30 minutes from Charlottesville. In addition, the mountains and ocean can be visited within a few hours driving distance; Lake Anna, a popular fishing spot is within a fifteen-minute drive. This geographic location makes it one of the fastest growing counties in the State of Virginia and new people are moving in regularly.

Serving in a bi-vocational capacity allowed the writer to be less concerned with finances than other church planters might have been. The total start-up cost for this church plant was under ten thousand dollars; much of the equipment that was needed was donated. There was just enough money to buy a trailer, some supplies, and some audio equipment before the launch service was scheduled to take place. There was a time period of approximately two weeks

²"Louisa County, Virginia," United States Census, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/51109.html> (accessed March 14, 2013).

between the short pastorate with the local Baptist church and the launch service for the new church. The author knows now there was no way the church was ready to publically launch. No planning had been done; no strategy had been discussed and no administrative infrastructure had been established. Prior to this, there had been no church plant training other than reading the Bible, providing music, and seeing what happened. A location had been rented and, at the time, that seemed all that was necessary in order to have church and a public worship service.

This is how many churches begin their journey: without a plan, a strategy for discipleship, or a vision. This lack of vision and lack of planning ends up costing something later on down the road when the church begins to grow. If he could start the church again, the writer would wait until small groups were fully developed and functioning properly. The primary discipleship model for this new church was traditional Sunday School; although this worked for a while, it became evident ten years later that small groups in homes would have to work alongside the Sunday School model. The church soon used every available hall and space that could be found for small groups. To this day, the church still incorporates a Sunday School model along with small groups meeting in homes to accomplish a community aimed at discipleship.

The writer's brother and his wife were local high school teachers; God used them to help open doors for meeting in the high school when the community center no longer met the church's needs. The school system was very accommodating and friendly with the use of its facilities and some of the teachers even agreed to open their rooms for childcare. This connection point was invaluable to networking in the community and enabled more and more people to come to the services and hear the Gospel. Measuring how much this networking helped the church get the Gospel out to the community would be impossible. Soon teachers and students

were coming to the services; many of them were connected to the church through the faithfulness of these teachers as tent makers. This combined with the writer's job in the timber business connected the church to the community on a daily basis. The church pastors' local connections were invaluable for opening doors in the community. Just about everywhere the brothers went, they knew people and were able to strike up a conversation or pass out an invitation card. Because of these opportunities, people were coming to the church and actually enjoying the excitement of this new work in Louisa County, Virginia.

Through the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia's (SBCV) Church Plant Network (CPN), the writer learned practical skills in evangelism, discipling, and connecting. Because the pastors had no seminary education or formal training at the time in church planting, the CPN coming alongside this new church to provide leadership and helps was essential for its early development. Every month, a network of church planters came together to discuss ideas, pray, and give each other encouragement along the way. Whenever an idea was learned at the CPN, the pastors would go back to the local church, apply it within their context, and use it to draw people into the church. Without this CPN and the ideas gained there, the church may not be where it is today. It was through the SBCV that the writer was encouraged and enabled to plant a church prior to having any seminary education or training. The SBCV instilled in the writer the value of partnership and networking to reach the world for Christ.

Within the first year the church purchased ten acres on Main Street in Louisa and within four years they built a fourteen thousand square foot multi-purpose facility that would be used for both outreach and worship. The church gained momentum and broke attendance barriers, adding approximately 100 attendees every year. Additional services were created and administrative positions added to help communicate with the congregation.

After seven years, the brothers determined that God was leading them to plant a new church in Charlottesville, Virginia. The writer's brother would lead this effort. After earning a Master's degree in Church Ministries from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, he felt it was time to start this new work. New Life Community Church helped to sponsor this church plant and today that church is reaching close to 1,000 attendees each Sunday. In addition, one year after the Charlottesville church plant was launched, a new campus was launched in Gordonsville, a small town just west of Louisa. After identifying the geographic location of where people were driving to the Louisa church from, it was decided that the Gordonsville area could sustain an additional campus of New Life Community Church. After three years, this campus averages 140 people in attendance every Sunday morning. Without a kingdom mindset in each of these pastors and their churches, these areas would be deficient in having a Gospel presence. As Charles Brock states, "Once there are new believers who are willing to follow the Lord wherever He leads, a new church can be born and a church should not rest until it is involved in spreading the Gospel in such a way that a new church is born."³ Today through the power of God and the sending out of one church planter and one campus pastor, the influence of this church plant reaches close to 1,500 in attendance each week.

The church could have settled for trying to grow bigger and larger in this small town, but instead it realized its demographic limitations and focused on church planting by reaching further out into other communities. From a demographic standpoint, growth in one location was limited; sending people out has allowed the church and its plants impact over a thousand each week. All three of these campuses are within a thirty-minute drive from each other and from the hometown of the founding pastors. People from the hometown who attend all three of the

³Brock, 95.

churches/campuses each week is not uncommon. Presently, the home church is seeking out an additional location to plant another campus 20 minutes north of the church in Gordonsville. The aim would be to raise up indigenous church planters who are living in the communities that they are trying to reach.

Chapter Three

SEVEN TIMELESS REASONS

The Testimony Reason

Who You Were Then

No one has ever made a choice to be born; birth is a divine providence of God and then immediately, barring any sickness at birth, everyone begins to develop and take on the form of a human being shaped by circumstances and surroundings. In addition, no one has a choice of the place where they were born. The writer was born in Rockingham County, Virginia but he never sat down with God or anyone else and made that decision.

After a period of time, individuals enter a mode of education where parents place their children in environments where they can begin to learn about the world around them. Circumstances such as a father's job, a mother's job, or a divorce may determine where children will grow up and spend their early years. They learn the sciences, they learn math, they learn history, and they learn how to build relationships. They learn how to interact with their peers and develop insights into life. For some, the same peers will interact with each other for the next 18 years or longer. Throughout this process, each individual develops friendships and forms opinions about others. Along the way, life itself begins to educate the individual as they learn from and interact with each other.

This process also brings the understanding that these individuals had a place identified as their hometown. This is the place where they grew up and formed relationships. There are other individuals, such as those raised in military families, who do not feel they have a hometown because they moved very often as they grew up. Those who did have a hometown realize how that town shaped them and molded them into the person that they are today. For some, there was a church in that hometown in which they heard the Gospel, surrendered to Jesus, and became a Christian; but for others, that hometown represented the exploration of the boundaries and the dark things that young people are often drawn to. The hometown could have been a place of positive experiences for some; for others, it could have been a place of a very bad childhood experience. Whether a positive or a negative experience, many memories were made in that hometown, many conclusions about life were formed, and the individual was influenced and developed.

In the days of their youth, perhaps these individuals did not realize they were building a testimony that would be used later for a much greater cause than just existing. No matter how good they were or how bad they were, their hometown has played a part in shaping their personality, their being, and their demographic. Hometowns are thought to be a special place as one grows up. When individuals leave the town, that place is often reflected upon and a pleasant place to visit from time to time. The concept of a hometown is universal across cultural and social boundaries. The artist Jewel once said, "I consider myself a product of Alaska. The love and the debt that I feel to my home state, you always want your hometown to be the proudest of you."⁴ Everyone who considers themselves to have a hometown is in some ways drawn back to

⁴Brainy Quote, "Hometown quotes," <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/hometown.html#u8cEhJGy6dTDbp8G.99> (February, 23, 2013).

it, if for nothing more than quiet reflection on how things used to be and how things have changed. Bruce Springstein's famous 1985 hit, *Hometown*, takes the listeners down memory lane of hometowns all across America and the special places where they spent their childhood and adolescence. This song was so popular, in part, because the concept of a hometown resonates in many people's memories as they reflect back on their childhood and the way in which they were brought up.

Many church planters grew up in hometowns that molded and influenced them and whose communities helped them develop their testimonies. Eventually, each individual must decide what to do with the rest of their lives. Some people leave, some people stay, and some go away for a while and then return to their hometown. Many factors played into these testimonies and how they are shaped and developed. Community leaders heard their names; friends' parents knew their reputation; and, in Small Town, USA, everyone knew what was going on with everyone else. Good or bad, testimonies were formed and opinions were developed. When church planters return to a community in which they spent eighteen years or more, there are dynamics that can be used to their advantage. Hometowns are a part of our American landscape and both identify and help to develop us into who we are.

The Calling

There is no greater joy for church planters than to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, what God has called them to do, that God has changed their life, and that they are being obedient to that calling with strength and passion. They feel the unquenchable desire to start a church and

make disciples of Jesus. They are convinced that God has called them. They have prayed and their spouse has even confirmed that the calling is genuine.

One of the most common questions to arise from a person who is truly called, “How do I know if I am called?” This question proves that God has been working and there is an unshakable thirst to do something crazy, something dangerous that only God can pull off. There is something fascinating about walking out on faith and trusting the Lord for every provision and need. This call is only quenched when the church planter says ‘yes.’

This calling is vital if the work is going to be realized unto completion and obstacles are going to be overcome. Without the calling, it is unlikely that anything of great significance would occur in a new church; in fact, without the genuine calling of God, the church would more likely be a hindrance in the community than a gospel presence. Without the calling of God to start a church, or if the motives to start a church are in the wrong order, the effort is doomed to failure and the church planter should consider something else to do. For those who live life as a journey and see faith as a journey, calling has an obvious implication and it reminds them that each individual is at a different stage and that no one who is still alive has yet arrived.⁵

God’s call on the church planter and his wife keeps them plowing and laboring even though some years are a drought and the insects show up and begin to devour some of the harvest. The calling enables the church planter to rest in verses like Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” God’s call helps the planter’s family navigate through the dark waters of ministry when there seems to be very little hope. Calling is essential to the life of the church

⁵O.S. Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*, (Nashville, Word, 1998), 112.

planter and he must be sure that there is a genuine calling on his life or the results could be devastating.

Some pastors are called to established churches that have excellent programs, buildings, compensation packages, and parsonages. There have been pastors who have returned to their hometown to pastor existing churches with great success. But the call of a church planter is a call to bring something out of nothing. The church planter will forge the way into new territory and pioneer an effort to bring life out of the ground. This call is special and must be accompanied with the entrepreneurial spirit of accomplishment. Without a special passion of the heart to be self-motivated and driven to reach the lost in a community, there won't be much of church plant.

The Place of Calling

Once the call has been confirmed and accepted, the next major decision a church planter has is to determine a location to plant a church. Planters may place thumbtacks on a map hanging on the wall, trying to determine a location to begin this calling. They may consider vacation spots where they have dreamed of God calling them, or perhaps there is a state where the hunting is excellent and now they will be able to afford the in-state hunting license. Many ulterior motives exist when a church planter begins to ask God where He would want him to plant a new church or where he should not go to plant a church. There are many places in the world to plant a church. In fact, there is probably no bad place to plant a new church; just about anywhere there are people there is a need for a church. Determining the location is perhaps one of the most vulnerable stages of the church planting process. Because there is concern about finances and how planters will support their families, they may tend to automatically default to the place with

the most people and where they believe is the place with the best financial support. However, the right man can find himself in the wrong place and the results are devastating.

There is a story in the Bible where a called man ran from the place and the people that God was calling him to. In Jonah 1:1-2, the Bible says, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’”⁶ We see the calling of God in this story; most church planters recognize this with no problem. Like Jonah, most planters are willing to conform to the idea that God is calling them and speaking to them, and they have surrendered to this calling. But verse two shows a bit of a problem for Jonah: the location of the calling. As the story unfolds, Jonah was not willing to submit to God’s place of calling on his life. In fact, Jonah went in the exact opposite direction that God was calling him. He tried to run from God’s location and the result was devastating, not just for him but for all of those around him as well. Everyone on the boat feared for their lives and it wasn’t until the man of God was thrown overboard that everyone else was safe. Further research could examine the number of church planters who initially ran from the place where God called them to plant a church and the consequences those around them suffered as a result of following a man of God who was not in the place of God.

The place of calling is just as important as the calling itself. Perhaps many church plants falter and fail because the church planter failed to obey God in the city to which God called them to start a new church. Jonah’s story continues in Jonah 3:1-3, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now

⁶NKJV

Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey.”⁷ Finally after much heartache, pain, and misery, the man of God was willing to go to the location where God had called him in the first place. Jonah was not happy in that city; he did not want to go there and he did not care for the people, but the results of him getting over himself produce a great harvest. The Bible gives the results of Jonah’s obedience in 3:5: “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.” The city of Nineveh repented of their sin, God was glorified and the King proclaimed a fast. The Spirit of God was so strong that the king began to preach saying in 3:8-9, “But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” What an amazing move of God; it all started with Jonah finally going to the location where God had called him.

The planter must be convinced that the place of calling is just as important as the calling itself. What is the decision-making process from this point forward? Should money be the planter’s highest determining factor of where to go? Should a planter call different state conventions and see which convention offers the best package? Following worldly provision and compromising the place of the calling is very tempting at this stage. Perhaps the planter just cannot imagine that God would be in something that mathematically does not make sense. However, through all of this, the question the church planter needs to ask is this one: Have you considered your hometown as a viable place to start a new church? Remember the place where, as a child, you first began to form those relationships that you thought were accident? Did God have a purpose for your childhood or was it pure coincidence? The hometown should be

⁷NKJV

considered, prayed over and at the end of the process must be eliminated only after God-confirming action. The results of not committing the place of calling to prayer and fasting will be just as devastating as Jonah's adventure.

On any given day, we read about professional athletes who become famous and earn lots of money from salaries and endorsements. Often, the news reports a special story of one who decides to give back to his hometown financially. People will see them appear at the dedication of a playground or a YMCA or some public facility that they help support. Why do they give this support to their hometown? Once they leave home and gain fame, some would think that they would never want to come back to that place again. But the overall reason for coming back and re-investing is due to an inner, perceived obligation to give back to the community that at one time gave to them. Once again, communities have a way of shaping individuals into the people they will become. Whether the communities are good influences or bad influences is irrelevant. The community has still played a role and there is still an impact on the individual. Mario Lemieux, former player for and current owner of the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins, concurs. He said, "I tend to believe that athletes should give back to their communities because their communities have given so much to them. I was blessed to be able to play and now own a franchise in the NHL. The sport of hockey and the city of Pittsburgh has opened many doors for me, so I want to give back so others can have success as well."⁸

Most people would agree that when a professional athlete makes billions of dollars, they have an obligation to give back to the community from which they came. Life-lessons were learned in that place and part of being a steward is leaving the hometown in better condition than

⁸Service Nation, "Are Athletes Obligated to Give Back? 'Athletes for Hope' Wants to Know (And Help)," <http://www.servicenation.org/blog/entry/whos-obligated-to-give-back-athletes-weigh-in-on-the-debate> (accessed on February 24, 2013).

it was before. Part of being a good steward in the world is leaving the world a better place than the way it was found. Of course secular stewardship is often based solely on a financial objective or investing in some building so that it can be named after the athlete. The athlete is expected to do something good because he or she has made it and along the way there were people who invested in him or her to see this great dream come alive. Hometowns are amazing places for those who have the privilege of returning and making a life contribution. When considering where to plant a church, it is important to note that there are no insignificant places on the face of the Earth that God does not care about. A church planter's hometown could possibly be the home of a new church started by a hometown boy who has a desire to reach his people.

But does the idea of reinvesting in a person's hometown impact church planters as they are praying about where to take the Gospel? Should they, like many sports figures, feel an unction to somehow make their hometown community better than what it was when they left? Does a born-again, blood-bought, redeemed pastor have anything to give back to his community?

Most if any church planters would not have the financial ability to return and donate millions of dollars to a local facility and have their name placed on the sign out front. But what they could do is return to their hometown with the life-changing message of the Gospel and reinvest in those communities in much the same way that the communities invested in them. Church planters must have a concern for their hometowns and the lost people who inhabit them. There must be a desire to see those former classmates come to Christ and to see them growing spiritually closer to Christ. Many of the peers with whom church planters grew up in the community have made a mess of their life after years of hurts, and now they have children who

are struggling. The cycle continues one generation after the other. But, the church planter with a desire to reach his hometown for Christ can influence these generations and break the generational curses that resonate in hometowns.

Dave Teis was at this crossroads in 1977 after he graduated from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. He knew that God had called him to plant a church but the location was still undecided. Dave wrote :

I was in a college that was started out of an independent Baptist church. A young man had graduated from Baptist Bible College and returned to his hometown to plant a church. That young man was Jerry Falwell, and that church became Thomas Road Baptist Church. We were challenged over and over as a student body to consider returning to our hometown to do what Dr. Falwell had done in his. God had burdened my heart for my hometown and after graduation in May of 1977, with the complete confidence that God had called us to Las Vegas to start a church, my new bride and I headed out across the United States to start what has become Liberty Baptist Church.⁹

Your hometown needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Statistics show that even if there are many churches already in your hometown, that does not mean your hometown is evangelized or that new churches are not needed. Why would you not at least consider your hometown as a place that God may be calling you to return to? Would it not be a great benefit to that hometown if you at least made it the subject of prayer as a possible place to start a new church? Instead of predetermining that the hometown is not an option, pray about it as a consideration and allow God to make that determination.

When the time comes to make a decision, God will lead the church planter and his spouse to the place of peace where He is calling them to be; but, the church planter must be willing to consider each possibility, including his hometown.

⁹Dave Teis, *Hope for my Hometown: Church Planting Principles From Our Journey of Faith*, (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2012), xiii-xi.

Who You are Now

Your relationships in your hometown have given you a possible advantage in starting a church there. The power of a changed life has an amazing impact on lost people. While you may have been one person growing up, you are now a child of the King and a carrier of good news. Just as the demoniac had an amazing testimony in his hometown, you also can make a unique and powerful impact if God calls you to return to your hometown and start a church. If Jesus thought that the demoniac's past life would have been a hindrance to the good news, Jesus certainly would not have permitted him to return. But Jesus knew that this changed life would bring God glory and ultimately bring people to himself. Who the church planters have become in Christ may be much different than who they were; many in their hometown communities may be interested in the change that has occurred. Every hometown needs to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the only question that remains is "Who is going to reach them and who would be the best pastor to reach that town?" Certainly there are other churches in those hometowns, but many of those existing churches are pastored by clergy who have been called from the outside and may only stay for a short while or until something better comes along. Would you consider allowing God to use your past? Would you consider trusting him to take your experiences growing up and turn them all around for the good?

Consider Jeremy Carr who heard the call of God to return to his hometown of Augusta, GA and plant a church in the already-churched South. He states:

With numerous stories of men moving across the globe to large cities to plant churches, I am somewhat in the minority. After traveling to various countries and pursuing a

seminary education, I boldly proclaimed to God, “I am willing to *go* anywhere for you!” To which he replied, “Yes, but are you willing to *stay* where I’ve placed you?” In an ironic and somewhat comedic twist, it was clear that I was to plant a church in my hometown of Augusta, Georgia.¹⁰

Jeremy Carr understood the importance of going where God was calling him to go and that just happened to be exactly where he already was. God may be calling many planters to not go anywhere but to stay exactly where they already are; their hometown may be exactly where God wants them to reach with the Gospel. What is it right now that would keep you from returning to your hometown or at least prayer walking for a day to see what God may be saying? There may be an exciting adventure out there and it may come in the most unlikely of places...a hometown.

The Network Reason

Who Do You Know?

Too often, evangelism is done on the presupposition that the lost neighbor is just like the evangelist or church planter, except lost. The reality is that the lost neighbor does not have the same worldview as the Christian, because the Christian lives according to the absolutes of God and his word. Therefore, I must engage in cross-cultural evangelism (missions) even within

¹⁰Jeremy Carr, “Personal Reflections of a Hometown Church Planter,” Resurgence: A Ministry of Mars Hill Church, <http://theresurgence.com/2009/07/24/personal-reflections-of-a-hometown-church-planter> (accessed February 24, 2013).

my own community.¹¹ Even in their own hometowns, church planters must be involved in dissecting their culture as diligently as the missionary going to China. In fact, the hometown church planter may have to work harder to overcome the familiarity in order to see the divergence.¹² But the opportunities to connect with people can occur much faster and with greater momentum when a church planter begins a new work in his hometown. Taking advantage of the network dynamic can give the hometown church planter an edge when reaching his community. Church planting is about building a network in a community by connecting with people who know people, who know people. The typical church planter may spend years building a network of friends, neighbors, and community leaders that will assist him in planting a new church; the hometown church planter has established many of these relationships already.

The task of church planting is becoming more and more difficult in today's postmodern generation. The days of the nuclear family who sit around the table and pray over their meals is gone. There is no more coming to church just because it is the right thing to do.

Effectively reaching postmoderns with the truth of the gospel will occur only if Christians personally invest their lives in those left empty by the materialism of the 20th century. They want to know that the church planter is the real deal and that he has come to bring value to the community. They want to know that you're not just after them as an evangelistic headhunter who wants another warm body sitting in their church. Knowing each other and building lasting relationships are a big deal to the postmodern generation. If you can develop and cultivate relationships, you're going to go a long way to be able to reach postmoderns.¹³

¹¹Bill Brown, "The Personal Dimension," North American Mission Board, <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/churchplantingvillagepb.aspx?pageid=8589989582> (accessed February 24, 2013).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church*, (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 145.

Interestingly enough, when church planters return to their hometowns to start a new church, many of those important relationships are rekindled, almost as if they never left the community.

Jimmy Carroll is lead pastor of Journey Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. He chose this city to plant a church because it was his hometown. As with many church planters, Jimmy knew he wanted to impact a city for Christ, but he wasn't quite sure how to go about it. He shares some of his first thoughts:

When I first started, I did not know much about church planting. What I did know is that the most effective strategy for impacting an entire city was to be one church in many locations. At the time, I did not even know that anybody else was developing multisite strategy. I looked at the largest churches in our city and while they had made a tremendous impact, in most cases, it was not citywide. Their impact was confined to their area of the city.¹⁴

Jimmy Carroll knew the benefits of being in his hometown where his connections could help him reach this city for Christ. In 2008, Journey Church averaged over 650 in attendance, had seven full-time staff, four part-time staff, and over 300 volunteers.¹⁵

Although many planters have successfully parachuted into new areas and have reached communities that have been far from God, this may take considerable more time and resources in order to become established and make lasting networks. This research does not discount that God uses different people in different ways to bring glory to himself. However, too often, moving into a new area seems to be the only location considered. Church planters should consider the networks and resources that are already available in their hometown.

Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Community Church knows the importance of networking. He tells the story of his real estate agent being his first church member: "While

¹⁴Miller, 156.

¹⁵Miller, 166.

driving to the condo, I asked Don if he attended church anywhere and he said he didn't and I replied, 'Great! You're our first member.' And that is exactly what happened. I began Saddleback Church with that realtor's family and mine."¹⁶ Don served as the "network agent," connecting Rick Warren to the community he was trying to reach. Where would Rick Warren had been if he had never met Don? Certainly God wanted a church in Lake Forest, California and would have made it happen. God orchestrated a hometown person with whom Rick Warren could befriend; in return, Don could connect him to many people in the area.

Imagine for a moment if Don had been saved at some point, felt the call of God on his life, and started a church in his own hometown. Don's connections and credibility would have been instantly used as a resource tool to advance the Gospel and get the church moving forward. To say the least, the story of Saddleback Church will point to the importance of finding a man or woman in the community who is able to leverage positive influence for the church planter. Thankfully, Rick Warren made that connection with Don by divine appointment.

However it occurs, there must be some type of connection with a hometown agent who can help network the church to the community. For the writer, that connection was his family. They had been in the community his whole life and, when he returned, much of the networking happened with little effort. When asked the research survey question, "What have been three of the most positive benefits of starting a church in your hometown?" one church planter responded with, "We grew much more rapidly than I could have ever expected due to the multitude of relationships I have built in my home town over the years."

Just imagine the difference it would make if the hometown agent were the pastor who already had credibility in the community. If his family also networked directly, ministering and

¹⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 37.

inviting people to come, the impact could be even greater and reach much farther than if the church planter did not anyone in the community. The true challenge is when a leader moves into a new city to start a church without knowing any one in the community. Every opportunity to share the vision with an individual or a group of people must be taken. Hometown church planting minimizes the networking effort and can effectively get the Gospel into a town more quickly and efficiently.

Who do you know in your community if you are planning on starting a church in your hometown? Do you remember those kids who you went to school with? Many of them have grown up now, gotten married, and have children of their own. Life, problems and difficulties have invaded their innocent childhood so quickly. You might find that the kids who you thought would really go somewhere have ended up in jail, or that the kids who never made “Most Likely to Succeed” are going places with their life. No matter who it is, the Gospel is truly the answer for this community. If God has called you to go back and make your community better than the way in which you found it then answer the call to return and do something big in your hometown. Don’t underestimate the power of your testimony in networking with your hometown community.

The Business Community

A business deals with people in the town or city in which it exists; the representative for that business is likely to know many more people in that community even the long-term resident. In many cases, the businessman has studied the community and knows the marketing demographics of that community. The businessman has taken his children to soccer practice in

that community, he has ridden his bike, or jogged the streets on the weekends. He has a vested interest in what happens in that community and how it affects his customers. Because of this vested interest, the businessman is vitally interested in the new church that is coming to town and wants to know more about it. If there is a family connection with this business, perhaps the businessman will refer his clients to the new church; he may even come himself to see what God is doing. When you can get a few businesses in the community to understand what you are doing, the benefits can be great.

Ray Bakke is an urban prophet of today and the chancellor of Bakke Graduate University which develops Christ-centered leaders who work within business and culture to change cities. One of his books is called *A Theology as Big as the City*. He states “that, as we go into the city, we can’t simply see ourselves as pastors to the faithful we must be chaplains to the whole community.”¹⁷ Bakke continues, “The deeper I go into the city of Chicago where I’ve lived and served, the more clearly I see the blood lines of our people traced back to Poland, to Ireland, to Korea, to El Salvador, to Mississippi, to West Africa...the whole city, not my people or my neighborhood alone, is to be the focus of ministry.”¹⁸ Bakke understands the dynamics of community ministry and recognizes the history behind his community that is leading the world to his doorstep.

A hometown church planter will deal with local businesses and even recognize some of the faces from school years. Perhaps with the hometown connection, the church planter could work part time for one of these businesses in order to make the connections and build an inroad into the community.

¹⁷Floyd, 105-106.

¹⁸Ibid.

According to the survey done by the author, 47.06% of the hometown church planters surveyed worked a bi-vocational position while they planted a church. Thirty-five percent of the hometown planters that were surveyed worked a combination of the two (bi-vocational and church support); some of the planters reported seeing God move in a tremendous way to provide for the support of their family. In some cases, the planter's wife worked a full-time job to enable the planter to get the church up and running. Most of the planters used their job in the business community to connect with unchurched people and saw great benefits from the ability to work bi-vocationally while starting a church.

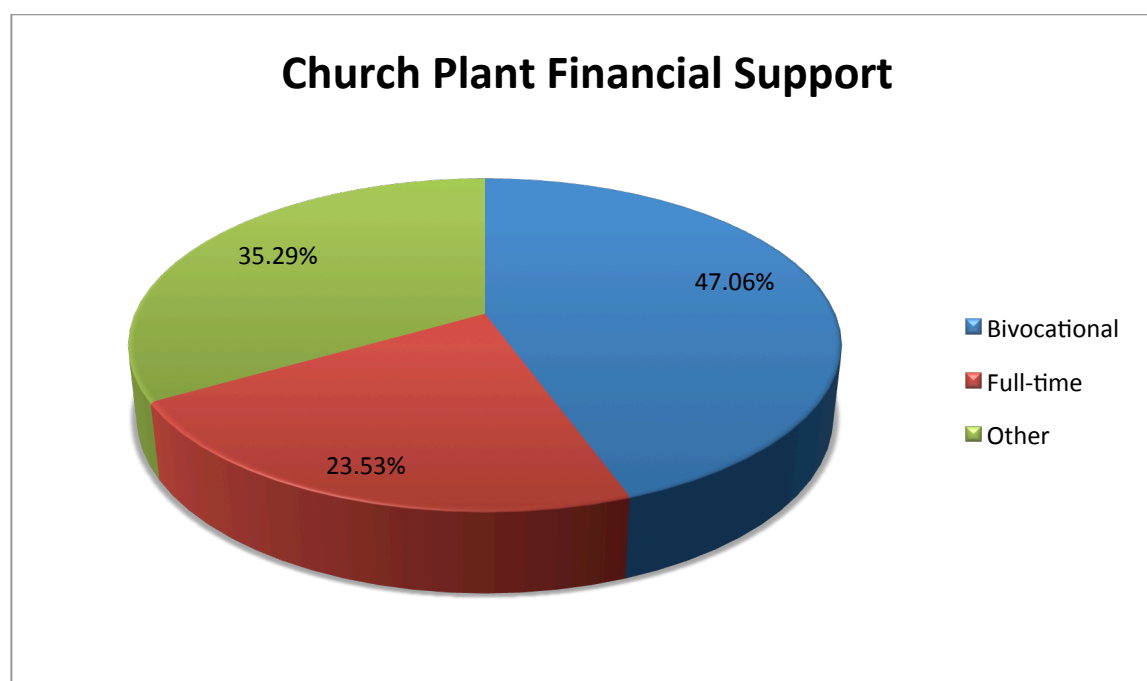


Figure 2.1: Financial Support for Pastors while Planting a Church

As a planter makes more business connections, relationships from childhood will also be renewed and reformed. Studies show the number one reason people initially choose a church is because they identify with the pastor; many church starters experience failure because they do

not know who they are, and consequently target people who are not like them.¹⁹ The pastoral dynamic and the ability that he has to connect his hometown to Jesus should not be overlooked. When the pastor works bi-vocationally in the community, networking is maximized and his connections will aid his efforts to begin a new church.

The pastor must build credibility in the business community so that the community can speak of this new church in town, become excited about it, and then attend. Pastors not only need to identify the people groups in their communities, they also need to look for cultural clusters: pockets of people who have come together because of the identifying culture they share.²⁰ This is why the church planter must be like the people, or at least have studied them enough to know who they are and how they behave. The hometown church planter is one of the people in the culture and will not have the same struggles overcoming cultural barriers that may exist when a planter enters that community from the outside. He will be able to speak the heart language of the community and feel the needs of the people. As one church planter, when asked the same question about the benefits of planting in his hometown, said, “I know them, how they think, because I’m one of them. There is less second-guessing decisions. I know which roads to walk down and which not to.”

Acts 16 speaks of a very prosperous businesswoman in Thyatira who sold purple and desired to help advance the kingdom of God. This woman named Lydia was at the riverbank one day and met the disciples, who were already looking for inroads into the community. Lydia invited them back to her town and they followed her. She proved to be a very valuable

¹⁹ Sylvia, 45.

²⁰Floyd, 109.

connection in that community to help start the church in Thyatira through both networking support and through financial support. Lydia begged Paul to allow her to help advance the gospel; Paul permits Lydia to live out the principle of sharing material goods with those who teach the Word (1 Cor. 9:11, 14; Gal. 6:6). In Acts 16:15, Paul's normal hesitation is overcome when Lydia will not take no for an answer (*persuaded*, actually "prevailed"; compare Phil 1:5).²¹ The idea that there are people who will dedicate their life for a vision that is much larger than themselves is a bit overwhelming. God will send the church planter friends and supporters in the community who have been praying and waiting for a new church to come. Those who own businesses in the community can be excellent sources of encouragement and support for the church planter who grew up in that community.

Church planters may find themselves working in the business community where they are planning to start a church; they can use this opportunity to share the Gospel and make more connections to help grow the church. They may consider themselves a tentmaker for a period of time as they financially support their families through bi-vocational roles. In fact, marketplace Christians played a vital role in the emergence, establishment, and expansion of the early church; most of Jesus' followers remained in full-time business while simultaneously conducting full-time ministry.²² The business community in the church planter's hometown can be a vital place to go for connection and support. The business connections provide opportunities for assessing any changes in the hometown during the time the church planter was away. Whether it has been a few years or a few decades, there will have been changes in the community. New businesses in

²¹IVP New Testament Commentaries, "Witness at Philippi," Bible Gateway, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Witness-Philippi> (accessed February 24, 2013).

²²Ed Silvano, *Anointed for Business: How to Use Your Influence in the Marketplace to Change the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 16.

the community will be eager for the church planter to tell guests about the business and a symbiotic relationship can be formed. One such way to connect the business world with the church start is by advertising the business in a “First-time guest packet” and many times, the business will offer discounts and coupons. Either way, the church plant and the business both have an interest in seeing the community thrive and become better.

The Religious Community

One of the most important things for church planters to know is who they are ministering beside in the community. The hometown church planter will want to know the churches in the community and may even get to know the pastors in that community. Pastors in a community discuss other churches, positively and negatively. Church planters should attempt to sit down and talk with each pastor in the community, sharing the vision of what God has called them to do. Pastors are, in essence, shepherds in their community; when another religious organization begins to form, those pastors should know what is coming so they can talk with the people and dispel any rumors that may form. Even if the church planter is planting in his hometown, he should respect the clergy roles enough to inform each one in the community what his plans are.

Hopefully, church planters are able to connect with the church they formerly attended and share the vision with the pastor of that church. If there has been a good relationship, the home church may have some interest in supporting the new church plant. One church planter surveyed actually received support from his home church when he returned to the community. The home church gladly welcomed him back and even offered him financial support for his

family while he planted the new church. Childhood friends of the church planter who attend a church in the community may also be a strong way to build relationships with other churches and ministries. However the connections are made, the church planter owes it to the community pastors to sit down and attempt to share the vision of reaching the unchurched in the same community. The best-case scenario is when the pastors in the community embrace the new church as one of their own and recognize a kingdom mindset. The idea that those of like-minded faiths are on the same team should be embraced and each body should understand the idea that the mission is the same and that together they can do much more for a community than if they remain separate. It is in the best interest of the church planter to communicate clearly with the faith community what his plans are.

Some pastors will not be open to a new church coming into their community, but the church planter still must make an effort to break the ice and attempt to work together. There is nothing more powerful than when pastors can labor together in the same community. Even though the church planter returns to his hometown, this doesn't always equate to acceptance and open arms. Rejection by an existing pastor in the community can be hard to understand, but should not quench the fire of the new church plant. Many pastors are insecure with their church and a new church in the community may seem threatening. Ron Sylvia, author of *Starting New Churches on Purpose: Strategies for the 21st Century*, states:

The territorial mindset of some pastors amazes me. They give many reasons to keep new churches out of their area. Some of the most prevalent arguments are:

- (1) Since we cannot fill existing churches, we do not need new ones.
- (2) Starting a new church will cause division in existing churches.
- (3) Our church is not large enough to give up people to start a new church.²³

²³ Sylvia, 19.

The church planter would do well to remember that this town is where he grew up and he is now giving back the Gospel and will certainly reach new people that the existing church will not reach. Nonetheless, God will give favor when peace is attempted and many lasting friendships will be made from these initial meetings with other pastors. Statistics show that many pastors leave a church after a period of time and a new pastor will enter the community; it will be the church plant pastor who will one day welcome the new pastor into the community where God has called them to serve together.

Warren D. Bullock, Superintendent of Northwest District of the Assemblies of God in Everett, Washington further discusses this point:

When we consider the lostness of humanity, the numbers of people yet to be reached for Christ, and the nearness of Christ's return, we don't have time to quibble over how to extend Christ's kingdom. If church planting is the answer in a certain city, let's do it. If undergirding and strengthening an existing church is the answer, let's do it. If doing both is what's needed, let's do it. Let's cooperate in fulfilling Jesus' promise, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).²⁴

This mindset must be embraced as a mission strategy that will work and bring people to the cross.

In fact, when a community sees that churches are cooperating together for a cause, it brings greater spiritual harmony in the community. While there are a myriad of objections to church planting, most can be classified into four main groupings: There is no need for church planting; Church planting harms existing churches; Church planting is not effective; and, Church planting is good but is not for us.²⁵ These excuses must be erased from the church planter's mind

²⁴Warren Bullock, "Why Another Church?" *Enrichment Journal*, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200004/028_why_another_church.cfm (accessed February 24, 2013).

²⁵Grady Smith, "Addressing Objections to Church Planting" (paper presented to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

because he is convinced that God has called him to start a church in this community and nothing will stop him.

Whatever the reasoning behind not planting churches, we know that Satan is against advancing the Gospel and his biggest threat is to have more churches planted who have a gospel mission to win the lost in that community. When pastors plant a church in their hometowns, they may be more accepted by existing churches than if they were not from there. At least the general community will be more open to seeing the homegrown pastor with a desire to give back to his community. It may take time for other churches to accept the idea that a new church is coming and this will be a good thing in the community. There are too many people in any given community for one church to be able to reach everyone. Teamwork must be embraced among community churches. When pastors work together on local missions, spiritual health in the community grows.

In addition to better community ministry, clear communication with local pastors will give the church planter a heads up as to who the “troublemakers” are in a community. Unfortunately, in most communities, there are individuals who bounce from church to church; although some really need redemption, there are others who are on a mission to divide and conquer. Communicating with other pastors will bring greater resolve and peace in the community. When pastors become friends in a community, the enemy has a much more difficult time creating havoc and bad feelings between different churches. The writer has enjoyed some of his best friendships among other pastors who serve faithfully in the same community that he serves.

The Credibility Reason

The credibility of any organization is an essential component of how well it will thrive and do business in a community. Studies have shown that the most effective church planters establish greater credibility and there is a direct correlation between missionaries who emphasize activities to increase credibility and who plant more churches.²⁶ Whenever the well-known company Starbucks announces plans to enter another thriving community, there is always a subset of alarmed locals who react as though the town were under siege from the Mongol horde. When residents resist Starbucks' advances, they often do so out of worry over a unique set of local effects: changing neighborhood character, soaring property values, increasing tourism traffic. These things are usually grouped under the touchy concept of "gentrification."²⁷ However, once Starbucks has been in the community for a while, there is ease and thankfulness for employment opportunities and local revenue. Starbucks' name and credibility give them great favor in a community; in many communities, they have been known to put multiple stores right across the street from each other. If gentrification plays such an important role for a company like Starbucks who provides a great service and product, how much more so will gentrification play a role in the growth of a new church when a church planter arrives in town ready to open the doors of "one more" religious institution that will "suck the county dry"? The credibility of the church and especially the church planter as the face of that church cannot be underestimated.

There are many churches being established but do they have credibility? Is the reputation

²⁶Dick Grady and Glenn Kendall, "Seven Keys to Effective Church Planting" http://www.globalopps.org/associates/cp/seven_keys_to_cp.htm (January 15, 2013).

²⁷Taylor Clark, "Starbucked: A Double Tall Tale of Caffeine, Commerce, and Culture," 148-149.

in the community about the church positive or negative? If a pastor expects people to come to the church, tithe, and bring their children, the ministry must have credibility. Truthfully, new churches are not as welcome in a community as they once were and all the more reason to build credibility in order to make inroads in the community.

Credibility for the church planter is huge and must be considered when arriving in a community. It is something that cannot be taken lightly and must be investigated in the initial dynamics of planting a church. Being skeptical about a new church is not unbiblical. In Matthew 7:15-20, the Bible says:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.

We should expect the public to fully investigate the church planter and the congregation that has gathered in the community. Everyone knows that word travels quickly and before long, everyone will know about this church planter who has come back home and started a new church.

The homegrown pastor may have a better chance at building credibility more quickly than those pastors who are not from the area, depending on his background. Of course, this will determine how quickly any church planter is accepted in a community. Once credibility is obtained, it must be guarded with the utmost integrity; once credibility is gone, it is sometimes impossible to regain credibility in that community. While the giftedness of the church planter is essential and may attract many people, the minister's most powerful tool to effect change in

another person's life, positively or negatively, is their example.²⁸ The way that a minister has lived in the community and once his credibility has been proven, this dynamic has been proven to be a very effective tool in drawing congregants into any church.

One of the most essential benefits of a hometown church planter is that he has already established some type of credibility within the community and for the most part, people have heard of him and know who he is. Hopefully his credibility is not "too" marred by the choices that were made; however, a good reminder would be that the gospel has the power to save. And regardless of what some may think in a community, a changed life is a testimony to the power of God and his miracle-working power in a saved life. There are times when this type of radical testimony will serve as a draw for others to come and "see what happened" to this changed life. Other times, this past may prevent some from coming but it should not deter the church planter from living out redemption in his life. Changed lives were always a way that Jesus drew people to himself. One such story is found in John 9:

Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others *said*, "He is like him." He said, "I am *he*." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

The disciples made the assumption that he had sin in his life but Jesus reminded them that

²⁸Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez, *Ministry Is...: How to Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 190.

this man was blind so “that the works of God should be revealed in him.” The results of a changed life are so that the “works of God can be made manifest” in each of us. Therefore, the church planter who has been healed by his past sins can trust that “the works of God will be revealed” in and through his changed life. One must not relish the past, but glory must be given to God for changing this life and making it new. This changed life is an attraction to the Gospel. We must also be reminded of our story concerning the demoniac found in Mark 5 and how the focus was not on the ugliness of his past, but on the power of God to change a life.

This concern over a church planter’s former life is an important discussion. According to the author’s survey, close to 30% of the respondents responded with the answer, “A prophet is without honor in his hometown” when asked “Why do you think more pastors do not start new churches in their hometown?” These results show that many planters are concerned that their past and/or their reputation would be a problem if they were to return to their hometown. While credibility is a huge concern for the church planters, it must not dictate the Spirit-led unction to plant a church where the planter grew up and reinvest in his hometown community.

In biblical days, credibility was not something to take for granted either. The Lord speaks in a vision to Ananias about Saul, sending him on a mission to restore the new convert; and the mission serves to preserve Paul's apostleship as by “revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12), to bring him into the church, despite his notorious reputation, and to ensure that the Gentile mission will take place with the approval of the church (Acts 13:1-4; compare other visions that guide the

church's advance: 10:3, 17; 16:9-10: 18:9-10).²⁹ The church itself struggled with accepting Saul's conversion from a persecutor who murdered many Christians to now becoming one of them; his credibility was, understandably, questioned. At this point, Paul could have become discouraged and used many excuses not to take the gospel forward; instead, he obeyed God and was arguably the greatest missionary ever to walk the face of the Earth. God has the ability to take a messed-up past that "Satan intended for harm," and make something amazing come to life. This is true for the church planter who has decided to return to his hometown and plant a church that will reach former friends, relatives, and acquaintances. At the end of the day, the planter must decide whether he truly believes God has the ability to go before him and cover things that need to be covered and reveal things that need to be revealed. Therefore, it must be concluded that a messed up past is no reason not to return home and plant a church that may reach many friends and family members.

This is not to discount that, even though Jesus forgives, the public is not as forgiving and will sometimes resist the acceptance of someone who has wreaked havoc in that community. The balance is delicate and the question that must be answered is: "Can a changed life offset the 'havoc' that was wreaked while the church planter was living for the world and not for God?" The answer must be "yes" due to the many characters in Scripture that battled with the same circumstance. This may mean that the church planter should consider staying in that community for the long haul. This means that he is ok with making this the hometown of his children, as well. The willingness to stay is often a difficult point of surrender; but, there is something

²⁹"Acts 9: IVP New Testament Commentaries," Bible Gateway, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Pauls-Conversion> (accessed February 24, 2013).

settling and secure in knowing where you will spend the rest of your days barring the return of the Lord Jesus or the very loud voice of a calling to go somewhere else.

There are numerous examples in the Bible of “havoc wreckers” who have recovered from their life of crime or sin and entered ministry in a disadvantaged state. Although this recovery may have been a bit of a mountain to climb, a church was built and God received the glory for what He did in the community. The very theology of the Gospel would promote the idea that a saved life is a changed life. The idea that God can change a life and give a brand new start is very attractive to those who are without hope. The most encouraging aspect to the unbeliever is that the person with whom they attended preschool, grade school, or high school is now in the ministry; there is hope that “if they can be forgiven then maybe God will forgive me and give me a brand new start.”

Great care must be taken by the church planter not to let the past manipulate the future and to trust the sovereignty of God in determining location. When the Bible is examined, the conclusion cannot be made that a treacherous past is too much for God when considering returning to the hometown. In fact, many planters are not open to returning to their hometown because they feel the scripture in some way discourages them from having any kind of effective influence on their hometown community. Many would site the passage in Mark 6:1-6 which states:

Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.” Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their

unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.³⁰

Pastor Geoff Thomas discusses this passage:

The people of the town knew the Lord Jesus intimately. They had watched him grow up. His parents had been eminently respectable members of the community. His mother and the rest of the family still lived there. He must have made a remarkable growing impression on these people throughout those twenty-five years. Luke tells us that he grew in favour with them. There was a certain initial popularity because he was such a pleasing young man. He loved each one of them as he loved himself, day after day. Their occasional sarcasm and cruelty failed to provoke him to anger. He always gave a gentle answer. He had forgiven them again and again for the ways they'd insulted him. He overcame their evil with good. He kept no record of wrongs. He was patient with them, and kind. There wasn't an envious bone in his body. He was the humblest man in the community. He was always protecting the weak, always trusting, always persevering in doing good. He never cheated in the prices he asked for finished jobs. He never gave shoddy workmanship. He kept his word. He was straight and fair in everything he did. He honoured his father and mother. Every mother wished for a son like him. Every father hoped the carpenter would marry one of his daughters.³¹

One cannot say that people in Nazareth were not open to his teachings as verse two states that they marveled at both his wisdom and his works. His hometown was initially receptive to His teachings. However, whether or not they were receptive or not is irrelevant; Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth to bring life where there was death. The people became unreceptive and offended when they recognized who he was in relation to the rest of his family members, even though he was doing some pretty incredible things. “Yes, it is true he was reputed to be so; and no disgrace to be the son of an honest tradesman; they should have respected him the more because he was one of themselves, but therefore they despised him.”³²

³⁰ Mark 6:1-6 (NKJV).

³¹Geoffrey Thomas, “A Prophet Without Honour In His Hometown,” Alfred Place Baptist Church, <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/Sermons/mark29.htm> (January 18, 2013).

³²Bible Suite, “Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary: Matthew 13:57,” Biblos, <http://bible.cc/matthew/13-57.htm> (accessed December 12, 2012).

While there were certainly some who were offended at Jesus, the general context does not lend itself to encouraging a modern day church planter to be fearful of returning to the hometown and begin a gospel-centered work there. The Bible acknowledges in verse five that “he could do no mighty work there, except that He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.” However, the thrust of the message is that Jesus went back to his hometown and did a work there. Even though the Nazarene people were not open to his teachings, he did go purposefully to his hometown with the message. The church planter must not focus on the reaction of the people, but on Jesus’ purpose in returning to Nazareth. Jesus was not pursuing results-oriented church planting; this is a direct contrast some of the modern day church planting methods and paradigms. Some believed and that was worth going to Nazareth because the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repents. The idea that one must grow a huge church with thousands of people involved to be a success is not true. If that were the case, every small town in American would be a poor place to start a church simply because their demographic would not lend itself to a large congregation.

Intentional “credibility building” takes time. When a church planter moves into the community from the outside, he must make great efforts to build rapport. Planters cannot afford to spend all their time with church people and must become acquainted with unchurched people who live nearby. The planter to begin to make inroads into a community where he has no previous relationships. Contrast this with the planter who is planting in his hometown where credibility is already somewhat established. The process is much simpler for a hometown church planter who can build upon a reputation or testimony that the community is already familiar with, at least in part.

According to the author's survey, 81% responded that it was very useful to know the demographic of the area a pastor was planting a church in; 18.75% responded that it was somewhat useful; and, no one responded that it was not useful at all.

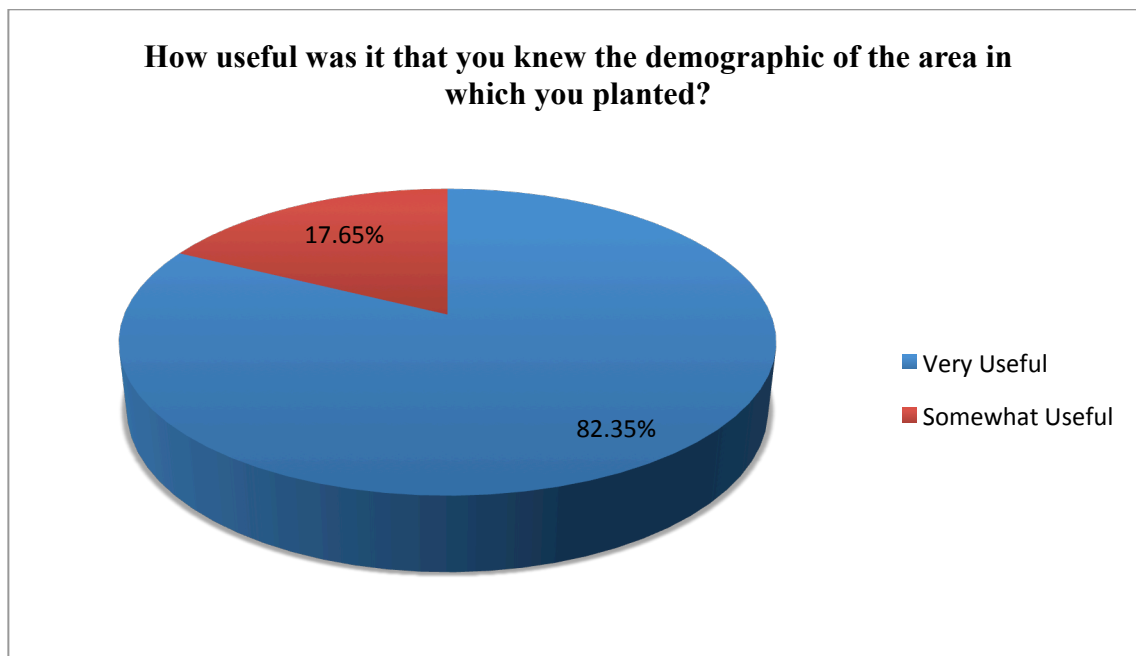


Figure 2.2: Usefulness of Demographic Knowledge for Church Planters

The hometown church planters who responded to the survey agreed that knowing the demographic of the area before they planted the church was a benefit to starting the church. One planter responded, “Familiarity with the church and city culture of my area lessened my initial research and made ministry feel more intuitive.” The idea that credibility was already established for the church planter made the process much more natural and “intuitive.” This natural approach allows the church planter to “be himself” and work less on trying to build a bridge with a culture that he does not have familiarity with. The result would be a shortened time frame for being ready to reach the lost and unchurched in that community, providing critical mass and momentum very quickly. This building of critical mass beginning in small groups will allow the

church planter to launch much more effectively and swiftly. As Stetzer points out, “People have difficulty committing themselves to a dream they cannot see just yet and recruiting a launch team is challenging but essential.”³³

The “In-the-Know” Reason

What Happened in Your Community?

The history of a community will play a part in reaching that community. This may be particularly true if the community is a rural small town. Many of America’s rural small towns are delightful places to be but may be closed to new things and new people coming in and making changes such as starting churches. A hometown church planter is already going to understand what this town is about and who the movers and shakers are. The planter will know who to go to in order to get things done and he will have a list of resources that will help him accomplish his mission. Knowing the history of the community he is trying to reach will help the church planter tremendously. One church planter surveyed affirmed that knowing the ins and outs of the community was invaluable: “Receptivity from people, knowing the religious and spiritual backgrounds of multiple denominations, and knowing how the process of breaking down cultural barriers must take place.” Topics that are important in a community may include racism, the Civil War, natural disasters, and potential strongholds, idols, or cults that may manifest themselves in the community. Each of these may have a spiritual factor on how well the gospel seeds will begin to grow.

³³ Stetzer, *Missional Churches*, 198.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:18-23:

Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

This scripture paints a picture of a farmer working hard to plant the seed; he realizes that the seed will fall on different types of soil. As the church planter goes into a community, he will plant the seeds of the Gospel and pray that the seed will take hold on good ground, begin to grow, and then reproduce. Each one of these environments is represented in any community and the church planter must be sure that proper “tilling” has taken place. The prayer is that the seed will fall on good ground and then “yield: some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown.” It would seem reasonable to conclude that different towns are in possession of different types of soil; knowing the community’s history as well as its spiritual climate is essential. Failure to prepare spiritually to enter a town may prove to have negative effects on the church planter and the spread of the Gospel. The concept of spiritual preparation is mandatory for the hometown church planter as well. This process cannot be overlooked; however, it is possible that the hometown church planter could have better insight as to the spiritual climate of his hometown. This insight will help him better focus his prayer effort on particular strongholds that may be present in his hometown.

Generally, a church planter who has grown up in this community may have a better handle on the spiritual dynamics of the community; however, as stated, this does not negate the importance of him doing the spiritual preparation in the community. No church should ever be started without continual prayer and supplication to God. The church planter should organize prayer walks around the neighborhood in which God is calling him to start a church. He should drive all over the neighborhoods in which he grew up praying, weeping, and asking God for the names of his friends that he went to school with, doing the spiritual work necessary to prepare the ground for a great harvest. The spiritual battle will be intense even if the church planter is planting in his hometown. Some dynamics will be more difficult to endure because the planter is from the same town in which he is planting.

When the author felt led to start another campus 20 miles to the west of the original church, he knew that the community was known for drugs, witchcraft, and that the Klu Klux Klan had manifested there over the years. The community had not seen a thriving new church for many years and Satan was happy about it. Today the site runs close to 150 in attendance on a Sunday morning in less than three years time. With a town population of 1,499, this would represent nearly 10% of the population coming to this campus.³⁴ One of the keys to growing so quickly was the prayer walking that took place on several nights during the weeks prior to the church launch. These prayer walks were powerful, effective and well attended by members of the home campus. This “tilling” is what opened the door for such a successful launch and ministry that is reaching many people in this small town. The campus pastor is actively involved in the community and serves as a police chaplain for the town. This network has given him credibility

³⁴City Data, “Gordonsville, Virginia,” <http://www.city-data.com/city/Gordonsville-Virginia.html> (accessed March 14, 2013)

and inroads into the community. The spiritual preparation to plant a church in any community cannot be overstated.

The hometown church planter will have an idea of the past happenings in the community but he will also be abreast as to what is coming in the community. Because of the networking that he has been able to do, he will be aware of things that are developing that may affect his church plant. Church planter Chip Wheeler states, “One of the biggest mistakes that a church planter can make when he arrives on the field is to lack specific and strategic contacts.³⁵ It is important to know the latest demographic research that may have changed drastically since the church planter was living in this town. There may be things happening in his community that will bring more and more people in to live.

The Identity Reason

Broken in Your Community

There is no greater story of a man’s love for his community than that of Nehemiah. Nehemiah

1:1-4 says:

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire. So it was,

³⁵Chip Wheeler, “Top Ten Ways to Connect to Your Community,” NAMB, <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/churchplantingvillagepb.aspx?pageid=8589991308> (accessed March 13, 2013)

when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.³⁶

There was no doubt that when Nehemiah heard the condition of the city, it affected his resolve so much that he had to do something about it. He was mourning, weeping, fasting, and praying for many days as a result. The weakness of the city and the atmosphere of destruction as well as the love he had for the residents who were in great distress were felt deep within his heart. His love was so deep for his people that he had to do something about the destruction that had taken place; he made a decision to leave a comfortable, well-paying job as a cupbearer to return home and rebuild the city. His connections in that city gave him a desire to return and make it a better place. He could not stand the thought of this city being in complete ruin and open for even more attacks.

Nehemiah approached his boss, the king, about returning to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple; the king could tell something was wrong with him.

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *when wine was* before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, “Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart.” So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”³⁷

Nehemiah had a heart for his home city. God had given him a vision to go back and rebuild that city for the glory of God. There was no doubt that Nehemiah was broken before the Lord and he could not rest until he returned to help the people there. He could not rest until he was able see the plan realized of rebuilding the city that was laid to waste and ruin. Nehemiah

³⁶Nehemiah 1:1-4 (NKJV).

³⁷ Nehemiah 2:1-3 (NKJV).

stepped out on faith to return and do what God had called him to do, even though the sacrifices were great.

Caring for Your Community

The desire to plant a new church must be birthed out of a genuine care for the people in that community. It cannot be birthed out of a desire to be famous, cool, hip, or to use people as a justifiable means. Church planters must care for their community in such a way that brokenness is the driving motivation behind reaching the community for Christ. They must remember those classmates with whom they once shared life with and desire to reach them for Christ. There has to be a tug and a pull on his heart to get something done back in his hometown.

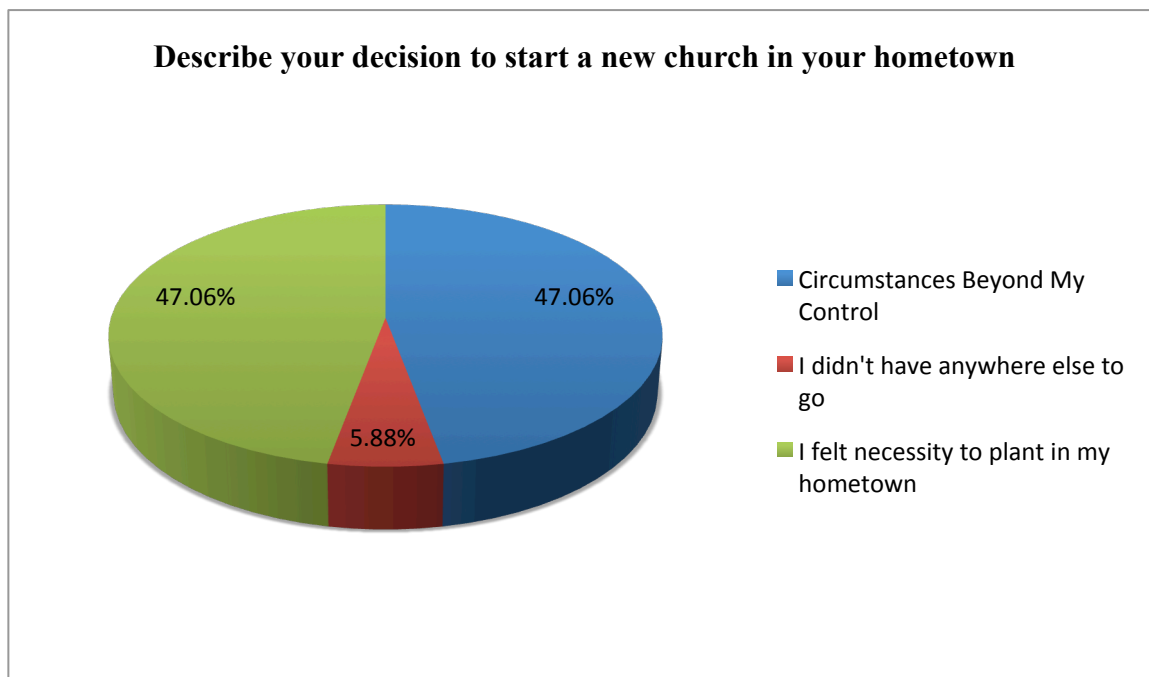


Figure 2.3: Reasons Church Planters Chose a Location in Their Hometown.

This is not to say that all homegrown church planters will have it easy or that everything will go their way. There are several obstacles that may have to be overcome when planting in the hometown. Sometimes a community has changed since the church planter has left and there may exist a totally different culture than was there before. Even in his own hometown, the church planter must be involved in exegeting his culture as diligently as the missionary going to China. In some aspects, he may have to work harder to overcome his familiarity in order to see the divergence.³⁸ This familiarity may also prevent him from reaching out into the community as he should. He would also need to guard against idleness and the relaxed lifestyle that may come from being at home. Regardless of where the church planter goes, he must always be a student of the culture. He must be sure that he has done all that he can to understand the cultural dynamics of the community.

Many church starters experience failure because they do not know who they are, and thus target people who are not like them.³⁹ There is less of a need for cultural training when the church planter returns to his hometown and reaches people who are like him. God will go ahead of the church planter and give him favor and identity with the people who he is trying to reach. He must become missional in reaching the area that he is trying to reach. Missional churches more completely reflect the biblical picture of God's self-revelation to humanity; the first missional act was God coming to humanity in the person of Jesus to reveal His mission of redemption for a humanity separated from Him by depravity.⁴⁰

³⁸Brown.

³⁹ Sylvia, 45.

⁴⁰ NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter...So What Will that Make Me?* 57.

The Celebration Reason

Go Back Home

There is nothing quite as satisfying for a church planter than to see someone receive Christ through the power of the Gospel, especially when the commitment to Christ is a result of the church plant drawing in unchurched. Most Christians would agree that someone's salvation is the most rewarding thing that could happen in the life of the church. The Bible says in Luke 15:7, "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." When one sinner repents, the angels in heaven rejoice; when one hometown sinner repents, the hometown church planter weeps with joy because he understands the dynamics of that repentance and the magnitude of that. There is a real motivation and reward to win the lost of the church planter's hometown and even more so when the planter has experienced the pre-Christ life with that individual. This is not say that church planters who are not in their hometown have any less desire to see the lost come to know Christ or that they do not feel the magnitude of lostness, but there is indeed something unique when the hometown sinner repents and serves Christ together with the hometown pastor. According to the survey conducted by the author, 10% of the respondents listed, "seeing their friends and family get saved" as a top three reason why they believe hometown church planting is of a great benefit. This is called "The Celebration Reason" due to the dynamics and reward of seeing your friends come to know Jesus.

The author can recall an account some sixteen years ago when he returned home from college for a weekend. Having been recently saved, he was excited to begin to share his faith

with those in his community. He drove around the community with a friend, looking for someone who was willing to listen to them testify and share the Gospel. After a while, they found two high school friends who were willing to ride around and listen to what God had done in their life. There were no salvations that day but recently one of those friends attended the 11:00 service of the church and has decided to continue at the church along with his whole family. Sixteen years later, the seeds that were sown in that car ride are now coming to fruition. Stories like this can only be told because the author returned to his hometown and witnessed the amazing hand of God moving to save his friends. The magnitude of the mission is intense and the fields are white for harvest; hometowns need the gospel as much as any other town on the face of the Earth.

The Extended Family Support Reason

If the church planter is fortunate enough to have his extended family still living in his hometown, he will be able to take advantage of the love and support that they may offer. Oftentimes, he has left the community for some time and his family has stayed in the community and has remained connected within the culture. In addition, no one is as close to you as your family and no one should want to see you succeed more than your family. When planting a church in a hometown, the ideal situation would be to have your extended family fully engaged and in support of what is happening. Church planting is very difficult and has the potential to cause confusion and chaos even in the most spiritual of families. As one church planter's wife testifies, "Prior to our experience I had an unrealistic vision...I expected to work hard and watch the 'perfect' church automatically grow up healthy and strong before our very eyes and it wasn't

until we were in the midst of our crisis that I learned many church plants struggle; we had not been singled out and whether your church plant thrives or barely survives, it will greatly impact your children.”⁴¹ With the help of extended family, the burdens of planting a church may be lightened.

The author can testify to the great advantages of having his parents in the same town, attending the church plant, and willing to help with the children at a moment’s notice. Especially in the beginning, church planting requires the planter to make many sacrifices in order to get the ministry up and running. This means that there are times when he must find childcare at the last minute so that he and his wife can handle a situation or a problem. Nothing will bring a grandma more joy than having the opportunity to watch her grandchildren and help in the work of the ministry. Planting a church is a community event and one in which the church planter will not be able to do by himself. Oftentimes, the church planter, his wife, and family testify as to how the Lord moved them to some far away city to plant a church from scratch without knowing anybody. The anguish and difficulty is obvious; children change schools, there is no family support and loneliness sets in.

But does a calling have to be isolated and lonely to be from God? What if the planter were to pray and consider his hometown? What if it were not such a huge jump and the church could grow significantly without some of the common difficulties associated with church planting? What if there were family support, childcare, financial advantages, and automatic cultural acceptance? Church planting is difficult regardless of location; however, planting in a planter’s hometown can relieve some of the pressure for both the church planter and his wife.

⁴¹NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter*, 87.

Numerous stories exist of church planters who have faced burn out, infidelity and, unfortunately, the loss of their family through the process. One of the things that will drain the energy and excitement out of church planting is for a couple or a family to become isolated. Even practicing hospitality and spending time with people in the church can be draining instead of life-giving, especially when the people in the church see the church planter as pastor and his wife instead of knowing them as friends.⁴² Not only does the church planter have to reach hurting people, he has to be sure that he does not hurt his family in the process or even lose them permanently.

When a church planter is praying through the process of location, he should be open to returning to his hometown where the pressures of church planting may be minimized. Of course there are other pressures that he may face as a result of planting in his hometown, but the benefits often far outweigh the difficulties. Extended family support the potential networking that can happen when family members begin to invite others to the church plant can both assist the church planter and the ministry. According to the survey conducted by the author, when asked the question, “What have been three of the most positive benefits of starting a church in your hometown?” 25% of the respondents surveyed mentioned that family support and being close to relatives was at least one of the most positive benefits of starting a church in their hometown. One interviewee responded, “My parents are an actively involved in attending and participating in our church, this is a tremendous support.” For most, the extended family reason tends to be of great benefit when the stress of church planting and family life become overwhelming.

⁴²NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter*, 137.

There is limited research on the advantages of having the pastor's extended family in the church; the author can personally testify that the benefits of having his parents, sister, and brother-in-law actively ministering in the church plant are too numerous to list. The family involvement could be seen as a liability or a bad perception in some cases, but can be used to assist the church planter in all facets of church life. The joys that the church planter will realize by seeing his family grow closer to Christ are innumerable. There are times when the author needed his mother to keep the kids and go with his wife to an emergency situation. This enabled his wife to be able to be in most situations with the church planter; because of extended family support, they could both share in the ministry dynamics that come with planting a new church.

According to Ed Stetzer:

Many families find themselves asking, "Should we quit or should we persevere?" Critical support environments for planters and their families are key. A fully engaged partner church that cares for the entire family unit is essential. Babysitters, Christmas bonuses, and financial sponsorship for marriage enrichment are a few ways to create a foundation for health. Accountability from partners is also essential. Coaching and mentoring for the planter and family is also a plus.⁴³

All of these dynamics can be solved with the presence of a good extended family that will help in time of need. The homegrown church planter can have access to all of these resources right under his fingertips while at the same time, devoting a majority of his time to reaching the lost. The benefits are great and the mission is too important not to have healthy church planters on the mission field doing the work that God has called them to do. Great siblings and parents will come alongside their children and help them in the ministry. The author's father currently serves as a Sunday School teacher and visits the members of his class on a regular basis. His

⁴³Ed Stetzer, "7 Issues Church Planters Face, Issue #7. Spiritual, Physical & Mental Health of Planter / Family," Ed Stetzer: The Lifeway Research Blog, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2011/02/7-top-issues-church-planters-f-4.html> (accessed June 5, 2012).

class is comprised of the more seasoned individuals who are members of the church. Without his ministry, the elderly population possibly would feel less welcomed in the life of the church. He has served well and everyone seems to love him for who he is and not for his relation to the author. The author's sister and her husband have worked for years with the adolescents in the church, reaching another population that often feels less welcome in many churches. The ministry efforts of the author's family helped the church reach a larger segment of the population earlier in the life of the church than the author could have accomplished without their support.

The church planter should not be scared to minister alongside his family members and should in fact embrace such a challenge. The great joys of seeing your family members grow in Christ and to watch their children get saved and begin to follow Christ is a great benefit. Every hometown church planter should consider the great benefits of having his family come alongside him and help the work get started; in return, the church planter should not have any reservations about his family being in the church with him serving for Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Place of Calling

The Plan

Once the church planter has heard from God that he should start a new church in his hometown, he should immediately begin to make plans. If the church planter is still living in his hometown, the connections and the plan will be different than if the planter has not been in his community for some time. Sometimes the church planter has just finished seminary and the Lord has placed returning home on his heart and a desire to see his hometown come to Christ. Great care should be taken to seek the Lord's advice on what steps the planter will need to take prior to returning home and beginning a new work. If he does not have an adequate source of income, he may have to consider getting a job and working bi-vocational for some time until the church begins to grow. As previously discussed, local businesses may be a great source for both employment and connection opportunities. Sometimes local businesses are underrated as to the amount of help that they can give to a church planter.

It should also be noted that bi-vocational ministry holds great advantages to the church planter who is just starting out. It provides a reason to be around people who are unchurched and lost and helps him integrate into the community. In addition, having another source of income will aid him in the mission. Many church planters have been convinced that the only legitimate ministry is one that will allow him to work full time. However, this paradigm must be shifted.

The whole purpose of the mission is to reach people; this cannot be accomplished if the church planter is holed up in his office all day preparing a sermon for people who never show up because he failed to belong in the community. Bi-vocational pastors feel they are better able to encourage the churches they serve to create a culture in which the laity use their gifts; where there is no fully funded pastors “paid to do everything,” the congregation devotes more of their time to ministry. Although this can be initially stressful, most bi-vocational pastors feel that, long-term, this creates healthy churches.¹

The church planter should consider who he may know that could sponsor, pray for, or support him in the new work of starting a church. Individuals with whom the church planter already has a relationship with should be considered as a potential church members or networking partners. Every church planter should know that the church will be built on relationships and these are the primary means by which the church will grow and be talked about in the community. When people tell their faith stories, they talk about the individuals they believe God put in their paths.² These relationships are monumental to the individuals who have placed their faith in Christ. Throughout the church planting process, God will place the church planter in the path of many people who need to be saved. This divine appointment will prove that God is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

He will remember the homes of his friends, and may likely end up knocking on these doors and meeting again the parents of his friends. For the author, this has always been a great benefit of connection when you can remember a name to generate conversation. Once the ice

¹Terry Dorsett, “First Person: 8 Benefits of Bivocational Ministry,” Baptist Press, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=35281> (accessed February 2, 2013).

²Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 132.

has been broken, then eventually they will want to inquire as to what the planter is up to “these days”. The response will be a formal invitation to come and see what God is doing through this new church plant. Once again, it is important to note that the tilling of the ground is of upmost importance as this will prepare the hearts of those who will be reached in the community.

The Preparation

Preparing to start a church is an exciting time for any church planter who feels the call to step out by faith and watch God do the work. What are some ways that a pastor can prepare to reach his hometown for Christ? The first move would be for the planter to spend considerable amounts of time in prayer with his spouse. Praying together will draw their hearts together and prepare them for the challenge at hand; prayer will also prepare the hearts of the people who they are going to reach. Prayer allows God to do more in days, hours, minutes, or even seconds than we could accomplish without him in months, or even years, of work.³ In Ephesians 2:10, the Bible says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Every church planter should be encouraged to know that God has prepared good works beforehand and he should walk in them. God also has prepared a place beforehand for the church planter to be and reach many people. And we know that the pastor’s spiritual preparation began long before he was even born, as Jeremiah 1:5 states that “God ordained him a prophet when He formed him in his mother’s womb.”⁴ God also used

³Dave Earley, *Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders* (Chattanooga: Living Ink, 2008), 5.

⁴James Bryant and Mac Brunson, *The New Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 18.

the town the pastor was raised to help form and prepare him for the ministry; maybe that was the exact preparation needed to return to that place with the Gospel of Christ

One may think that just because the church planter is going to his hometown to start a new work that prayer is an option for being successful. Discounting the potential dangers and difficulties of returning home would be spiritually naïve and possibly devastating. Some people may hold the church planter's past against him; sometimes his immediate family dynamic is not positive; or, perhaps there are some hurts from the past that would cause barriers to him planting in his hometown.

For the pastor, hometown planting may be the best thing he has ever heard of; however, his wife will have to deal with some special obstacles. When the author asked his wife about the special challenges of planting a church in the hometown of her husband, she had several obstacles to list. While the church planter's relationships in the community are a great advantage for networking purposes, they may eliminate a sense of privacy and individualism for the church planter's wife. The planter's wife will already struggle to establish her identity as an individual, even as she labors alongside the church planter; placed in his hometown where he grew up may pose some additional difficult challenges for her. Donna Stevens, a pastor's wife from Strongsville, Ohio, testifies, "One of the struggles that I have faced as the wife of a church planter was understanding my call and I struggled with knowing exactly where I fit in for about four years."⁵ When she is laboring alongside her husband who is well-known in his hometown, there may be times of loneliness or depression. Many times, church planter's wives know what

⁵NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter*, 32.

goes on behind the scenes and yet cannot discuss the information with others.⁶ The “In-the-Know” reason discussed earlier makes hometown church planting beneficial, but may also play heavy on the mind of the church planter’s wife. There are times when the church planter wishes he didn’t know everything that he knows about a community or the people who dwell in that community.

Another dynamic that may play a factor is that in a small town, everyone knows about everybody. Trips to the grocery store are always met with 30-minute conversations about church life or prayers requests right there in the grocery store aisle. After a while, there aren’t too many people that have not been touched by the church at some point. Eventually, the pastor and his wife will have encountered just about everybody in a small town, or have heard something about that person. In many ways, a pastor’s wife can have more privacy in an established church better than in a church plant because starting a church means entertaining people in your home and getting out into the community to know people and to learn the culture.⁷ Sometimes, the very things in a hometown church plant that will help the planter (networking, credibility, etc.) are the very things that will begin to break him down. Thus, he must immediately begin to develop leaders and pouring himself into them and giving them some credibility so that he can begin to reproduce himself.

In addition, the hometown church planter’s wife may feel like an outsider compared to her husband who is always on the inside. She often has to deal with her husband’s past as well and she may have to hear others speak of what her husband may have done in his past. All of these may hold special challenges for the church planter who decides to return to his hometown

⁶NAMB, *My Husband Wants to Be a Church Planter*, 120.

⁷Ibid., 29.

to start a church. This is why the preparation to enter a hometown to start a church is essential.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

Only the church planter will know where God is calling him to plant a new church. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate guide in leading His believers in the direction that will ultimately fulfill His plan for their life. Everyone agrees that God's plan is the best plan and one that will bring complete satisfaction to the church planter. However, it is also possible for the Christian to move in a direction that is not God's plan and hinder His blessing for their lives. The important message is for the church planter to hear from God on the location that God would have him to move in. This study was not intended to be a mandate but simply a suggestion that maybe God would be calling the church planter to return to his hometown just as the writer did and experience great success in doing so. The temptation to ignore the hometown and keep it out of the "prayer of location" would be a tragedy and perhaps a missed opportunity. Just as Jerry Falwell did many years ago and experienced a total transformation of his hometown, his friends, and his family, the church planter who returns to his hometown can experience the same measure of blessing and community change. Anyone who has ever been through Lynchburg would agree

No one could have ever imagined what one man's dream would become and what one man's faithful response to God's call would turn out to be. But there are more Jerry Falwells out there and there are more great dreamers who have yet to experience the ride of their life. Relationships with God and relationships with each other are at the forefront of human desire. Those relationships that were formed in the early years of one's life can be used to bring glory to

God in the church planter's hometown and in return, the church planter can see great things happen with "his" people. The caution would be to remember; however that the hometown has changed and there are other people living in that hometown. The temptation would be to form a "hometown" club or clique that would exclude others from coming and experiencing the goodness of God. The hometown church planter has the ability to connect the "new town" to the "old town" in an amazing way that will form the body of Christ among many different groups. He must keep the great commission at the forefront and connecting people to Jesus as the primary goal.

Jonah was never quite right about going to Nineveh, he never would have said that this is what he wanted to do but was "forced" there by the hand of God. He became depressed about what God was doing in that awful town, became bitter and angry. He failed to see the people of Nineveh through the eyes of God; but, God had a plan for that town and ultimately the town would experience redemption. Jonah's response for fleeing was, "I fled to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm." Jonah's heart issues ran so deep that his anger was stirred by God's grace on underserving people. As a result of his heart issue, he was not willing to go to a place where God wanted him to be. Instead, he went in a different direction and suffered the consequences from God. It would be a great tragedy for a man called of God to identify a calling, recognize the calling but go in the wrong direction to fulfill that calling. The church planter must be convinced that the place of calling is just as vital as the calling itself.

In contrast, Nehemiah had such a burden and a heart for the people that there was absolutely nothing else that he could do but go and rebuild Jerusalem. In both cases, God received great glory, lives were rebuilt and stability was restored where there was once chaos.

The difference between these two accounts is the heart of the one that was doing the preaching. One was forced to go where God wanted him to go and the other one went out of “unction” from the Holy One and a love for the people. The prayer would be for the church planter to have a Nehemiah vision for reaching his town for Christ. A vision that is birthed out of a restless desire to rebuild a town or a community that lay in ruins. Ruins may not necessarily be in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense. Things happen in a community that may leave it in spiritual shamble with no moral direction or sense of comfort. The hometown church planter can return to his hometown and “rebuild” a town that may have lost its direction just as Nehemiah did. But the heart must be pure and the motives clean to reach the people with the gospel of Christ. Jerry Falwell returned to his hometown of Lynchburg, VA and gave the town hope, direction and a sense of excitement. He never left the vision that God had called him to and was tenacious in building a church including the world’s largest Christian University. God blessed Jerry Falwell’s calling to go home and reach his hometown for Christ. Jerry Falwell pinned a map of Lynchburg to the wall of his cubicle office and put a dot at the church’s location on Thomas Road where he had radius’ drawn around each block with the idea that he would knock on 600 doors per week giving them a personal invitation.¹ Like Nehemiah, Jerry Falwell felt an unction from the Holy Spirit to return to his hometown and plant a gospel-centered church. This unction was something that would not let Jerry rest and even under intense persecution to leave his hometown, he continued to persevere. This perseverance in his hometown has changed the whole world and the influence of Jerry Falwell is being felt and will continue to be felt for many years to come. As the church planter works through the location of calling, his hometown should be high on his radar as he has the potential to affect many family members and friends.

¹ Macel Falwell, Jerry Falwell: His Life and Legacy (New York: Howard Books, 2008), 41.

Likewise, the author has realized great joy from planting in his hometown and has found extreme peace in knowing that this is the place where he will likely spend the rest of his life ministering among the people with whom he has known since childhood. The writer's wife, while at times having experienced even more challenging dynamics, would also admit that God has done amazing things in this hometown and God has used her in an amazing way to minister alongside of her husband. Further research could be done to explore the dynamics of the church planter's wife and how the hometown church plant could possibly have negative connotations to the planter planting in his hometown. However the overall consensus would conclude that the church planter would do well to consider his hometown as a place to begin a new church and continue the life that he once had in this place. The advantages of planting a church in the planter's hometown will help fulfill the Great Commission as Jesus stated without the additional requirements of learning the culture, learning the people, and making the connections. The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God's heart is that sinners would repent and that none should perish. This too should be the heart of every church planter as they pray through where God would have them plant a new church. God will keep His promises and when the church planter goes where God has called him to go, the provisions for reaching the lost will be met in every way.

The most rewarding occupation on the face of the Earth is shepherding God's people who come to hear God's Word every week. Most pastors would admit that their occupation is a very difficult, and seemingly never-ending, task. The hometown pastor may face an extra set of challenges just as Jesus did when he returned to Nazareth and no one wanted to hear the message that he preached. This message is becoming more and more unpopular even today in our ever-

changing world. However, the rewards that come with seeing God change lives every week are far greater than the difficulties; and, when a church planter returns to his hometown and ministers among those with whom he grew up with there are even greater rewards because of the bond between him and his hometown. This bond between the church planter and the hometown parishioners is an understood bond of camaraderie. The hometown church planter will be able to connect Christians from the hometown and those who may have moved in to the area together and eventually develop a community in which they will grow as disciples of Jesus. The joys of seeing friends and relatives come to know Christ far outweigh any negative aspect of returning to the hometown.

Perhaps when a church planter returns to his hometown as an indigenous worker in that community, the measure of lostness as presented by Jim Slack back in 2008 can begin to turn around. Maybe the measure of lostness can be reduced and tide turned especially in hometown communities. Church planters can realize critical mass in their churches and make inroads into the community more effectively, when they are from that area. Time can never be taken for granted as the mission field continues to grow and more people continue to journey through life searching for the truth that Jesus came to give. The task at hand is an urgent task and eternity is on the line for those who have never made a decision for Christ.

The writer's desire is to see the church planter do exactly what God is calling him to do which may not include the planter returning to his hometown but one thing is certain: the planter should at least consider his hometown and commit his hometown to prayer. Perhaps this thesis will help the church planter to identify with his past and then use that past as a tool with which to infiltrate a community with the gospel. Careful consideration should be used when the church planter is praying for a location to plant a church and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is of utmost

importance when lives are at stake. It is the writer's opinion that many churches fail because the location was not as important as the call oftentimes placing a church planter in a demographic that he does not understand. This often causes confusion, disappointment, and ministry-abandonment at the very least while in some cases, the disappointed pastor has turned his back on ministry altogether and picked up a job doing something else until retirement. Further research could include studies on churches that have hometown pastors and those who do not to determine just how effective the hometown pastorate really is. Success rates could be determined based on a healthy church that remains a healthy church after three years from the date of launch. It would be interesting to find out if churches where the pastor is from that town are more successful than pastors who are not from that town.

The "Measure of Lostness" must motivate the church planter to move with a sense of urgency and realize that time is of the essence.² While prayer is essential, training is essential, and calling is essential, there is just not much time to "waste" in evangelizing the lost if we can conclude that time really does matter. The time to plant churches is now and the most effective location for some church planters is their hometown where they can immediately begin the process of planting a church through the rekindling of relationships that have been stagnant for many years. Perhaps in one generation, the tides will begin to turn and these numbers can begin to reverse but until then, the only way to effect the measure of lostness is by training up new church planters to surrender to God on calling and location. The gospel certainly commands us to reach the ends of the Earth; however, the command begins in our Jerusalem as a starting point. From

² Jim Slack, *"Doing the Math!" on Lostness in the United States Based on Copngregational and Affiliate Growth from 1990 to 2000 A.D.* (Global Research Department of International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, March 14, 2008), (March 1, 2012).

Jerusalem, we are to extend out to the nations but there must be a starting point and for the church planter, that Jerusalem may very well be his hometown. The hometown church planter will then be able to raise up more indigenous lay ministers to plant more churches and reach more hometown communities with the gospel.

APPENDIX A

Research Questions and Results

*

1. What have been three of the most positive benefits of starting a church in your hometown?
Responses

- 1. know the culture 2. know the city 3. know people living here
- 1.) We grew much more rapidly than I could have ever expected due to the multitude of relationships I have built in my home town over the years. 2.) My parents are an actively involved in attending and participating in our church. This is a tremendous support. 3.) I know the mindset of our city intimately.
- 1. I know them, how they think, because Im one of them. There is less 2nd guessing decisions. I know which roads to walk down and which not to. 2. I knew the demographics as well as psychographics. (See Barna about Psychographics) 3. I had some previous contacts. Not many.
- 1.) opportunity to serve an area with which I have life history, familiarity and affinity, 2.) proximity to family and friends, 3) baseline of connections from earlier life seasons
- 1) Pre-existing contacts, even if they didn't end up as part of our core-group. 2) Pre-existing financial contacts. 3) Familiarity with the church and city culture of my area lessened my initial research and made ministry feel more intuitive.
- Knowledge of the area History of the people Knowledge of the culture and temperament of the people
- Knowing the Culture, Seeing your family members grow or get saved, the ability to start quickly.
- knowledge of the area / resources / people - cultural awareness - heart for the people
- cultural connection, relational "head start," family support
- Receptivity from people, knowing the religious and spiritual backgrounds of multiple denominations, and knowing how the process of breaking down cultural barriers must take place
- 1. Understanding the spiritual background and atmosphere of the area. 2. Familiarity with different people groups in area 3. Deep network of relationships.
- 1) Understanding of the community's history 2) Reputation/credibility 3) Sense of belonging (not wondering if I'm going to move soon)

- Knowing the people Knowing the places Familiarity
- 1. The people know me and know the changes that have occurred. 2. Received support from my home church 3. Already knew the area and the obstacles and opportunities that would come
- Knowing the culture. Knowing the culture. And knowing the culture.
- family support system, understand the culture, credibility with the locals
- 1. Being able to be close to family and friends for support. 2. Seeing all my friends get saved 3. Connections

2. Why do you think more pastors do not start new churches in their hometown?

- A prophet is without honor in his hometown
- The desire to go where more people are
- Fear of failure among peers
- Embarrassment of their hometown
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
A prophet is without honor in his hometown	29.41%
The desire to go where more people are	47.06%
Fear of failure among peers	17.65%
Embarrassment of their hometown	17.65%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of causing strife with your original church within your hometown • It's not as exciting to go home! • Pastoral roles seem to take people all over the place. You have to follow the opportunities given you. Networks and sending churches aren't necessarily interested in your city of choice, especially if it's small. • hesitance to share with friends and relatives 	23.53%

3. Describe your financial support when you started a church.

- Bivocational
- Full-time
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
Bivocational	47.06%
Full-time	23.53%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I led our church planting core group into a dying church that offered me the call to be their pastor. It was a church-plant and a replant rolled into one. At this time I had zero financial support, but was able to take a full-time salary within two months. However, a church in Lubbock had graciously determined to support us with 20k • half bivocational, half support • one church rented us a building for 200.00 per month we lived by faith. God supplied week by week. • Sponsoring churches helped with salary • My wife currently works full time and we do not have children yet, this allows me to be full-time without a salary required. • raised support 	35.29%

4. What was your estimated start-up costs prior to starting your church?

- \$0-10,000
- \$10,001-20,000
- \$20,001-30,000
- Above \$30,000
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
\$0-10,000	23.53%
\$10,001-20,000	23.53
\$20,001-30,000	0%
Above \$30,000	41.18%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're a unique situation. I was able to utilize the resources of a dying church (debt free building, sound board, etc). However, the church was in debt due to inability to pay utilities. A lot of start-up material was donated (website, design, sound equipment, etc). Overall, our expenditures in the first year was around 200k. 100,000\$ but this is relative to the pastor. Some may think you dont need so much. Vinings, GA needed this. And still, our equipment does not satisfy the mainstream, secular unbeliever. We did not know! We just lived week by week! 	17.65%

5. Which of the following best describes your experience starting a new church in your hometown?

- Rewarding
- Challenging
- Conflicting
- I would never do this again
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
Rewarding	64.71%
Challenging	41.18%
Conflicting	5.88%
I would never do this again	0%
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A good church plant or replant is nothing short of a miracle. You never afford remove the supernatural from the equation. 	11.76%

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mostly reaching people I didn't know before. | |
|--|--|

*

6. During the start of your new church, how useful was it that you knew the demographic of the area in which you planted?

- Very Useful
- Somewhat Useful
- Not Useful at all
- Other (please specify)

Responses	%
Very Useful	82.35%
Somewhat Useful	17.65%
Not Useful at all	0%
Other (please specify)	0%

*

7. How long were you out of the community before you returned to start a church?

- Less than a year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- Greater than 20 years
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
Less than a year	17.65%
1-5 years	17.65%
6-10 years	29.41%
11-20 years	23.53%

Greater than 20 years	11.76%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have only lived one summer outside of my city's metropolitan area. • Left at 6yrs old and returned at 31 • I was not out of the community 	

8. How would you best describe what people thought of you as a young person growing up in your hometown?

- I was a troubled kid (always in trouble)
- I had my issues but generally people liked me
- I was loved by everyone and had a stellar reputation (everyone knew I would be somebody)
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
I was a troubled kid (always in trouble)	5.88%
I had my issues but generally people liked me	58.82%
I was loved by everyone and had a stellar reputation (everyone knew I would be somebody)	41.18%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was generally loved. I wasn't outstanding in any way (other than being a decent student). • Left before people knew much about me but raised in the other end of the county • I lived in my hometown, but as a bedroom community, I did school and recreation in other cities. • Virtually no reputation. I went to a small private school and most of the people from that school moved away. A good reputation would have been helpful as I have seen another home-town pastor start his church at the exact same time, but because he had a well-known stellar reputation (including a ministry reputation) his church has grown much more rapidly than mine. • successful & loved but also known as a wild times guy. 	

9. Describe your decision to start a new church in your hometown

- I didn't have any where else to go
- Circumstances beyond my control allowed me to plant in my hometown
- I felt necessity to plant in my hometown to reach my family and friends

Other (please specify)

Response	%
I didn't have any where else to go	5.88%
Circumstances beyond my control allowed me to plant in my hometown	47.06%
I felt necessity to plant in my hometown to reach my family and friends	47.06%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had a very specific call. I had planned on planting elsewhere. • Direct leadership of the Lord • My sending church sent me there. • God broke my heart for the people. I had no desire prior to that. • Mom passed away came home to be with my dad. 	

*

10. How important in your church start was a Church Plant Network (CPN) or denominational support?

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- We were not part of a CPN
- Other (please specify)

Response	%
Very Important	64.71%
Somewhat Important	23.53%

We were not part of a CPN	11.76%
Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We were in relationship with Acts 29 from our early days, and have since then become full members.• We had no support. We started out of another local Church they rented us a building we soon became self supporting. Latter other churches did help us from time to time!	

APPENDIX B

Survey/Script Information

Dear Pastor (name),

It is my understanding that you have planted a new church in your hometown and I want to congratulate you for this great endeavor. In 2002, I too planted a church in my hometown and have found that God has greatly used our church to reach the people with whom I previously shared life. I believe there are great advantages that will assist a church planter in starting a church in their hometown.

I am currently working on my doctoral thesis project at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary with the topic of: Homegrown Pastors: 7 Reasons Why You Should Consider Planting a Church in Your Hometown. My desire is to hear about your experience in planting in your hometown and then form some conclusions that will help me in my doctoral studies. If you would so kindly agree to help me in my study, please click on the link below that will take you to 10 questions about your experience. This survey will take about 10 minutes of your time but will help greatly in future endeavors to plant churches. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in completing this brief survey.

Josh Turner

Sr. Pastor

New Life Community Church

www.newlifelouisa.com

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WM52DQ6>

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VITA

Joshua J. Turner

PERSONAL

Born: June 11, 1972
Married: Stacey D. Smith, August 17, 1996
Children: Caleb Jennings, born January 21, 2000.
Laura Ruth, born October 16, 2001
Anna Caroline, born March 24, 2004

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1995.
MAR, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008.
MDiV, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010.

MINISTERIAL

Ordained: July 27, 2003, New Life Community Church, Louisa, VA

PROFESSIONAL

Squires Timber Company, Elizabethtown, NC, 1995-1996.
Stone Container Corporation, Hopewell, VA, 1996-1999.
Canal Wood Corporation, Lumberton, NC, 1999-2002.
Turner Timber Company, Louisa, VA, 2002-2006.
New Life Community Church, Louisa, VA 2006-present.
Southern Baptist Conservatives of VA, 2010-present.

PROFESSIONAL HONORS

Eagle Scout, Boy Scouts of America

IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER PAGE

Dear Josh,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling

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