

RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**A Strategy for a Successful Church Plant
in an Un-churched, yet Spiritual Culture**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Ernest Smith

Lynchburg, Virginia

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Mentor: Dr. Gregory S. Faulls

Reader: Dr Frederick Smith

Project Abstract

Kingdom Building: A Church Planting Model in a Post-Christian Culture

Ernest A. Smith

Liberty University School of Divinity, 20194

Mentor: Dr. Gregory S. Faulls

Planting a church is difficult, especially when the church is planted in a post-Christian culture. Denver, Colorado is this type of culture and has commonly been called “A Church Planter’s Graveyard” by various church planters, church planting network leaders and senior pastors in Denver. According to the North American Mission Board and other reports, Denver is 88-95% un-churched. This writer moved to Denver in the summer of 2013 to plant a church. The goal is to create a different strategy to reach a community of people who are not Christ-followers. This strategy will research former and current Denver church planters. This author will examine growing churches in the Denver area and survey and interview at least 15 previous or current church planters. Through the research, this project will offer a strategy for church planting in a difficult region.

Abstract Length: 138

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

God makes it very clear in His Word that He desires for all to come to know Him and for none to perish.¹ Now, whether the word “all,” which in Greek is *pas*, literally means all people on Earth or if it means all those God has chosen is not of great importance in this context.² The fact remains that God desires all to come to repentance, ultimately, coming to understand the love and grace that God has for them. 2 Peter 3:9 states, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” This verse is found in the midst of a passage that discusses the return of Christ and the subsequent judgment. Therefore, the author is saying that God is slow in His judgment because He does not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Using deductive reasoning would tell the reader that if Christ has not returned, then there are still more who are to come to repentance. This should be a sobering and exciting thought for any follower of Jesus. To know that there are people who do not know Christ personally and that God is waiting for them to make that decision should fill all believers with hope, a hope that God is in control, knows all things and yet still waits for men and women to turn to Him. At the same time, knowing this truth should bring a sense of intentionality on the part of all Christ-followers to participate in the work of God so that people can not only hear the gospel but respond to

¹ 2 Peter 3:9. All Scripture references are ESV unless otherwise noted.

² “Reverse Interlinear, Morphological GNT,” BlueLetterBible.org, accessed October 4, 2015, https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/2pe/3/1/t_conc_1159009.

God's grace. Knowing that all have not responded to the gospel should make every follower of Jesus ask the question "Why have people not responded to the gospel?" If the gospel is Good News, then would not people respond favorably to that Good News? Well, unfortunately, that is not always the case.

There are some who have not responded to the Good News because they simply choose to reject it. Although they hear the truth about God's love and the grace being displayed through the sacrifice of Christ, they choose not to receive that grace and love. They knowingly turn their backs on the goodness of God. There are others who say they have received the Good News, but their lives do not reflect that proclamation. These may be individuals whose understanding and relationship with Jesus is based on emotionalism, intellectualism or legalism. They may assume they have already achieved a level of spiritual superiority that should allow them into Heaven.

They are like the people Jesus mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23 when he states,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Then there are others who have not responded to the gospel because they simply have not heard it preached or spoken before. The individuals who have never heard the gospel before are those who do not attend church, they most likely do not have a lot of friends who are Christ-followers, and they simply have not had the chance to respond to the Good News. Most of the time, people think that these types of individuals can only be found in the jungles of Africa or the remote islands in the South Pacific. However, there are people in the United States who have never heard the gospel before. According to the Joshua Project, there are over 10 million people in the

United States who have never heard of Jesus Christ³. This means that over 10 million people have never had a chance to respond to the grace and love of God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

In a country that was built on the principles of God's Word and established in the hopes of religious freedom, many would wonder how anyone could not have heard the gospel before. When the term gospel is used, it is in reference to the plan of God for salvation for all mankind. It is the birth of Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity. He lived a perfect life, taught thousands of people, showed his power by miracles, such as raising people from the dead, and then died a criminal's death on a cross, although he had committed no sin or broken any laws. It was this death on the cross that paid the penalty that each human deserved to pay because of their sin. Three days after his death, Jesus rose from the grave, taught his disciples and then ascended to the right hand of his father. The gospel is the Good News that all who place their trust in Jesus Christ will be saved and could live the abundant life Jesus promises in John 10:10. When the term gospel is used through this project, this is the definition that is being asserted. So, how can people in a religiously free country never hear the gospel? The answer to this question gives a clear picture of the culture that these individuals would have been raised.

There are some who have never heard the gospel because they do not want to. They choose not to engage in spiritual conversations and are seen, in many ways, as anti-spirituality or anti-Christianity. These individuals do not hear because they do not want to hear. There are cities

³ "Country: United States," JoshuaProject.net, accessed October 10, 2015, <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/US>.

in American that seem to represent this mindset. Boston, San Francisco, and Seattle are three cities that seem to characterize a culture that is anti-spirituality or anti-Christianity. The culture in these cities is not open-minded to the gospel, and many people do not engage in spiritual conversations. Then, other people have never heard the gospel simply because others did not present it to them. These places may be open to spirituality or even open to God's Word, but there have been little to no representatives of God's character to share the truth with them. In such places, the blame is just as much on the individual who has never heard as well as those whom God is asking to speak. Whether the culture in these types of places are spiritual or not, those who do not hear the gospel are not churched. Where the people are spiritual, they do not see the necessity to attend church or believe in God, much less have a personal relationship with a spiritual figure that, in their opinion, lived and died thousands of years ago. Their spirituality gives them a false sense of fulfillment that is difficult to penetrate, even with the most experienced evangelists. If someone is questioning whether or not there exist places in America where people are un-churched, the Barna Group researched this subject and found that 1/3 of adults are classified as un-churched, which is an estimated 73 million. That number jumps to over 100 million Americans if children and teenagers are added to the data.⁴ These statistics tell us that not only are there un-churched people in America but that the un-churched population is staggering large, growing and in need of people who will tell them about Jesus Christ.

To focus this project to one particular location, Denver, Colorado is one of the most unchurched cities in America. It is the 15th largest city in America and one of the fastest growing

⁴ Matt Smay and Hugh Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 11.

in total population.⁵ One pastor in Denver, who has planted multiple churches, said that all the research he has done has shown that Denver is 90-95% unchurched.⁶ Multiple other pastors said the same thing, many of which will be mentioned later in this chapter.⁷

Although there are many places where people have not heard the gospel, and there are places where some Christ-followers are not being ambassadors for the Kingdom and sharing their faith with the unchurched, God is still sending followers of Christ to reach these cultures. God wants all to know Him. He wants all to come to a place of repentance. That means He is going to use every available means to help those individuals experience His transformative power and life-changing love. One of the ways that God does this is by raising ministers to go and plant churches. It is through church planting that many can come to know Christ and the gospel is proclaimed in various places. It is through church planting that people who are unreached can come to hear the gospel and respond accordingly.

The Project

This project will focus on planting a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture. Key factors that lead to successful church planting in an unchurched culture will be identified, and a strategy that will enable a church plant to be successful in growing and reaching people will be developed. This project will focus on the concept to launch phases of church planting, in a city that is un-churched, yet spiritual, Denver, Colorado.

As a part of any project, some presuppositions are made that must be identified from the

⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, “Denver Overview,” North American Mission Board, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.namb.net/denver/overview/>.

⁶ Ron Johnson, interview by author, Denver, CO, May 21, 2015.

⁷ Geoff Surratt, Ron Johnson, interviews by author.

beginning, so the reader understands the process that was taken and why in creating the project. The first presupposition is that God is calling the author to plant a church. After a long, arduous process of trying to determine how and why one can become discontent in a very comfortable culture and job, the author determined God's calling was to start a new faith community in a new city. A key component of the process was discerning not just the calling, but the skills and gifts of the church planter. God will not call someone to do something without equipping them to do it. A part of this first presupposition is not just that called cause the author to plant a church, but that He has equipped him to do so as well.

A second presupposition that must be discussed here is that Denver needs another church. There are many people, Christians, and non-Christians, who think cities do not need more churches. Because there are steeples in the skyline or buildings with church names on them, some believe that there are enough churches in every city to reach the people of the city. Although this may be true in some unique towns and situations, this is not true for most large, growing cities. Denver, Colorado is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation with one of the highest unchurched populations. According to the North American Mission Board (NAMB), over four million people live in the metro Denver area. This area consists of what is called the "Front Range," which stretches from Colorado Springs in the south to Fort Mill in the North. Throughout this entire area, statistics show that on average, 12.2% of the population is affiliated with an evangelical church. In addition, there is one Southern Baptist Convention church for every 20,401 people in the metro Denver area.⁸ According to one pastor who oversees a large church planting network and also lives in Denver, the statistic is a little more daunting. He states

⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, "Denver Overview."

that the percentage of people who live on the Front Range who do not attend church is closer to 95% instead of 88%.⁹ It would seem pretty apparent why there is a need for another church in Denver. The need is so great that NAMB has selected Denver as one of the SEND cities, which means there is such a great need that they would place a greater emphasis and invest more resources on sending church planters to this area. With the understanding that Denver is a fast-growing large city with a highly unchurched population, one of the major presuppositions in this project is that Denver is desperately in need of another life-giving, Christ-centered church.

Terminology

As with all projects, there will be special terminology used throughout that should be defined at this time. One term that will be used and could use some definition is “happily lost.” While interviewing Pastor Geoff Surratt in December 2012, he used the term “happily lost” to describe the people of Denver. The term is about the people of the area being happy with their lives and with their environment. Many of the people who live in the Denver area have transplanted from someplace else. Many of these same “transplants” have moved to Denver for a lifestyle change. They want to be closer to the mountains and enjoy a more active, outdoor lifestyle. Since the environment has not changed and the mountains have not moved, the reason many of these people moved to Denver still exists. They are happy with the position of their lives, concerning the lifestyle they lead. Also, Denver is one of the wealthiest cities in North America. It is thought of as the Wall Street of the West and has many wealthy communities where people find their “happiness” in their wealth. At the same time that people are very happy with their active lifestyle and wealth, the majority of them are lost. The term lost refers to not

⁹ Geoff Surratt, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 5, 2015.

knowing Jesus Christ personally and, therefore, not knowing the purpose or direction God has for our lives and eternity. When the term lost is used in this setting, it means that a person has not given their lives to Jesus Christ and therefore, they are still living a life disconnected from God. This notion that a person is lost without Jesus Christ is related to the three stories that Jesus tells in Luke 15 when he shares the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Much like the sheep, the coin and the son in these stories, people are lost when they are not following the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the term “happily lost,” which was first heard when the author interviewed Geoff Surratt, refers to someone who is happy with their life, but they are lost at the same time.¹⁰ This type of person is a challenge to minister to because there is nothing that is driving them to make a change in their lives. Therefore, when they are presented with the gospel, there is little to no need to make a change in their lives, so they reject God’s grace and truth. Although not all the people in Denver could be categorized as “happily lost,” it is a place where that term defines many of the people.

Another term that must be explained here is “attractional excellence.” This term refers to a worship experience at a church that is conducted with excellence. Since we serve a God who was careful with how He created the universe and is careful in his intentionality, His followers are to live their lives with the same excellence that He displayed. It is this living with excellence that brings intentionality into one’s relationship with God and how followers of Jesus live their lives. By being excellent, one can bring glory to God in ways that only He can receive. It also must be pointed out that when excellence is mentioned, it does not mean one must be perfect. Perfection and excellence are two different things. Perfection is trying to be what one could

¹⁰ Geoff Surratt, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 5, 2015.

never be. Only God is perfect, and the pursuit of perfection is a lack of acknowledging one's weakness and frailties, which results in a lack of trust in God. Excellence is trying to bring glory and honor to God with all of one's strengths, gifting and ability to the best of their human ability. The term "attractional" means that what someone does demands the attention of others. Therefore, "attractional excellence" when used regarding a worship experience, means that someone does everything they can to bring greater glory and honor to God and through that process, people will be attracted to the experience and ultimately attracted to God. There are many churches whose worship experience is poorly conducted, and people walk away without any desire to come back. "Attractional excellence" in a worship experience means that every person who enters the parking lot feels welcomed, every person who walks through the doors of the church feels at home and every person who participates in the worship and teaching gets a sense of awe that God is present and He desires to know them. If this type of experience can be had by people, then they will be drawn back to that experience because it was excellent and it attracts their attention.

A third term that must be defined is "missional community." A "missional community" is a group of people seeking to live life together and reach people who are in the same sphere of life. When the term "community" is used, it is referencing a group of people who desire to live in authentic relationships with one another. These people know each other, trust each other, believe in each other and challenge one another. These people are not just talking about having community, but they are experiencing it like those in Acts 2 experienced community. In Acts 2, one can see a great depiction of the early church and the community they experienced. It says,

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and

distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

This type of community becomes attractive to others because all people long for community in their lives and they want that community to be real, raw and authentic. The term “missional” means to be outward focused. It refers to a mindset that keeps the focus on evangelism and helping people come to experience the presence and power of God. Therefore, a “missional community” is a group of people living in an authentic relationship with one another who are focused on reaching people for the sake of the gospel. This community usually centers on a particular lifestyle or activity or desire. Therefore, a “missional community” can be a group of basketball players, a group of stay at home moms or a group of bikers. It is simply a community of people who want to be involved in the same things in life, and the missional component allows them to stay focused on not just partaking in certain activities, but allowing those activities to open up avenues to share the gospel with others. This term will be used frequently throughout the project since a big piece of the vision centers on the idea of communities living on mission.

Statement of Limitations

As with all projects, certain limitations will apply to this project. The first and largest limitation is that there will not be enough time to adequately see if the church planting proposal will achieve successful, long-term growth. The project will be able to tell if the initial launch was healthy as well as the ability to attract people early in the life of the church, but there will not be enough time to see if the church plant will be sustainable for five-plus years. Most of the hard work for this project and the church plant will be complete by the end of this thesis, so there will be sufficient data to see if a successfully growing church plant can thrive in the unchurched

culture of Denver. Most of the project will focus on the pre-launch phase of church planting before anyone ever steps foot into the first official worship service of the church. The success of the church is built not on how great a worship service flows, but rather how great is the foundation that is being established. There will be sufficient time to show how this foundation of partnerships, vision, culture, and launch team, is established and how that foundation will lead to a successful church plant that is growing and reaching people with the gospel.

Another possible limitation of the project is the author's lack of complete understanding of the culture of Denver. The author moved to Denver in 2013, so his experience is not as someone who has been there for decades, but rather just a few years. Many assumptions were made at the beginning of the project and some that are still being made based on a lack of experience and time in the culture. This possible limitation should be minimized though because the author subsequently lived in the Denver metro area for four years and had had many conversations with dozens of pastors over that time. This should enable the author to dispel any assumptions that may have been made before arriving in the city.

Theoretical Basis

Before deciding whether or not to start a new faith community, one must look at what the Word of God says about the subject of church planting. The first passage that draws one's attention is Matthew 28:18-20. This passage makes it clear how important evangelism and discipleship are in the Kingdom of God. One reads, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18-20). In this passage, Jesus first reminds his hearers that he has been given

all authority. This is essential for any church planter to remember. It is the authority of Jesus that leads to the success of the ministry. It is because of the authority of Jesus that disciples of Jesus can go and make other disciples. Jesus' authority is the foundation upon which one must build their life and ministry. In reference to making disciples, the ESV study Bible states, "The imperative (make disciples, that is, call individuals to commit to Jesus as Master and Lord) explains the central focus of the Great Commission, while the Greek participles (translated go, baptizing, and 'teaching' [v.20]) describe aspects of the process."¹¹ Jesus calls His followers to "go." He does not want them sitting around waiting for people to come. He does not want them opening a church and hoping people will walk in the doors. The command is to go. Now, what that process looks like in helping make disciples can be dependent on the personality and abilities of each church planter, but the command is to "go."

Another passage that speaks to the calling to start a new faith community is Luke 10:1-3 which states, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.'" This is an important passage for ministry leaders. Many ministry leaders translate this passage to their need for more volunteers. That is not a bad interpretation of this passage, but there is another way to view the passage, especially as it pertains to someone's calling to start a church. As it pertains to planting a church, instead of the church planter being the one praying for more workers, they are the answer to the prayers of others asking God to

¹¹ ESV Study Bible, "Notes for Matthew 28:19", accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.esvbible.org/Matthew+28/>.

bring more workers. The church planter is no longer the one primarily praying the prayer for more workers, although they still ask God for that as well, now the church planter is the worker that was prayed for, and God responded. Having this perspective helps one to see the gravity of the situation and process. It is humbling to know that God is drawing His servants to cities like Denver to plant a church not only because there is so much potential fruit, but there are just not enough workers there.

Another truth that could drive one to plant a church comes from Matthew 16:18 when Jesus is talking about the church that He is building. He states, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This passage is a reminder that Jesus is the one who is ultimately building the church. Jesus already started the church; no church planter has to start THE Church, they simply have to bring up a new expression of Jesus’ Church. A church planter is simply called to be faithful in what God is asking of them and to remember that the gates of hell cannot stop God from building His Church, even if our expression of that church fails in the eyes of the world. No matter what challenges arise; no matter what situations the church finds itself in, no matter what hardships come, the enemy will not win. Jesus has already won, and it is through His authority that every church planter, and believer in Christ, can do anything He has called them to do for His glory.

Methodology

One of the most important aspects of this project is how the goal of successfully planting a growing church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture will be achieved. Understanding the theory behind the plant is important, but the theory does not directly lead to success. One’s methodology leads to action steps, which leads to either success or failure. Since there will not be enough time in the life of the church to adequately assess whether or not the church will be a

success in relation to attendance reports and spiritual depth, the focus will be on the methodology toward the pre-plant and pre-launch phases. When the phrase “pre-plant” is used, it is about the period before the church planter moves into the community in which he is going to be planting. When the term “pre-launch” is used, it is referring to the period after the church planter has moved into the community, but before the church launches its first official worship service. Neither of these periods is constrained by time. They are simply periods in which certain steps must be taken by the church planter. It is in these phases, the pre-plant and pre-launch, that the foundation of the church is established. If the foundation is solid, then the church will become healthy. If the foundation is shaky, then the church will crumble over time. Most of the project will be devoted to the methodology that develops the foundation, a foundation that must be secure and strong before the launch of the church.

Chapters Outline

This project will have four main parts, with each part having a different focus. The first part, herein titled Chapter 2, will introduce the topic of church planting. Many may not fully grasp what church planting is; therefore, this chapter will help the reader understand what is meant by planting a church and what is involved in that process. The second part, Chapter 3, will focus on the research that will be conducted throughout this project. The reader will gain an understanding of the types of surveys that were conducted as well as the audience for each survey. Additionally, multiple interviews will be conducted throughout this chapter to help the reader get a ground-level view of the culture of Denver and the challenges and opportunities for planting a church. The third part, Chapter 4, will focus on the first phase of church planting, the pre-plant phase, which is vital for a church planter to be successful in understanding if God has called the planter and, if so, where God has called him to plant. The final part, Chapter 5, will

focus on the second critical phase of church planting, pre-launch. This phase will give the church planter and his team specific steps that will help lead them through the preparation, recruiting and launch day. These four chapters should give great insight into the research and development that went into discovering how to successfully plant a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture.

Chapter 2 Outline

Within this chapter, the goal will be to give the reader a greater understanding of church planting. This chapter will focus on four key aspects of church planting.

The Man

Within this section of the chapter, the focus will be placed on the type of person that God calls to plant a church. God does not call every person, nor every Christ-follower to be the senior pastor of a church, much less a church planter. There are specific requirements laid out in God's Word for those who sense they are called to be the senior leader of a church. This section will take time to explore these requirements, so there is a clear understanding of what type of man God calls to be a church planter. As well as exploring the biblical requirements and calling for leadership in God's church, this section will explore what type of man it takes to lead a large, multi-site, mega-church. Some church planters want to have a small congregation, but the focus of this paper is to launch a large, healthy, growing church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture. Therefore, there will be a focus put on what type of leader can help lead a growing, thriving church, not just start one. There are certain characteristics that these types of leaders have, and it is within this section that those characteristics will be shared.

The Message

No matter how great a person is or charismatic their personality or how many are

attracted to them, if the message is not the right message, people will be deceived. The message that Jesus calls us to take out into the world is the same for every person. Unlike the truth that God does not call every person to be the senior leader of a church, God does call every person to share the message about Jesus Christ. Every successful church is one that is telling the same message of hope, life, and truth. This section will spend time investigating what that message is and how a church can best articulate that message to the culture in which it is working.

The Mission

The mission section will discuss the primary purpose of church planting. It is within this section that one will read about how successful church planters are or are not in today's culture. Many organizations help people plant churches, and there are lots of guys wanting to plant churches; this section will see if those two elements are leading to successful church plants. In addition, this section will focus on why church planting needs to be improved upon and how those improvements can be made.

Author

The last section will focus on the author, the church planter. This section will draw upon his experience, and the calling God gave him to plant a church in Denver, Colorado. It is within this section where some valuable lessons will be shared, ones that were learned from failure, learning from mentors and discovering the heart of God through the process.

Chapter 3 Outline

This section of the Thesis will focus on the research that will be conducted throughout the project. The research will be conducted in a variety of ways. First, many books, articles, and reports will be read on the subject. These publications will provide a greater understanding of what it takes to plant a church and some of the pitfalls to look out for in the process. The

research on prevailing literature will also uncover how church plants are successful or not in certain areas of the country.

The second type of research that will be shared in this section is personal interviews. There are multiple church planters, leaders of church planting networks and pastors that will be interviewed. Their perspective is crucial, as they will be able to share personal experiences that will influence and enhance the strategy designed in this project. It is highly critical to talk to others who have gone before and to learn from their successes and mistakes. This leads to greater growth for all who will learn from them. Also, these interviews will give a realistic picture of what it is like to be a lead pastor in the Denver metro area. Every city has unique challenges, and every church planter should seek to learn about those challenges from the leaders who have gone before them. There will be at least ten church planters and lead pastors that will be interviewed for this section.

The third type of research that will be conducted through two questionnaires. The first questionnaire will be sent to multiple churches in the Denver metro area. The goal will be to learn from these churches about what they sense are some of the unique challenges in leading and pastoring a church in Denver. These churches will help to determine trends in the culture and how to best reach and minister to people specifically in this particular culture. The second questionnaire will be sent to church planters throughout the country. Although this project will focus primarily on church planting in Denver, Colorado, there are common challenges and strategies that all church planters face or have used to gain growth. This questionnaire will be used to learn the best strategies to reach people no matter the culture.

Chapter 4 Outline

This third chapter will be the one that is the primary focus of the project. The goal of the entire project is to create a strategy for successfully planting a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture. It is within this section that the principles and methods that are discovered will be discussed. Also, the implementation of these principles and methods will be tested, and the results will be given as well. However, as mentioned earlier, there will be a limited discussion on how the church launched or the sustained growth after launch. All the methods and principles discussed will be focused on the pre-plant and pre-launch phases of church planting. This section will be broken into two major sections, which will be broken into three sub-sections.

The first major section of this chapter will be the pre-plant phase. It is within this phase that one must address certain issues. Three of the main issues that must be addressed and discovered are self, destination, and partnerships. These three areas are essential for establishing a firm foundation during the pre-plant phase. Discovering self will focus on making sure that one knows whether or not they are called to plant a church. Planting is not a feeling; it is knowing that one must do what they are being called by God to do. Discovering the destination is the process by which every planter must go through in order to discover where God is calling them to plant. Every planter's process is different, and this will be the section by which some insights are shared as to how one can discover the destination. The final area that is essential is discovering partnerships. Many church planters plant without any established partnerships to help them launch or partnerships in the new area where they will be planting. Having the right partnerships can help a church planter launch well; therefore, this section will cover how to discover the right partnerships effectively.

Chapter 5 Outline

The fifth chapter will focus largely on the second section of the launching process, the pre-launch phase. As mentioned earlier, the pre-launch phase is that time period after the planter has moved into the plant area, but before he has officially launched the first service of the church. This is a critical time period, and there are three essential aspects of planting that must be engaged at this point. The first is to create the mission, values, and strategy of the church. These components are absolutely essential to creating a healthy, life-giving church. The church planter must understand these terms and then create each of these areas so that they know what they are seeking to achieve, mission and values, and how they will achieve it, strategy.

The second area that must be an area of focus during this pre-launch phase is creating a strategy for the launch of the church. Every church planter must determine what their strategy for getting the church started, and some strategies are most effective, especially in areas where the population is heavily unchurched. This strategy will determine how much money will need to be raised, how many people he gathers to the launch team and what the evangelism and marketing will look like to achieve the desired launch goals.

The final area of focus during the pre-launch phase is to engage the launch team. Every successful church plant must have a launch team, a group of people that will help launch the church. These are the people that help to develop the systems that will be used to reach and retain people effectively. These are the people who will help build the financial basis of the church, as well as establish the original leadership of the church.

Review of Literature

This section will carry a detailed list of multiple resources that will be used throughout this project. The section will be divided into sub-categories that will reflect the type of source

that will be used.

Books

The American Church in Crisis by David T. Olson.

This book was helping in Chapter 2 of the project. There are a lot of statistics that this book covers, including how many Americans attend church on a given Sunday. Besides the statistics, this book will help generate ideas on how the American Church can reach more people with the gospel.

The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay.

This book was helpful in this chapter and also in Chapter 5 because of its discussion on living incarnational and missional. The authors of this book challenge the reader to evangelize creatively, especially for people ministering in cultures that the people are primarily un-churched. In addition to obtaining great ideas and statistics, another reason this book will be valuable is that the author, Hugh Halter, lives in Denver, Colorado.

Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission by Darrin Patrick.

This book will primarily be utilized in Chapter 2 while discussing the different components that are essential for church planting. Pastor Patrick does a great job of outlining what it means biblically to plant a church and what is required of the leader. This book will also help the author discern his calling.

Center Church by Timothy Keller.

This book will be used throughout the project, but primarily in Chapter 3, where the mission of church planting is discussed. Keller does a great job in this book of helping the reader think critically about being missional and truly allowing God to use them to transform the city by God's grace.

The Forgotten Ways by Alan Hirsch.

This book will be helpful in Chapter 5 when the project focuses on creative ways to evangelize. Hirsch challenges his readers to think differently and live differently. Some of Alan Hirsch's insights will influence the strategic plan for creative evangelism.

Ten Stupid Things That Keep Churches from Growing by Geoff Surratt.

This book will be helpful in Chapter 1 while discussing the need for a successful, healthy, growing church plants. Many churches are just doing things in such a poor way that they are preventing themselves from growing. This book will help the author diagnose some of the issues preventing church growth and how those can be avoided with a church plant.

Building a Discipling Culture by Mike Breen.

This book, much like *The Forgotten Ways* by Hirsch, will be helpful in Chapter 5 while discussing creative evangelism. This book is focused on helping people learn a system of evangelism and discipleship through relationship. Some of the principles in this book could be valuable for planting a church in an un-churched city.

Surprising Insights from the UnChurched by Thom S. Rainer.

This book should be helpful in multiple areas of the project. First, this book will be helpful in this chapter when discussing the need for another church in Denver. Second, this book could be really helpful in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 when discussing partnerships, engaging the culture and creative evangelism. There will be many uses for a book that has as much research as this book contains.

Planting Churches Cross-Culturally by David J. Hesselgrave.

This book will be useful in chapter one when discussing the mission. This book helps people think about how to engage the culture and be creative with evangelism most effectively.

This book will give some great insights into responding to the new culture in which one is going to be planting a church.

Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch by Nelson Searcy.

This book will be instrumental in Chapter 3 when discussing the pre-plant and pre-launch phases of church planting. Searcy is a church planter and gives great advice from the experience that he has lived.

Why Churches Die by Hollis L. Green.

This book could be very helpful in this chapter, as the discussion focuses on why churches are not succeeding and the reasons for these failures. In a time when planting a church is so crucial, this book will be important in diagnosing why so many churches are not successful in growing and thriving. This book should help influence the strategy to plant successfully.

Total Church Life: How to Be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World by Darrell W. Robinson.

This book will help diagnose some of the key components of a 1st-century church and a strategy to help modern churches develop strategies that the early church had. A good portion of this book should be helping in Chapter 3 while discussing engagement with the culture and being creative with evangelism.

Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts by Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III.

This book is great for learning about a generation that either has never gone to church or has dropped out of the church. Although the book primarily focuses on the latter of the two, there are still some great insights into the un-churched. This book will be most helpful in this chapter when discussing the need for church plants, as well as Chapter 3 when discussing the

essential elements of engaging the culture and creative evangelism.

Articles

“4 Ways We Need to Grow in Evangelism” by J.D. Greear.

This article is great because it discusses some different areas that the American Church should be growing in if more people are going to be evangelized and come to faith in Jesus Christ. This article will be helpful in Chapter 5 when the project focuses on engaging creative evangelism. This article will not only be good for this project, but it is a great resource for all church leadership teams.

“Relationships Are the New Religion for Many” by Cathy Lynn Grossman.¹²

This article is a great look at the un-churched and why so many young people are not actively involved in church. Coincidentally, one girl that is interviewed in this article is from Denver. This article will be very helpful for Chapter 2 when discussing the need for church plants, as well as Chapter 5 when discussing creative forms of evangelism.

Scripture Passages

Matthew 28:18-20.

This section of Scripture, known as the Great Commission is the foundation of all evangelism and church planting. Jesus makes it very clear at the end of his ministry time, before His ascension, that one of the main responsibilities and commands the Church has been given is to go and make disciples. This passage is the foundation of church planting and this project. This passage will be used in chapters one and two when discussing the mission.

¹² Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Relationships are the New Religion for Many,” *USA Today*, March 23 2013, accessed April 29, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/23/christian-jewish-passover-easter-rob-bell/2011307/>.

Luke 10:1-2.

This passage describes Jesus sending out 72 of his followers to go to multiple towns where Jesus would then come. They were the ones paving the way for Jesus' coming to those places. In this section of Scripture, Jesus makes it very clear that the number of people who need Jesus, who will come to know Christ is plentiful. The issue is not those who will come to know Christ; the issue is the number of people who are willing to go and sacrifice and share the good news. Jesus makes it clear that prayers should be focused on God sending more workers because the harvest is plentiful. This passage will be used in this chapter and the next when discussing the mission on which the church planter is called.

Matthew 16:16-18.

This passage focuses on the message that the Church is to carry to the world. One of the main components when it comes to church planting is what message is being shared with the world. This passage identifies clearly what that message is, that Jesus is the Christ and upon this declaration, God's Church is built. This passage, like the previous two, will be used in this chapter.

2 Corinthians 13:5.

Church planting is not just knowing how to recruit people and reach the lost, but it is dependent upon the right person seeking and following Jesus. The church planter must not only know how to plant a church, but they must be a person of high character. This passage will be used in this chapter when discussing the type of man that God calls to plant a church. This verse is crucial for a person to examine themselves to see if they are the type of person that God can use to plant a church. God can use anyone, but the person must be teachable, humble and full of character.

Luke 15:3-7.

This parable that Jesus tells focuses on reaching the lost no matter the cost. Church planting has a lot of costs and sacrifices associated with it. However, Jesus makes it very clear that it does not matter what sacrifices must be made, but if there are lost sheep, then God desires to seek and save those lost no matter what the cost. The church planter must always remember that God desires to seek out the lost in this world and He is simply looking for people who are willing to leave it all to seek out the lost.

John 3:16-17.

One of the most famous verses in Scripture, this passage reminds us of God's love for the lost, hurting and broken in our world. The church planter must always remember that God's love for the world drove Him to give His only son to die for the salvation of all. Obviously, this is one of the most important passages throughout the entire Bible, especially as it relates to sharing the gospel and seeing the lost be found.

Matthew 22:34-40.

The two greatest commandments Jesus gave his people is to love God with everything and love our neighbor as ourselves. To reach the unchurched in the world, Christ-followers must be willing not just to preach the gospel but must be willing to love them where they are. Loving our neighbor is essential to reaching the lost in the world, especially in American society. This verse reminds us that loving our neighbor is just as important as loving God. In an unchurched society, loving one's neighbor is extremely important because a believer might be the only Jesus that their neighbor sees.

Galatians 5:22-23.

As mentioned previously, the church planter must not just be equipped with skill but

must be deep with character. The character of a church planter is more important in the long-term success of the church plant than anything else the church planter may possess. This passage will be used in Chapter 2 when discussing the type of man God calls to plant a church. 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

The church planter must not just be filled with skill and competencies, but the church planter must fulfill the requirements of an elder in Scripture. God makes it very clear what type of a man He will entrust the local church to and it is essential that every church planter understand what is expected of him as it pertains to his character. This passage will be utilized in Chapter 2 when discussing the type of man that God calls to plant a church.

2 Timothy 2:24-25.

Another passage that helps the church planter know what type of character is expected of him as he leads God's church. This passage will be used when discussing the type of man God calls to plant a church, in Chapter One.

Reference Materials

www.blueletterbible.org

This website is great for digging into the Greek and Hebrew language of the Bible. This source is used when referencing Scripture and using it to establish a point. This source may not be used every time, but the translation of the Scripture is checked to ensure that it is the correct one, based on the Greek or Hebrew of the text.

www.esvbible.org

This website will be used to gain further insights into the Scripture passages used. The commentary from this website helps determine some of the historical aspects of a passage and what the author intended to say.

Chapter 2

The Man, The Message, The Mission

Church planting is unlike most other jobs. It is not an occupation you climb a ladder to achieve. It is not a position where you can just work hard enough, and you will obtain corporate success and accomplishments. It is not a career path that is discussed at job fairs at most local universities. Church planting is a mission, a calling. It is a calling by God on a particular person's life, designed to fulfill a mission God has for the individual, their family and the community in which God is calling them to minister. Dr. Darrin Patrick, author, and church planter says that when it comes to the calling of a church planter, there are three main aspects one must consider.¹ These three main aspects will be elaborated on in this section so that the reader can have a more well-rounded view of the call and mission to plant a church. Additionally, there will be a section on the author and his calling to plant a church in a spiritual, yet unchurched city.

The Man

The first aspect of church planting that is significant is the man, the person God calls to start the church. This piece of the equation is just as important as the other two aspects that will be addressed. In fact, many believe that the church planter is the most important factor in the equation. In talking to the Pastor of church planting at Southeast Christian Church in Parker, Colorado, Pastor Geoff Surratt states, "One of the crucial elements for a church plant to be successful is the church planter. Without finding the right guy, there is no way the church plant

¹ Dr. Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

will thrive or even survive.”² A church planter in Denver who leads the LifeGate Church was asked what he believed was the major reason most church plants do not make it to year five and he said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership. So, if a church does not make it in five years, I would say most likely it was not well led.”³ A pastor in Grand Junction said it this way,

“I believe everything rises and falls on leadership. Unfortunately, I believe most church planters are not prepared for the amount of diligence that will be necessary. Diligence is their personal relationship with the Father, finances, raising volunteers and leaders, sound and transformative teaching...these are just a few of the areas of diligence that will be, and are, paramount.”⁴

The man is a crucial aspect of the call. However, what is it that is important to be a successful church planter? What are the crucial characteristics found in other successful church plants in an area of the nation where churches not only do not thrive, but church plants rarely survive? A few key characteristics every successful church planter must have are an active relationship with Jesus Christ, biblical character traits, honest self-evaluation, leadership capabilities, and experience.

For someone to be a successful church planter, they first must have an active relationship with Jesus Christ. God is the one who has called us to Himself. That first and foremost, we are called to love God with all we have. In Matthew 22:37-38, we read, “‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.’” Jesus was asked, “What is the very thing that would please God the

² Geoff Surratt, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 5, 2015.

³ Nirup Alphonse, interview by author, Denver, CO, August 9, 2016.

⁴ John Wickham, interview by author, Grand Junction, CO, August 8, 2016.

most?” What is it that we can do that will give God the most glory? Jesus’ responds by telling the person to love God with everything.

Jesus does not say, “go plant a church.” He does not say, “ work hard for people to come to Me” or, “preach every week the best you can.” No! He says, “Love God with everything you have.” Buttrick says it this way, “This is the first commandment...our deepest bond is with the Creator. Only in him can we learn the purpose of life, or find the power to fulfill it. The vertical line of life is *the* line: only when we have rightly established a relationship with God can we hope for stable and shining friendships with our fellow men.”⁵ It is clear to every person who studies healthy churches that the key is the leader’s personal health. Peter Scazzero, the author of *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, puts it this way, “the overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader’s internal life than with the leader’s expertise, gifts, or experience.”⁶ The first attribute of a successful church planter is one who understands this truth and lives it out daily. Without this truth permeating the life of the person, there is no way anyone could be successful at planting and growing another expression of the bride of Christ.

A second key quality of any successful church planter is the possession of biblical character traits. This may seem like something that does not need to be addressed, and if the person is truly seeking God’s best for their life and falling more in love with Jesus daily, then this characteristic will be there, but pastors are people too and some struggle with this

⁵ George Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), 524.

⁶ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

characteristic. When asked about the many church planters he evaluates, whether formally or informally, Rick Burge, pastor of church planting at Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall, Texas says, “The character of a church planter is essential. Without having a godly character, there is no chance that a church planter will see God’s favor on his or her life and on the church plant.”⁷ Having biblical character traits can mean many different things to many different people; however, if we are to look into God’s Word, it becomes very clear what type of man God is looking for, as it pertains to character. The Apostle Paul may give the best prescription of what it means to be a lead pastor. He writes to Timothy:

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Tim 3:1-7)

In this letter to Timothy, Paul gives him instruction on not only what type of man he is supposed to be, but what type of leaders to look for when looking for a lead pastor.

The qualities that Paul lists here are not different from what God expects for all followers of Jesus, but the expectations and accountability for leadership are higher. As Liefeld writes, “First Timothy 3:1-13 sets forth a standard of behavior that, while not different from that which all Christians should live by, is to be more rigorously monitored among elders and deacons.”⁸ Many of the characteristics that Paul mentions in this passage are ones that most

⁷ Rick Burge, interview by author, Rockwall, TX, May 10, 2015.

⁸ Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 127.

people would easily understand and agree too. Someone who is not violent, but gentle, someone who is the husband of one wife, someone who is able to teach, not a drunkard, and not a recent convert.

Some of these attributes are easy to understand, and there are not too many people who would disagree with these characteristics; however, other characteristics mentioned are not as easily understood or followed. Pastor Wayne Hanson, who has been pastoring for 10 years in Denver, made the point of how important the lead pastor having his life in order is when he said, “It can be very hard and very lonely especially if your support structures fall away or you become disenchanted or disconnected from spiritual, emotional, relational and financial support. Keeping these in place year after year is not only vital for success but your survival as a church planter.”⁹ It is essential that every lead pastor and church planter make sure they keep the charge Paul gives Timothy.

There is a major reason Paul listed some of these as he knew many senior leaders might struggle with maintaining great character in these areas. Paul says that a lead pastor, a church planter, must not be a lover of money. This seems to be an interesting statement in a culture where the majority of believers were of the lower class, which meant that the churches probably did not have a large “budget.” The Holy Spirit, however, saw past what Paul saw and knew that being a lover of money would not just be a temptation even in the poorer seasons of the church, but also in the more wealthy seasons.

In today’s culture, there are many churches whose budgets exceed the million dollar mark. Many churches have budgets in the tens of millions, and it would be easy for a lead

⁹ Wayne Hanson, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO, October 10, 2017.

pastor to be a lover of money and take advantage of the wealth of his congregation. Also, a church planter can have full access, especially early on in the process, to all the funds. If he is a lover of money, he will be tempted to use that money for his personal gain. Another attribute Paul mentions that must be considered is that the church planter must be “well thought of by outsiders.” (1 Timothy 3:7) Many think that their reputation is not too important, especially if their past life was one of rebellion and living apart from Jesus. Paul makes it very clear that it is essential to have a good reputation with outsiders, with those who do not know Jesus.

If a church planter can have a good reputation with those outside the church, then he will have more opportunities for reaching people in his town. On the flip side, if the church planter does not have a good reputation, then people will question not only his motives but will question the character of the church. If this happens, then there will be more barriers for the unchurched to come to know Jesus in that particular church plant.

Character is essential to not just the church plant, but character is essential to the man coming to know Jesus and representing Jesus well. Every church planter should seek to have others say about them the same comment the religious leaders said about Peter and John in Acts 4. After questioning their faith and how they did the miracle of healing a paralytic, it says this about the religious leaders, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). The religious leaders were perplexed that two people who did not have the education or the religious clout could be making such a difference and demonstrating miracles and power. As one author wrote, “They were disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, but—He was dead! The council took notice of the courage and confidence of Peter and John, as well as

the power of Peter's words; and it all added up to perplexity."¹⁰ Not only does having great character lead to a good reputation outside the church, but it helps to develop leaders with great character inside the church. One author said this when discussing the importance of integrity in leadership, "if you seek to inspire and equip others to higher standards of performance and commitment, the best first step is modeling integrity in your own journey toward the same direction."¹¹ We cannot model what we do not first believe and do. If we want to lead others in character, then we must have character and integrity ourselves.

A third key quality of the man whom God calls to plant a church is experience. Experience, in and of itself, is not going to determine the success of a church planter; however, it has been proven time and again that experience helps the church planter to be better prepared for what may come his way and how to respond accordingly. Many guys believe God is calling them to plant a church, but they have had very little, if any, experience leading in a healthy church. Some guys were a part of an unhealthy church, and they left to try and create a church with greater health. Many other guys have come from healthy churches, but they never served in leadership at those churches. You can plant a successful, healthy church, but it appears more than not, that guys who do not have the right experience will have a greater chance of failure, not success.

One aspect of having experience is not just having the leadership experience in ministry, but having the experience of living in that particular city. Scott Bloyer, who pastors a church plant in Aurora, Colorado says that one of the reasons many church plants do not last is because

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol 1* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 417.

¹¹ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 145.

“some church planters go to an area to plant a church not knowing the area and the culture and they try to plant a church like where they come from.”¹² Many church planters move into a new city not knowing anyone, and they base their methodology around what worked at another church in another city. However, every city is different, and every culture has its challenges that the church planter must identify.

One pastor who has been leading a church in the Denver suburbs areas for almost 20 years said, “I believe that many have come to the Denver area with the wrong insight. They have seen an area growing by leaps and bounds, but they have not done their research in what is taking place with this growth spurt.”¹³ If a church planter does not have the experience of living in a city, then they must do all that they can to learn from others about that city, so that they can better understand the needs and challenges of that city. Brett Crimmel, who is the founding pastor and current lead pastor at Forefront Church in Denver, confirms that statement by saying, “Native guys are gonna have an easier way because they understand the culture. Guys who don’t ever leave, they stay here and study locally or virtually, and they understand this culture and grow from this culture.”¹⁴ Experience is a key component for the person God calls to plant a church. Not just the experience in ministry, but the experience of living in the culture they are planting in.

Although experience is such a crucial component to the man that God calls to plant, there is a warning. One’s experience does not always represent the future success they will have

¹² Scott Bloyer, interview by author, Aurora, CO, August 8, 2016.

¹³ Torrey House, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO, October 21, 2017.

¹⁴ Brett Crimmel, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 16, 2015.

in leading a church. Many church planters were successful youth pastors or campus pastors, but they were not created or called to lead a church. They saw success in the position they were, and they believed that success would transfer to leading a church. Angel Flores, a church planter in Greeley, Colorado, has seen this happen many times. He says he believes the vast majority of church plants do not make it to year five because of “disillusionment.” He says, “I call church planting the ‘great humbler of the rock star youth pastor.’ What they quickly figure out is that they were so successful in their previous role because they had a great support system and this allowed them to focus on their area of ministry, work in the area of their strength, spiritual giftedness and really excel in it. In planting, you go from specialist to generalist leader overnight. This can be a tough transition.”¹⁵ Experience is great, and it's absolutely essential for the person planting a church, but it's not the only deciding factor. One must have all the key characteristics, including experience, to plant a thriving, life-giving church.

A final key characteristic for the man to be the right person to plant a life-giving church is there must be a calling from God. Not anyone is called to plant a church. The majority of people who come to follow Christ will never be called to be a lead pastor, much less a church planter. Being the lead pastor is a special calling. It is a very difficult job, and only those who are called by God can live with the pressures and challenges that come along with being the lead pastor. Sam Chand makes this observation in his book *Leadership Pain*, “Organizational guru Peter Drucker observed that the four most difficult jobs in America are, in no particular order: president of the United States, university president, hospital CEO, and pastor.”¹⁶ If that is

¹⁵ Angel Flores, interview by author, Denver, Co, August 9, 2016.

¹⁶ Sam Chand, *Leadership Pain: The Classroom for Growth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2015), 5.

true, that being a pastor is the fourth hardest jobs in America, then the calling to be a pastor, and a lead pastor and church planter, cannot be for everyone.

The church planter must absolutely know that they are called to start a church. If they are not as confident as they possibly can be that God has called them to start a church, then they will be frustrated, confused and in pain more so than the average church planter and it will cause them to doubt their ministry and their calling eventually. Nelson Searcy, a pastor who has planted multiple churches and author of *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch*, says, “in church planting, there are three deadly sins: 1. Lack of calling. 2. Lack of strategy. 3. Lack of funds. These three deadly sins will ensure that a church plant fails and fails fast.”¹⁷ The call to plant is absolutely essential for any healthy, growing church plant.

There have been many church planters who have started churches because they were unhappy with their previous church or they thought they could do it better than their last pastor or they thought that was the natural progression from youth ministry to the next step of ministry. If any of these reasons are what guide and govern a church planter and his process, then he will be very confused and will most likely not make it in the long term as a church planter. However, if one knows that God has called them to start the church, then even in the painful times and confusing moments, they can hold onto the truth that God called them to start the church and no matter what, God will be with them through it all.

One of the essentials to a healthy church is the man. This is the person that is called by God to start and lead a healthy, growing church. He must be a man who is following after Jesus and who has learned to dwell in the presence of God. He must be a man of character and one

¹⁷ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2006), 19.

who has a great reputation outside of the church. Last, but not least, the man must be someone who is called by God to be a pastor and a church planter. If the man is all of these things, then the next step is to make sure the church planter has the right message.

The Message

In order to plant a healthy, life-giving, sustaining church, the message of the church planter must be very clear and articulated in a way that the people in that particular culture will understand and receive it. The right man to plant a church is based on God's calling in an individual's life, but the message of the church planter is not for just one person, but all. Jesus makes it very clear what the message is for all believers, not just church planters. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." In this passage, the word "go" is not a command, but rather a present participle. It means "going." Therefore, Jesus is saying, "While you are going, make disciples of all nations."¹⁸ This means that the mission of all believers is that while one is going about their life, they are making disciples. That is their mission.

In the first chapter of Acts, we see Jesus saying the same thing differently. Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Some debate whether or not Jesus was making this a command or a statement of fact. One scholar notes, "Grammatically the words may be taken either way, but because of (verse) 10:42

¹⁸ Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition, Vol 1*, 107.

it is clearly an imperative in the future tense.”¹⁹ In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” (Mark 16:15) Jesus makes it very clear that the mission of all His followers is to share the Good News about Jesus to all others. It does not matter where someone lives; it does not matter what someone does for a living, it does not matter what someone’s past is like, every person who is a follower of Jesus Christ is called to share His love and mercy with all.

This may seem like a truth that does not need repeating, but when it comes to church planting, if the mission is not to share the truth and grace of Jesus Christ with those who are lost and broken and hurting, then that church will not achieve the purposes of God, and the church planter will simply be adding to the confusion the world creates in the lives and minds of the unchurched. There have been many church planters over the years who have planted with a different mission. The following are a few misguided statements church planters have made, revealing their mission.

The author has talked to many church planters at various conferences who say their reason for starting a church was because there were no good churches in the town. They have surveyed the church landscape of the town and decided that there are no good churches in that town. When one drills down further as to what makes a church good or not, the church planter will talk about how bad the preaching or worship is, how churches are not serving their community or how the church’s style is different from their own. Although some of what they believe may be true, this does not determine if a church is good or not. Nor, should this be the driving engine to start a church. If the “why” behind starting a church is because there are not

¹⁹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* (Colorado Springs, David C Cook, 1983), 354.

good churches, then not only does that church planter need to check their pride, but they are building the foundation of their church on personal opinion, not the mission of God.

The author has heard some church planters make the statement that they can lead a church better than the senior pastor they used to work for and that is why they are starting a new church. Surprisingly, this is a statement heard from many guys and one that shows the lack of understanding of Jesus' mission. For someone to choose to plant a church because they believe they can do it better than the church they are coming out of, is a sign of an unhealthy church planter. When someone is hurting, and they decide to plant a church out of that hurt, they are establishing a foundation of their church on pain, not on promise. The mission because their own ability to prove themselves better than another, rather than proving that Jesus is the greatest of all and our need for Him.

The author has also heard many potential church planters reference their lack of opportunities, especially to speak, in their last church; therefore, they are going to start a church so that they can get more opportunities. This mentality is much like the second one. If church planters are planting churches because they believe they were not given speaking or leadership opportunities, then their mission for the church is one of self-centeredness, rather than seeking to make Jesus famous. This is another unhealthy approach to church planting and a mission that will fail in the end.

The only mission a church planter should have is to reach the unchurched people with the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. There is no other mission Jesus gave us. There is no greater mission in which we could be called to participate. This is not only a mission that every church planter should have but every follower of Jesus. This is the mission of following Christ. This is the mission of church planting.

Not only is reaching the unchurched with the love and mercy of Jesus Christ the mission Jesus gave every one of His followers, but it is also the most effective way to change the world. Church planting is essential to seeing people come to Christ and for lives to be radically transformed with the Gospel. It is essential because it is the greatest way to see that transformation happen. C. Peter Wagner says, “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.”²⁰ Others agree with Wagner’s assessment. Dave Olson puts a different spin on this idea when he says, “New churches are historically the best method for reaching each emerging new generation. While many established churches have the ability to connect with the younger cohort, each generation also seems to need their own new type of churches that speak the Gospel with their cultural values and communication style.”²¹ Planting new churches are essential for the growth of the American Church and reaching more people for Christ.

Ron Sylvia, the pastor of The Springs Church and author of several books, says, “The simple truth is that new churches reach more new people, and established churches reach more established people. The Springs is less effective at reaching the lost today than when we first began. Initially, over 75% of our people found Christ at The Springs. Today that number is closer to 60%.”²² Many churches have a similar reality of fewer people come to know Christ the older the church gets. This can be for many reasons, but the bottom line is that to reach more

²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Great Harvest* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1991), 11.

²¹ Dave Olson, *The Survival of the Species: Why the Multiplication of Churches is Critical for Your Denomination*. Enrichment Journal, accessed March 30, 2018.
http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200904/200904_030_survival.cfm.

²² Ron Sylvia, *Starting New Churches on Purpose* (Ocala: NEXT Church Planting, 2006), 21.

people and make a difference in culture, the American Church must plant more churches.

Once the church planter has determined to live out the mission Jesus has called his followers to live out, the church planter must then determine how that mission must be communicated in his city. Every city has a specific culture that has its similarities with other cities, as well as its own uniqueness. Every church planter, if they want to not just duplicate another church's culture, but reach their city the way God has called them too, then they must know how to communicate the mission of God clearly. For every church to communicate the message of the gospel, it must utilize pertinent and clear language that helps the people know what they are called to do in life, as well as the mission of the church.

Every church finds itself in a culture that it must understand before it can properly understand how to articulate what it is that God has called us to do. For example, if a church is located in the south, or commonly known as the "Bible Belt," then that church could use language that is more "churchy" in nature. Words could be used that are more common to those who have been raised attending church or have been attending church for many years. In a culture that is more unchurched and does not have the history of Christianity or regular church attendance, the church would need to use language that would appeal to the culture and be understood by the culture. Using more "churchy" language in this type of culture would possibly confuse the general community as to what the church is there for or why it exists.

Some of the best mission statements of churches in highly unchurched cultures, are centered on purpose and becoming more intentional neighbors. One church in Woodlawn, Maryland communicates the message this way "Destiny Harvest Church is a church that exists

to see people saved, prepared and positioned to fulfill their God-given Destiny!”²³ This is their way to express that God has called all of us to come to know Him personally (“see people saved”) and to help them help others become disciples (“prepared and positioned to fulfill their God-given Destiny”). Another church, one located in Castle Rock, Colorado, states their message this way, “Front Range Christian Church exists to help people become intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus.”²⁴ This is their attempt to let people know that God has called us first to place our faith in Jesus (know and follow Jesus) and as a result, we will share that love with others through being an “intentional neighbor.” These two mission statements have very little “churchy” words, making the message easier for the people of their cultures to understand and accept.

It is imperative that the church planter not only understand the culture he is working within, but he must also understand how to clearly and effectively communicate the message God has given all His followers to proclaim to the world. Without clearly and effectively communicating the message God has for His people, the message could fall on deaf ears and result in very little fruit for the life of the church. Once the church planter has made sure that his reasons for planting the church are in line with God’s call on their lives, as well as that message is clearly and effectively communicated, then the church must understand the mission God has for the church.

The Mission

Church planting has almost become a Christian fad in the last three to five years. Many

²³ “About Us,” Destiny Harvest Church, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://destinyharvest.tv/about-us/>.

²⁴ “Front Range Church,” FrontRange.org, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://frontrange.org>.

guys see church planting as something that is cool and gives some guys a platform to become popular or to have a voice in the church world. With it becoming increasingly popular, there is the necessity for the right church planters to be assessed and approved. If there is not a good process to make sure every church planter who thinks God is calling him to plant a church is actually qualified and properly equipped, then we will have many more church plants that fail, causing even greater damage to the communities these churches are seeking to reach.

Many church plant organizations have begun over the last 10-15 years, and many of them are discovering the same sad truth that many church plants do not make it past five years and those that do, most of them will not make it to year ten. One author says, “Every year, over 1 million people in this country start a business. Forty percent of them will close by the end of the first year. Within five years, more than 80 percent of them will fail. Of the 20 percent that makes it past the first five years, 80 percent will not make it past the second five. The statistics are about the same for new churches, and church-planting studies with denominations bear this out.”²⁵ Those are staggering statistics. To say that 96% of all church plants will close their doors by year ten should cause major alarm to anyone who is wanting to plant a church and to those who are helping others plant a church.

Church planting organizations have been trying to identify the causes of so many church plants not succeeding over the long haul, and it seems that the majority of these church planting organizations have determined that the majority of church plants do not succeed because the main leader is not properly equipped, gifted and supported over the long haul. As one author writes, “Prior to the 1990s, most church-planting groups showed little interest in focusing on the

²⁵ James Emery White, “Why New Churches Fail,” *Enrichment Journal*, accessed October 5, 2016, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200004/022_why_new_chuches_fail.cfm.

church planter's abilities, training, or involvement in support networks. Church-planting books failed to address personhood issues. There is currently a shift toward emphasizing the nurture and support of church planters.”²⁶ This shift is extremely important if America is going to see more church plants succeed, rather than fail. One of the ways that church planting organizations are emphasizing the nurture and support of church planters is through the leaders of those organizations stressing “the ABC’s: Assessment, Boot Camp, and Coaching as the key systems.”²⁷

There are many different types of assessments for church planters and their teams. Most, if not all, church planting organizations take their prospective church planter through some type of assessment process. Many of these organizations will assess their personal finances, ministry experience, leadership capabilities, the health of their marriage and willingness to learn. One of the main areas that church planting organizations like to evaluate is the church planter's personal finances.

The mentality is that if a church planter does not have a good grasp on their own finances, then they will have a difficult time managing the finances of the church. Josh Mauney, who oversees church plant coaching and assists with the assessment of church planters for the Association of Related Churches (otherwise known as ARC), says, “A full picture of a church planter's personal finances is critical in the assessment process of that planter. While many things must be taken into consideration when assessing church planters, it is critical to get a

²⁶ Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” unpublished book, 12, accessed December 1, 2016 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/assets/10228.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

clear understanding of that church planter's personal discipline and maturity. While the statement of beliefs or references might speak to their intelligence, only in the area of finances one can clearly and objectively assess whether or not the church planter has discipline over time. Their ability to manage their lives personally is a non-negotiable pre-requisite for biblical leadership, especially in the area of starting new churches. A church planter who in the past did not manage their finances well and have made many poor financial decisions might indicate that they are not ready to start a new work as a church plant. Jesus was clear that faithfulness in the little thing was the pre-requisite for receiving more in the Kingdom of God.

Church planters that cannot handle their own small personal budget are not yet mature enough to handle all of the things necessary to start a successful church.”²⁸ Additionally, every church planting organization evaluates the planter's ministry experience and leadership capabilities because if the church planter has not shown the ability to lead a ministry area before, then they probably will have a difficult time leading a church with many ministry areas. As referenced in the quote from Josh Mauney, God makes it very clear that the “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much” (Luke 16:10). Evaluating the finances is essential, but it is not the only area of assessment.

If a planter has shown the capability to lead well and lead something that is growing and healthy, then they will have a better chance to lead a healthy, growing church. Previous ministry experience helps organizations to vet possible church planters maybe better than any other assessment tool. It just gives the church planting organization a realistic picture of the capacity of the church planter. It helps the organization to identify the capacity of leadership based on

²⁸ Joshua Mauney, interview by author, Birmingham, AL, March 10, 2016.

Jethro's suggestions to Moses in Exodus 18:21. Moses was having a leadership crisis and needed to hand over some leadership responsibility to some other guys and Jethro says, "Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens." Not every leader has the same ability to lead large groups of people, which means every church planting organization needs to help determine what the potential capacity of the church planter is and many times that is based on their previous leadership and ministry experience.

The last two areas that must be assessed for every church planter is his marriage and willingness to learn. Every church planter who is married is going to have that marriage attacked from the first moment of launching out to start a new church. The enemy of the Christian faith, Satan, will do everything he can to destroy that marriage and the stresses of ministry do not help the health of the relationship either. In order to properly vet potential church planters, every church plant organization must be willing to evaluate the health of the church planter's marriage.

Many church plant organizations evaluate the planter's marriage differently. Some will give a self-assessment test to the couple and then evaluate the scores of the assessment. Some will have the church planting couple go through some type of counseling or marriage coaching to evaluate the health of their relationship. No matter the system that is used, the important piece is that every church planter has his marriage evaluated to make sure it is healthy. If the marriage is not healthy going into the church planting process, the poor health of that marriage will become very noticeable very quickly. If a couple passes the marriage assessment, it does not mean the process will be easy for them; it just means they are starting the journey in a

healthy place and hopefully have the tools and communication skills to keep it there, no matter the attacks.

The last area of concern for most church planting organizations is whether or not the church planter is a “learner.” Rick Burge, who is the pastor of church planting at Lake Pointe Church and heads up the Strategic Launch Network says, “One of the things I look for in every church planter we want to partner with is someone who is a learner. If they are a learner, then they will be willing to grow and develop as a leader.”²⁹ Being a learner is crucial for not just the development of a church planter, but the humility as well. Pastor Ron Edmondson says that one’s willingness to invest in personal growth is essential for a reproducing culture. He writes, “you can’t take new leaders where the current leaders haven’t been or aren’t going.”³⁰ If a guy is willing to learn, then he will pass that same trait to his team, and the church will continue to seek ways to get healthy and grow.

Boot camps are another essential ingredient for church planting organization to focus on the nurture and support of a church planter. A boot camp is an intensive training time that happens before and even sometimes after the launch of a new church. ARC is one organization that uses boot camps for the training of church planters. They have two levels of “boot camp” style training. The first is called ARC 1.0, and this is for those who are interested in church planting and would like a little more information of what it entails before moving too far into the journey. This part of the training process involves eight videos online. These videos range in material, but all of them are focused on helping the church planter gain a little more knowledge

²⁹ Rick Burge, Interview by author, Rockwall, TX, May 10, 2015.

³⁰ Ron Edmondson, “10 Ways To Have A Reproducing Culture,” RonEdmondson.com, accessed April 5, 2013, <http://ronedmondson.com/2016/06/10-ways-to-have-a-reproducing-culture.html>.

not just about church planting, but about leading a church.

The second aspect of boot camp with ARC is called ARC Launch Training. This is a two-day event where church planters come into a city and learn about launch teams and fundraising and marketing and other key areas that are vital to the success of a church plant. ARC is just one model that uses boot camps to care for and invest in church planters. Mac Lake, who works for Multiply Group and started a church planting network called Launch, says this about boot camps, “Intensive training and assessment opportunities are one of the best ways to see if a person is going to be a good church planter and to give them the resources they need to be prepared.”³¹ Boot camps are strategic as they give the church planter and his team a chance to learn a lot about church planting, build relationships with other church planters and form bonds with coaches that could help them for many years.

Coaching is the final ingredient to the ABC’s of church planting and much like the other two components, absolutely critical. Without proper coaching, the church planter will feel isolated and alone. Brandon Bruce, the lead pastor at Church Experience in Tampa, Florida, spoke of the importance of coaching in his church planting journey. He says, “The most valuable part of coaching to me was having multiple coaches that each had unique strengths. I was able to hear perspectives on key areas from different angles. Then, through prayer and discernment, I was able to customize a plan for our specific community and specific church plant. Coaching was invaluable in the process of planting.”³² Coaching is essential if the church planter wants to have a continued relationship with someone who has already been down the

³¹ Mac Lake, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, April 16, 2015.

³² Brandon Bruce, interview by author, Tampa, Florida, November 6, 2017.

road they are going and can give them answers to questions most people would not be able to help with. There are very few people who have planted a church; therefore, every church planter should have someone in their life who has already done it, so that they might have a source of tested wisdom from which to glean.

Many organizations have made the mission of church planting a little bit easier. Decades ago, a church planter would have been hard-pressed to find the support that he can now find through multiple organizations. Whether it is the assessment process, the boot camps or the coaching, church planters are being trained and cared for in more significant ways than they ever have been. This is helping to lead to healthier launches of church plants, as well as greater sustainability for these church plants.

Author

After a church planter understands the three main aspects of planting a church, man, message, and mission, he must then assess whether or not he is called and capable of being a church planter. Not everyone is called to be a church planter. It is not an elitist title, but it is a fraternity, a group of guys that must know they are called and capable through the power of Christ, or else the journey gets too lonely and too difficult to succeed. This section takes a moment to evaluate the author as a church planter.

At first glance, the author is one of the most unlikely church planters. Not growing up in a Christian home and, in fact, he always assumed being a Christian meant that one was from the South. He thought the term “Christian” was synonymous with being a Southerner. He did not know it meant anything about a guy named Jesus or was a person identifying themselves as being people of faith. Eventually, however, the author would hear about Jesus and place his faith in Jesus Christ. Around this same time of him discovering salvation, he had multiple

people telling him they believed God was going to call him to be a pastor. In one instance, the author had a friend's mom have dreams about him being a pastor before he placed his faith in Jesus. He did not even know a pastor was actually a paid profession, but he was open to whatever God wanted to do in, and through, his life.

Six months after the author accepted Christ, he went on a mission trip to Panama. It was there where he received a calling to go into ministry. At that time, he thought the only ministry he would ever be a part of was the youth ministry. Eventually, the author came on staff at a church called Seacoast Church in Charleston, South Carolina, which was the same church the author made a commitment to Jesus Christ. The author's first position was not as a youth pastor or mission's coordinator, but rather he was a facilities worker. He would spend four years cleaning up trash, setting up chairs and cleaning toilets. It was in that position that the author learned what it meant to be a servant of God and do whatever God placed in front of him. He learned that real ministry was serving people and bringing glory to God, no matter the title given.

Eventually, the author was hired on full-time in youth ministry and stayed there for many years. In all, he spent over 15 years on staff at Seacoast and did everything from facilities to youth ministry to family ministry to co-campus pastor, to teaching pastor and leadership development pastor. The variety of roles prepared him to lead a church and to understand the scope of ministry. Over the 15 years, the author was asked many times by different leaders at Seacoast and some of his mentors if he would ever plant a church. He would laugh and tell them there was no way he would ever be a lead pastor, much less start a church. Leading middle and high school students were hard enough; he did not want to lead their parents too. Also, to plant a church meant that he would probably have to leave Charleston and there was no reason to

leave the city where he and his wife were born and where all their family lived. It was very comfortable, and there was no reason to leave that comfort. Church planting was not going to be an option.

In May of 2011, the author was given a one-month sabbatical by Seacoast Church where the author was currently working. It was an opportunity the church gave every pastor who had been a pastor for seven years or more. It was during that month that God showed the author many things about his future. God did not show him where he was going or what he was going to be doing, but God did show the author that he would no longer be at Seacoast long term. It was clear that what God had wired the author to do and what He was going to call him to do next could not happen at Seacoast, or any current church, for that matter. For the next few months, the author prayed and fasted many times, trying to discern God's direction for his life.

One day, about nine months after this process began, the author was sitting in his first doctorate class at Liberty University learning from Dr. Elmer Towns. Dr. Towns gave the class a 15-minute break, and during that break, the author mentioned to the student behind him that he did not want to plant a church, but that was the only thing he could see himself doing in the future. The gentleman asked where he wanted to plant and the author responded, "I could only see myself in Denver, Colorado." After the break, Dr. Towns asked the author in front of the class if he was an entrepreneur. After answering in the affirmative, Dr. Towns asked if he wanted to plant a church. The author told him that he would do whatever God called him to do. Then Dr. Towns said something that would forever stamp the course of the author's life. He said, "I think you should move to Denver to plant a church." Coincidence? No. This was God's way of trying to get the author's attention and showing him how God was leading in this process. After this encounter, the author had a conversation with his senior pastor and two

mentors, all of whom confirmed the call on his life.

The next step to discover what God was leading the author to do was to determine where God may have been sending him and his family. Once a church planter determines that God has called them to plant, a big piece that needs to happen is an affirmation from those who understand what it takes to plant a church. The author wanted to make sure he was evaluated and assessed before taking the plunge to step out in faith. He and his wife, Sara, took multiple online assessments, went to an ARC³³ (Association of Related Churches) church planter's assessment, and was interviewed by other organizations; all of these assessments and evaluations came back with the same conclusion, they were called and ready to plant a church.

The author's experience had given him opportunities to lead people at higher levels. Their marriage and finances were at a healthy place to withstand some of the pressures and the costs associated with planting a church. Also, the author's desire to learn and grow was one of his top five strengths according to Strengths Finder, so he was ready to move forward and learn all God had for him in this process.³⁴ Everything seemed to be pointing the couple in the direction of starting a church, and the next step was to determine a game plan and what their subsequent steps were going to be. To make this game plan, they would conduct a lot of interviews, surveys, read books and articles on planting a church. They wanted to make sure they were not just diving into something without knowing what to expect. They sought to gain the greatest knowledge by exploring as much of church planting as possible, to help in preparing them to launch and grow a healthy church.

³³ "Launching, Connecting, Equipping the Local Church," ARChurches.com, accessed on Nov 10, 2015, <https://www.arcchurches.com/>.

³⁴ Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

Once a church planter believes he is called to plant and then has been given confirmation by wise counsel, the next step is to ask themselves four questions. “Where do we want to plant a church?” “When will we plant this church?” “Who will be a part of this church?” “How will we be different from the other churches in that community?” These are four vital questions that must be asked and answered in the church planting process. As the author and his wife processed through these questions, they knew the most important question to answer at this next stage was “Where will we plant this church?” This question seems to determine the answers to the other questions.

To answer the “Where?” question, the author and his wife sat down at a restaurant and identified what type of city they wanted to live in. They believed that if God was calling them to start a new church and there was no specific city on their heart, then they wanted to go to a big city they could love. They knew that to love the people of a city, one has to love the city. If a church planter does not love his city, then there is no chance of truly loving the people of the city; therefore, making it impossible to truly let God use his family to reach those who are far from Christ. The author and his wife identified five values they wanted in a city, and as they looked across America, they only found five cities that matched those values. The five cities were Denver, Miami, San Francisco, San Diego, and Tampa. We put Denver at the top of our list because of the author’s love for the Broncos and had an attraction toward the city since he was a child. They put Miami second on the list because it was the most unchurched city on the list, which was one of the core values they were looking for in a city. They decided at that point to visit both cities and pray over them. If neither city seemed like a good fit, then they would visit the final three cities and pray over those as well.

The author and his wife visited Miami first and absolutely loved it. They loved the

ability to stay located near a beach; they loved the multi-cultural aspect of the city and that it was the most unchurched city in America at that time. After spending a weekend in Miami, they believed that would be the place God would allow them to live and start a new expression of His Church. Although it was not one of the five core values, the multi-cultural aspect of Miami was a major draw to plant a church in that city. If their search had stopped there, they would have been happy going to Miami. However, they committed to one another that they would visit the first two cities and then make a choice. Since they already purchased the plane tickets, they knew they needed to visit Denver out of due diligence.

Arriving in Denver in December of 2012, the author and his wife thought their decision to move to Miami was made, but they still took time to pray through whether, or not, God may be calling them to Denver, and it became very clear, very quickly that there were major differences between the two cities. Miami has beaches, and Denver has mountains. Miami was hot and humid, and Denver was dry and cold. Miami was also very diverse, and Denver lacked in that category. Although Denver lacked in diversity and that was a major draw toward Miami, God began to move on the author's behalf. He and his wife were there for four days, and they met with three different pastors. Surprisingly, each of them made the same statement. They said, "If you move here, you can preach in our congregation and take as many people as you want." One pastor even added, "Our church just raised \$75,000 for a church plant, and we would love to give that to your church if you move here." God was showing His movement on their behalf.

Neither had the author or his wife ever heard of a church planter with that story. To be told that they could preach in other churches and other pastors would be okay sending people and money. This was unheard of in the church planting world. Pastor Greg Surratt has said many times, "Never walk somewhere and ask God to bless you, but find out where God is

blessing and see if He'll let you join Him³⁵.” It was clear that God was blessing this place on behalf of the author and his family. One week later, they decided to move their family from Charleston, SC to Denver, CO to start a church. The next question they needed to answer was “When?”

Mac Lake, former church planting president of Launch Network, teaches that as soon as church planters know where God is calling them, the church planter will have a draw to move to that city as quickly as possible.³⁶ This was the case for the author. They made the decision in December 2012, and it was just seven months later, in early July, that they found themselves in a Uhaul moving across the country. The author and his wife believed that the way they begin something new is determined by how they completed their last assignment; therefore, they made sure to end their time at Seacoast well and worked with the lead pastor there to establish the timeline for their exit. Moving in the summer allowed the author and his family to experience the best weather of Denver before any of the cold and snow came. Furthermore, it gave them eight months to build up a launch team before the church would officially launch in February 2014. It seems that the two best times to launch a church is either early fall or January/February. Moving in the summer gave the author and his family plenty of time to grow to love the city, before seeking to reach the people of the city through a new expression of the church.

The third question that needed to be answered, and a question every church planter must answer, is “Who would be a part of this church?” The author knew God would bring people He wanted once they moved to Denver, but they were praying for God to give them a great team

³⁵ Greg Surratt, interview by author, Charleston, SC, February 8, 2015.

³⁶ Mac Lake, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, April 16, 2015.

that would move with them. They began praying for God to establish a team of people they could trust, people who had the same vision and desire to reach the happily lost and a team who understood how excellent ministry looked. God was faithful and answered their prayers beyond all they could ask or imagine. In the first four months of moving to Denver, the author and his wife saw over 30 people give up the comfort and normalcy of their lives and move to Denver to help start the church. This was a huge answer to prayer as these people already knew the vision, their leadership was trusted, and they understood what was expected to have a growing church.

The final question that needed to be answered was “How will we be different as a church?” The author knew God was not calling them to the Denver metro area to be another church. They knew God was not calling them to Castle Rock, Colorado because there were no good churches in Castle Rock. God’s call for almost every church planter, excluding those who plant churches where there are no churches, is to go to a place because God needs a different type of expression of His church that already exists, and there is a need for churches to do things differently to reach people who are not currently being reached.

God was drawing the author and his family to the area to plant a church which would be different from every other church there. As they prayed through this reality, they discovered that the church was going to resemble whom the leader of the church is, meaning the values and strengths of the leader will be the values and strength of the church. After a long process, the author knew God was calling them to start a church that helped people become intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus. This is the mission of the church and defines whom God has called to be that church, and that would define how they would operate moving forward.

Church planting is not easy. Church planting is not for everyone. God calls certain

people to be a part of starting a church, and when one looks at the main components of church planting, there is The Man, The Mission, and The Message. As the author has processed through all three of these aspects, it has become apparent that God has called him to plant a church, but not just any church. God has called him and his family to plant a life-giving, gospel-centered church in an un-churched, yet spiritual, culture.

Chapter 3

Research for Success

Twenty years ago, there was not much material on church planting. The majority of information that church planters had to draw from, especially as it pertains to books and articles, was about church planting or mission work in other countries. Although people did start churches in America, it was not a popular trend, and therefore, there are few resources on the subject during that period. However, over the last 10-15 years, church planting has grown in popularity. There are multiple church planting organizations and experts on the subject, which has flooded the market with church planting resources.

In gathering research for this project, the author chose to study multiple views on church planting and learn from many different organizations and individuals who plant churches. Three major facets of research were conducted to gather this information. First, resources such as books and articles were researched and read to gain head knowledge. Second, conversations with church planting organizations took place to gain theory about the subject. Lastly, interviews were conducted with church planters and pastors to get real-time, on the ground perspective about the challenges and successes of planting a church.

Written Resources

This project started with reading materials on church planting. It became quickly apparent that there were multiple views on how to plant a church. Many of the books and articles focused on how to prepare oneself and one's family for the spiritual hardships of starting a new church. One book, *It's Personal* by Brian and Amy Bloye discusses the rawness of church planting and how it affects your family. Brian and Amy planted a church outside of Atlanta, Georgia and they have been able to maintain a healthy marriage throughout all of the

challenges the ministry brings. This book does not hold back on the legitimate challenges a church planter is going to face, not just the financial or the leadership challenges, but the personal challenges that one will go through in the process. There is even one story in the book about how Brian and Amy's son was attacked by major spiritual forces one night¹.

Another book that goes along with this same theme of helping the church planter prepare himself and his family is *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* by Dr. Darrin Patrick. In his book, Dr. Patrick discusses the necessity for the church planter to know his calling. The importance cannot be understated, as the enemy will try and convince the person that they are not the person for the job or not good at it². If the church planter does not know that they are called by God to start a church, then they are destined to be discouraged and succumb to that discouragement, and there is a strong possibility the church either will not launch, or last very long. Darrin Patrick is a church planter, who started a church in St. Louis, Missouri, so he understands first-hand what it takes to plant a church. His book is an attempt to prepare future planters for the longevity of the mission, not just the appeal of starting something new.

These types of books are designed to prepare the person's heart for the heartache and challenges that come along with planting a church. If a church planter does not first understand the real challenges that they will face, and if they are not prepared to deal with those challenges, then they will find themselves wanting to quit the ministry and shut down the church. Church planting is a very challenging endeavor, and there have been many former church planters, like

¹ Brian and Amy Bloye, *It's Personal: Surviving and Thriving on the Journey of Church Planting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

² Patrick, *Church Planter*.

Dr. Patrick and Brian Bloye, who have tried to help prepare the new wave of planters for the challenges they will face.

In addition to resources designed to help prepare the church planter for the challenges he and his family will face, there are many other resources on the subject, many of which focus on the theory of church planting. There are many different resources out there that help a potential church planter figure out the theory on which he is going to base his church planting efforts. Every one of these resources, for the most part, focuses the entire discussion on reaching the lost and growing God's Kingdom. There is really no other reason to start a new church than to reach those who are far from Jesus and help expand the Kingdom of God. So, although these books have different titles, the content remains very similar.

One of the most popular books on the theory of church planting is *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in your City* by Tim Keller. Although this book is not primarily for church planters, it is being used as a guide for many church planting organizations to help their future planters understand the theory and reason behind starting a new church. This book was used extensively in this thesis, and the author has changed some of his old ways of thinking and put into practice ideas from this particular book. Keller's main focus of the book, which is read and used more like a college textbook, is that the ministry of Jesus was to seek and save the lost, and church planters are to conduct that same ministry at the heart of the place in which God has placed them.³ The church should be the center of the life of a city because the people of the city see the necessity of the church and ultimately of Jesus Christ. This book is a phenomenal resource for any pastor or ministry leader, but especially for

³ Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

those who are wanting to start the process of starting a church.

Another book that focused on the theory of church planting, as well as the method was *Starting New Churches on Purpose: Strategizing for the 21st Century* by Ron Sylvania. Pastor Ron is a church planter in Ocala, Florida. He was extremely helpful to the author in the very early stages of the author learning about church planting. Pastor Ron also supported the author's church plant financially in the pre-launch phase. In his book, Pastor Ron takes time to point out the grave importance of church planting in America. Pastor Ron states:

According to the North American Mission Board, in 1900, there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 2004 there were 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans. If the current trend for church attendance continues in America, by 2050 only 11.7% of America will attend church. The Barna Group reports that the number of unchurched adults has nearly doubled from 1991 to 2004. A Barna study explained, 'Since 1991, the adult population in the United States has grown by 15%. During that same period, the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled, rising from 39 million to 75 million—a 92% increase.' Clearly, we are losing ground with each passing year. We have a growing evangelistic deficit in America that will best be answered by starting new churches.⁴

Pastor Ron makes it very clear that the method of church planting is important, but only when the right theory and reason are behind it.

Another type of written resource that was used in this project were books and articles on leadership. Since one of the major components of having a healthy, thriving church plant is leadership, the author wanted to make sure there was a study into leadership and what makes a great leader. There are many books on the subject of leadership and most of the books the author read focused in some degree on the character or inner life of the leader being an important factor in all leadership opportunities.

⁴ Sylvania, *Starting New Churches*, 20-21.

One such book that focuses on the inner being of the leader is *Bigger, Faster Leadership* by Samuel Chand. The book's focus is on how to grow an organization, especially one that is spiritually focused. Chand discusses many different components of how to grow an organization, and one of those is the character and development of the leader. When quoting another businessman, Sam writes, "Businessman Max De Pree famously noted, 'The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.'"⁵ According to Chand, every leader must be a servant to people, as well as calling people to more. In another spot, he writes, "That's the double-edged knife of a leader: help people live in peace, but stir up enough chaos to make changes happen."⁶ Every leader must balance the tension between being inspirational and being willing to challenge people. That tension will be managed best when the leader's inner life is secure, and they understand their role as a leader.

These leadership resources were also used to discover other key elements of leadership that are essential for any church plant to be successful and thriving. One such resource was a book called *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Collins writes this book in an attempt to help people understand what sets apart organizations. He gives ideas on how an organization can make the transition from a good company to one that is truly great. He makes it clear that a deciding factor in all great companies is the leadership. Collins identifies five levels of leadership within his book. Level one is a highly capable leader. This is the leader that has the capability and work habits to be successful. Level two is the contributing team member. This person takes his

⁵ Samuel Chand, *Bigger Faster Leadership: Lessons from the Builders of the Panama Canal* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

or her individual capabilities and uses them for the betterment of the team and the accomplishment of team goals. Level three is a competent manager. This person knows how to organize and lead a group of people toward a desired outcome. The fourth level is an effective leader. This type of leader is one who can help others commit to a pursuit of higher standards and performance to achieve more as a whole.

The fifth and final level is the executive. The executive is the leader who “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”⁷ To have a great organization, its leader must be a level five leader. In the same chapter, Collins writes, “Level five leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that level five leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”⁸ Collins proceeds to state that all great leaders have an ego, but the level five leaders channel that ego toward the organization. This is also true in the church world. Church planters must not make planting about them or their experience or their opportunities. The reason to plant a church is not for the ego of the church planter, but rather for the betterment of the community and the eternity of people. Every church planter must have that clear understanding as a leader if they want to create a life-giving, sustainable, healthy church.

Finding and learning from resources about leadership was essential for this project. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the “man” who plants a church is so crucial to the success of the church. This includes the church planter’s inner life, as well as their leadership

⁷ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2001), 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

capability.

The last type of written resource that was covered during the research of this project were books and articles written on the method of church planting. It was quickly discovered that there are many different beliefs on how someone should start a church. Some resources try to focus the church planter's attention to being a "missional church." A missional church is one that is focused outwardly with a high emphasis on community and serving people. One of the leading books on this method is *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply* by Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im. In their book, Stetzer and Im, takes the attention off great strategies and drawing people into the church through advertising and attractional elements, and focusses on starting a church and drawing people in through incarnational means. They state, "The concept of being incarnational as it relates to church planting emphasizes the importance of relationships in effective church planting. It's not about establishing a location for worship; it's about establishing a basis for coming together in the first place. Good church planting depends on good relationships."⁹ These books focus more on the relational component of church planting, as the main strategy for starting and growing a church.

Other resources discovered while researching focused on the step-by-step actions that one must take in starting a church. These resources are designed to help a church planter know exactly what they are to do in establishing a mission statement, building a launch team, creating a strategy for small groups and many more items. Aubrey Malphurs book *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting* is an example of this type of resource. In his book, Malphurs helps the church planter know how to establish vision and values, research and determine a location and facility,

⁹ Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 4.

raising funds and many more essential elements to the church planting process.¹⁰ Another book that focuses on the step by step process and a book that was heavily used throughout the experimentation phase of this project is *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas.¹¹ Resources like these and others are absolutely crucial for the church planter. Many church planters that were interviewed throughout this project admitted that they did not know how to plant a church and even small things like how to start a bank account could have been a bigger issue if they did not have any resources to help them. It is great to have books on method, but it is essential to have books on the step-by-step process of planting a church.

As well as the resources mentioned, another type of resource that was used was one that helped the author know how to prepare himself for the pressures and difficulties of planting and leading a church. There were books that just focused on a step by step process to help the planter know how to prepare his heart and mind for what he would experience. One such book used was *Ready? Preparing for the Pressures of Church Planting*. This book is a sort of guide for the planter to use in preparing themselves for the trials they will face. The authors discussed areas that are important to the strategy of church planting, like engaging one's community with the Gospel and how to recruit and utilize partners. The book, however, had a heavier emphasis on the heart and mind of the church planter. The authors discussed areas such as spiritual warfare and who to handle discouragement. In a section discussing the realities of church planting, the author mentions that after four years, the average church plant is running around

¹⁰ Aubrey Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

¹¹ Searcy and Thomas, *Launch*.

85 people in worship. He writes, “For the church planter, having realistic expectations will help avoid discouragement. Research shows that if the expectations of the church plant meet the reality of the church planting experience, the chance of survivability increases by over 400 percent.”¹² Understanding the reality of church planting and having expectations that are in line with what is probably going to happen is absolutely essential for the vitality of the church plant. Resources like this one help the planter to prepare his heart and mind while working through the process of planting.

Throughout the project, there have been a total of over 150 different articles, blog posts, scholarship journals and books read on the subject of church planting. Each of the different types of subject matter listed previously was read to gain a full understanding of the scale of planting a church. Not only were there resources read and reviewed on planting a church, but also resources used to help understand the difference between planting a church in a cross-cultural setting. Since the author of this project comes from a different area of the country than where the church will be planted and the research conducted, there were books read to help understand how to do cross-cultural ministry work. All in all, these books and other resources help to give a diversified knowledge of church planting and the essential elements of starting a new church in a cross-cultural setting.

Church Planting Organizations

Along with the reading resources on the subject matter, the author had multiple conversations with organizations that help plant churches. There are many church planting organizations in America. Almost every major denomination has a church planting arm to its

¹² Tony Watkins, *Ready? Preparing for the Pressures of Church Planting* (Alpharetta: North American Mission Board, 2009), 136.

organization, and many other church planting entities are not associated with a particular denomination. For this project, there were multiple conversations with six different church planting organizations. Each one of these organizations has different strengths, so it was invaluable to learn from each of them and to have different takeaways, regarding church planting in an unchurched, yet spiritual context.

The three organizations that had the greatest impact on this project were Association of Related Churches (known throughout the rest of this discussion as ARC), Strategic Launch Network and Church Planters of the Rockies (known throughout the rest of this discussion as CPR). Each of these three organizations not only discussed with the author of this project, but they partnered in significant ways to help see a church launch in the Denver metro area.

The first organization, ARC, is located in Birmingham, Alabama and began in 2002. Since its inception, ARC has planted over 700 churches in the United States and many more internationally. They are one of the largest and fastest growing church planting organizations in the world. ARC is currently planting churches in America, Europe, South Africa, China, and Australia. ARC says about themselves, “having planted over 600 churches (that number is now over 700), and with hundreds more partner churches, ARC has become not only a movement but a collection of many ‘tribes,’ all with a focus to see a life-giving church in every community in the world.”¹³ They also claim one of the highest success rates in church planting, stating that 95% of church plants through ARC are successful¹⁴. ARC defines success as still in operation after five years.

¹³ “About,” ARChurch.com, accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.arcchurches.com/about>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ARC states that they specialize in “launching large,” which means they want to start churches with at least 250 in attendance on the first day. After talking about their vision for launching large with Josh Mauney, church planting director for the US, Josh says, “Launching a church is like having a baby. You want to do everything you can to have the healthiest birth possible. If you have a healthy baby, it has a better chance of survival. If you launch a larger, healthy church, it has the best chance of longevity.”¹⁵ The strategy that ARC communicates to those who go through their training involves mass marketing, strategic events, development of a healthy and large launch team, and a great system to help people return.

ARC has a proven track record, and they have some of the best training that is available for church planters. On top of their training, ARC has created a culture of community. Each guy that is a part of the ARC “family” strongly believes that they have an advocate one phone call away. They know that they have people who will encourage them, pray for them and will walk with them through the tough journeys of life. ARC provides opportunities throughout the year for pastors to connect and grow together.

One of the opportunities that ARC provides to all their church planters or those interested in church planting is an annual conference. They currently do two of these conferences, one of the East coast and one on the West coast. These conferences give training and inspiration, but the major goal of each conference is to provide a place where pastors can meet one another and build relationships. Also, they provide quarterly, sometimes monthly, “meet-ups” for pastors in particular cities to get to know one another and be encouraged by one another.

¹⁵ Josh Mauney, Church Plant Training, Birmingham, AL, March 10, 2016.

In researching ARC and interviewing different ARC pastors, it became very apparent that one of their strong passions was to create a sense of family and to push their mantra of “don’t do ministry alone.” This was a great organization to research because of their emphasis on the pre-launch and launch stage of planting a church. They also plant churches all over the world, so having that perspective helped to broaden the ideas and hopes of this particular project.

A second organization researched in this project was the Strategic Launch Network. Strategic Launch Network is the church-planting arm of Lake Pointe Church outside of Dallas, Texas. Strategic Launch Network is affiliated with the Southern Baptist, but they do not only plant Southern Baptist churches. They are very particular about whom they plant and where they plant. They believe God has called them to plant churches in some of the hardest areas of the country.

Strategic Launch Network only focuses on planting churches in the United States of America currently, and, more specifically, large cities where they believe the church can make the most difference in the country. Strategic Launch Network focuses heavily on the assessment, the ongoing coaching, and the partnerships. Unlike many other church planting organizations, Strategic Launch Network spends much time assessing future church planters. Rick Burge, the church planting pastor at Lake Pointe and the one who oversees Strategic Launch Network, says, “The most important piece of any successful church plant is the church planter.”¹⁶ Because they believe this is the most important aspect of any church plant, they spend a large portion of their time assessing future planters. It is not uncommon for Strategic

¹⁶ Rick Burge, interview by author, Rockwall, TX, May 10, 2015.

Launch Network to spend six months assessing a future planter and then choosing not to partner with them.

When assessing a potential church planter, they are looking to see their leadership capability, their ministry experience, family life, their financial responsibility, and their communication ability. These are all major factors into whether or not Strategic Launch Network will approve a future partner. Once the partner is approved, they then provide ongoing coaching for that individual, resources and a partnership with churches all over the country.

Strategic Launch Network is not just interested in launching large, healthy churches, but they are also interested in providing ongoing coaching for these church plants to succeed for decades to come. They provide ongoing coaching and support for each church planter they support. Furthermore, they bring in all their church planters, who are receiving financial support from them, to an annual conference. At this conference, they take two days to give further training, as it pertains to leadership and character and other essential aspects of growing a healthy church. During this time, they set up meetings between the church planters and different ministry and mission partners who might be interested in coming alongside the church plant and sending a mission team to help or support through prayer. They truly believe that the only way to change the world is through starting new churches that grow into healthier and larger churches and they seek to pour every resource they can into making this happen.

Strategic Launch Network was a great organization to research throughout this project to find out what type of church planter succeeds and what type of ongoing coaching is needed to be successful long-term. Moreover, their focus on hard cities to start a church was greatly beneficial because of the learning they have already acquired in cities where it is difficult to launch and sustain a healthy church, in particular, Denver.

The last organization that is worth mentioning here is Church Planters of the Rockies (CPR). This is the oldest out of the three most helpful organizations, as it was started three decades ago before church planting was popular. CPR is based out of Colorado and only focuses on planting churches in Colorado. It is associated with the Christian Church Restoration movement, and plants roughly 1-3 churches every couple of years. The value that CPR adds to church planters in Colorado and this project is their extensive knowledge about the culture of Colorado.

There are reasons that Colorado is one of the most unchurched states in the United States. CPR has been around long enough and helped plant enough churches that they understand the dynamics of church planting in the Denver area. Each of the guys on the board is a lead pastor on the Front Range of Colorado, and they have a unique perspective that many other church planting organizations do not have.

The author found that many church planting organizations are run by guys who either are not lead pastors or were lead pastors at one point, but never planted a church. This is not a terrible thing, but it does set CPR apart knowing that each board member is a lead pastor in the same area where they plant churches. This gives the potential church planter immediate support and coaching with guys on the ground. This group was highly beneficial from the standpoint of having other lead pastors to interview and receive coaching from in regards to this project.

There are dozens of church planting organizations, and many of them are extremely helpful to the church planting process for many reasons. Out of all the organizations the author could have chosen from, these three organizations were chosen very strategically. Each of these organizations has a vast knowledge of church planting and what makes a church plant successful. ARC focuses on the process and helping the planter understand what goes into the

process of launching a large, healthy church. Strategic Launch Network focuses on finding the right church planter and resourcing them with the coaching and ongoing support they will need. Church Planters of the Rockies focuses on gaining the knowledge and understanding of the culture of Colorado.

Each of these three was extremely valuable to the planter during the process of starting the church. Also, all three organizations also gave significant amounts of resources as well. These organizations do not just talk about launching healthy churches; they put their resources where it will best help the church plant as well. All three of these organizations are committed to seeing church launch healthy and grow to greater health while reaching more people.

Interviews

Not only was there research conducted through reading materials and talking with church planting organizations, but another aspect of the research was conducting interviews with eleven current lead pastors in the Denver metro area, as well as interviewing seventeen church planters in different stages of the process. The reason current lead pastors were interviewed is that they know the current struggles of the people of Denver. They understand the challenges associated with pastoring in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture. They understand the sins that the people struggle with and the mindset of people in that type of culture. Moreover, they are past the church planting stages, so they have learned what it takes to sustain a church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture and the things that will work and will not work in reaching people who are far from Christ.

The information gathered from these pastors all sounded similar. The struggles were the same. The people, no matter where in the city someone lived, had similar issues. The mindset that the average person in Denver has was the same for each of the churches interviewed.

The overwhelming knowledge gained by these interviews was threefold. First, there have been a lot of church plants come and go in Denver. It may be common in other cities, but the number of churches that some of these lead pastors have seen started and then close their doors was staggering. Brett Crimmel, who is six years into a church he started and planted another church before that, was asked how many churches he has seen fail in the Denver area. Brett's response was "More than I can count. I would say more than 60."¹⁷ Pastor Ron Johnson, who pastors a growing church plant and also started one of the fastest and largest churches in the Denver area before this latest plant, said he has seen at least 25 church plants fail in the Denver area since he moved to the area.¹⁸ This was a general theme I heard from many of the pastors I interviewed.

Another piece of information gained from these interviews was about the mindset of people in Colorado. Coloradans do not live in one of the most beautiful places in the world so that their weekends can be filled with church activities. People move to Colorado because they want to enjoy the outdoors. Every weekend, one can take part in a different activity like hiking, skiing, white water rafting, climbing, mountain biking, and the list can go on and on. A lot is competing for one's time and energy. One pastor, Keith Boyer, who planted a church almost ten years ago and then just recently planted another one, said: "your best leaders will come to church every three weeks."¹⁹ This is something that every church wrestles with in Colorado.

When discussing this truth that Colorado people are drawn to do many other things on

¹⁷ Brett Crimmel, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 16, 2015.

¹⁸ Ron Johnson, interview by author, Denver, CO, May 21, 2015.

¹⁹ Keith Boyer, interview by author, Denver, CO, March 5, 2015.

the weekend, another pastor, Mark Marble, said, “You have a choice. You can be upset that people are not coming to church because they are out enjoying what God created or you can be okay with it. How you respond will determine how people allow you to lead them.”²⁰ This was a prevailing theme in the interviews and one that helped the author understand the depth of an unchurched, yet spiritual mindset and culture. People would rather be outside having a spiritual experience, than inside a church building have a church service. This is a major mindset that every pastor in this type of culture must understand and minister through.

The third piece of information garnered from these interviews with the lead pastors is: if one were going to make it in church planting, one must be in it for the longevity. Every church that was interviewed in Denver that had a weekend attendance of over 1000, and is over ten years old. There are no quick growth stories of churches in Denver. The churches who have been around the longest seem to have the most clout and are, almost always, the largest churches in their respective towns. Many of the pastors spoke of how many churches come and go, and it takes a while for a church to build up a rapport with the people in their town. One pastor, Mark Hardacre, who has been pastoring in Denver for nine years, said, “From a church perspective, it takes a long time to gain credibility in the community. People have seen churches come and go and they want to know if you’re in this for the long haul. By continuing to serve the community, I believe it builds credibility in their mind that we’re serious about this deal.”²¹ This was a sentiment that most of the pastors interviewed expressed.

Besides interviewing current lead pastors in the Denver metro area, a part of the research

²⁰ Mark Marble, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO, May 17, 2015.

²¹ Mark Hardacre, interview by author, Denver, CO, August 8, 2016.

was also interviewing current church planters in the area. A church planter met the criteria of being selected for interview if they were within five years of planting the church. This type of research was conducted to gain a greater understanding of the challenges of planting a church in an unchurched culture. Each of these guys is either a few years into their plant or just beginning, and they each were able to bring a different perspective.

The overwhelming response that the author heard from these guys was that a lack of knowledge and support is what hindered their church planting experience. Each of them would have liked to have had more support in leading up to launch and more help with the step-by-step launching process. Since most of these guys were former youth pastors or some other type of ministry staff, they did not have the experience that set them up to start a church.

Most of the church planters felt or feel adequate to run the daily operations of the church, but many of them did not know how to start the church. One pastor, Kiko Jeantette, is in the process of planting his third church in Denver and when asked what advice he would give to a possible church planter wanting to plant in Denver, he said, “Don’t, unless the force behind you starting here just can’t be stopped.”²² His words expressed the sentiment of how hard it is to start a church in Denver.

Another major thought that was expressed from these current church planters is the “weight” that is felt leading a church. Again, most of these guys have not been in a lead pastor role, so the pressures and challenges that they face are all new. One church planter who is in the pre-launch phase of planting said the most challenging aspect to him is “the weight of leading a church. It is all of the collective things that as the primary leader you are now responsible for.

²² Kiko Jeantette, interview by author, Denver, CO, June 2, 2015.

There is no longer a buffer; the buck stops with you.”²³ Jody’s thoughts are what many of the church planters expressed in the interviews. The pressures of the entire church, not just the structure and success, but the people and their struggles, the entire weight of the ministry is now on the church planter’s shoulders. This is a massive challenge that every church planter must come to grips with and one that was helpful to explore for this project.

Overall, the research conducted for this project helped gain a greater understanding of church planting as a whole and the specific challenges for planting a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture. The books and other written material was great to fill in the gap that was created by a lack of knowledge. It is difficult to start something or do anything without any experience, so one of the first places to start to gain the knowledge that one needs is to read. Reading over 150 books, blogs, articles and scholarly journals for this project was essential to gaining the right information needed in regards to the planter, boundaries for one’s family, understanding the theory behind church planting and different methods to start a new expression of the church effectively.

The discussions with the church planting organizations were crucial to learning what they have seen as most valuable in church plants. To know what needs to be the focus and what leads to the greatest chance for success is invaluable in a study like this. In researching so many different organizations, it helped give the author a great place to go for training and coaching. It was also crucial to know what aspects of church planting are being taught, so the author could understand why some of the church planters that interviewed were struggling or successful in different areas.

²³ Jody Earley, interview by author, Denver, CO, August 8, 2016.

The interviews of the pastors may have been the most helpful part of the research. Each pastor had their own experience and knowledge from which to draw. This was truly invaluable because it does not just provide insight, but it brings real experience to the discussion. These men have sacrificed so much for the spreading of the Gospel and to learn from their pitfalls and failures, as well as their strengths and successes was crucial to this project. Before talking with these pastors and church planters, everything learned was just great ideas and theory. These guys helped put teeth to the discussion and allowed some of the knowledge to be seen in practice. All of the research was strategic and valuable, and this project greatly benefited from the reading, conversations, and interviews conducted along the way.

Overall, the research conducted in this project has helped the author gain much insight needed to launch a healthy, growing church. The books, articles and other text resources were huge in giving the author wisdom on what to expect and what to prepare for in regards to planting, preparing his family and being ready for some of the challenges associated with starting a church. The church planting organizations were essential in helping the author find support and wisdom from those who understand the process better than anyone. These are, with their experience and knowledge, were invaluable to the author as he sought to determine the strategy by which he would launch the church. Also, these organizations helped the author to connect with others who had gone down the same path of church planting. These connections not only have been encouraging to the author and his journey, but many of them helped him with the furtherance of this project in regards to the interviews. The interviews were critical. Without the conversations with men who had either planted churches or were leading churches in the Denver area, the author would not have had real-time information; the knowledge that he learned would have taken years of personal experience to gain on his own. The research in this

project was helpful and invaluable in creating and then executing the plan to launch a church in a spiritual, yet unchurched culture.

Chapter 4

Pre-Plant Phase

The goal of this project is to create a strategy to successfully start a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture. To successfully plant a church in an un-churched, yet spiritual culture, one must understand the two major phases of launching a church. These two phases are the pre-plant phase and the pre-launch phase. This chapter will focus on the pre-plant phase and what must happen during that phase for the church planter to launch a healthy church.

It is within this phase that one must address certain issues. Three of the main issues that must be discovered are self, destination, and partnerships. These three areas are essential for establishing a firm foundation during the pre-plant phase. Discovering self will focus on making sure that one knows whether or not they are called to plant a church. Planting is not a feeling; it is knowing that one must do what they are being called to do. Discovering the destination is the process by which every planter must go through to discover where God is calling them to plant. Every planter's process is different, and this will be the section in which some insights are shared as to how one can discover the destination. The final area that is essential is discovering partnerships. Many church planters plant without any established partnerships to help them launch or partnerships in the new area where they will be planting. Having the right partnerships can help a church planter launch well; therefore, this section will cover how to discover the right partnerships effectively.

Pre-Plant Phase

The pre-plant phase is the period after the church planter has sensed a call to start a church, but before that planter begins building a launch team, marketing the church, holding pre-view services or, sometimes, even before they live in the city where they are planting. This

phase of church planting could be anywhere from one to three years out from the actual launch of the church and could last weeks, months or even years; although a suggested timeframe would be 6-18 months out from launch. In this time period, the planter is processing through three main areas of concern, self, destination, and partnerships.

Self

During the pre-plant phase, the potential church planter must identify if they are not only skilled in the right aspects to plant a church but if they are called to plant a church. Since 95% of churches will fail by year ten of their existence¹ and one of the major reasons is because of the lead pastor, there must be considerable thought, prayer, and investigation into this aspect of the pre-plant phase. As mentioned in chapter one, there are multiple characteristics one must have in order to be an effective church planter. Four characteristics mentioned earlier are an active relationship with Jesus Christ, biblical character, experience and a calling from God. These four characteristics are essential to being the right person to plant a church; however, there are a few other characteristics that help determine the “health” or “growth” of a new church plant.

One characteristic that all church planters whose churches make it past the five and ten-year marks is entrepreneur leadership. Every church planter that is successful at starting a new church has an entrepreneurial mindset, meaning they have the capability of not only seeing something that does not currently exist, but they also have the capability to lead people to see the vision become a reality. This is an essential characteristic for any church planter who is assessing whether or not they are capable of starting a new expression of God’s Church in a

¹ White, *“Why New Churches Fail.”*

local community. In fact, SEND, the North American Mission Board's initiative to plant churches in some of the most unchurched and difficult cities in America, has made entrepreneur leadership one of the core aspects that they evaluate when it comes to church planting. Dave Dave Howeth, director of SEND Denver, says:

Entrepreneur leadership is vital. This quality is manifested by their passion for starting something new, ability to mobilize and get by from people to invest and participate plus a willingness to take risks. Church planters take risks that most existing church pastors are not willing to take. Let me also distinguish between a business entrepreneur from a spiritual entrepreneur. A business guy may have a cause in mind or a skill to market to make a difference in the world. Most of the time, they want to be their own boss and follow their own path to make money. But, a spiritual entrepreneur is driven by God's call to make a difference based on spiritual transformation and renewal, both in the lives of people and in the community. But, the other aspect of this entrepreneurial spirit is not only that they have a vision based on a call, but they can inspire and mobilize other people to invest in and sacrifice for the vision and cause.²

Entrepreneur leadership is essential for healthy, successful church planting.

Along with entrepreneur leadership, church planters who are able to create a church out of nothing have a vision, the ability to see what others do not. Vision is not something to take lightly. In fact, Andy Stanley, lead pastor and founding pastor of North Pointe Community Church says, "Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be. Anyone who is emotionally involved - frustrated, brokenhearted, maybe even angry - about the way things are in light of the way they believe things could be is a candidate for a vision. Visions form in the hearts of those who are dissatisfied with the status quo."³ Vision is what drives each person to do what they do. If someone has the vision to see their kids educated, then they will research schools and

² Dave Howeth, interview by author, Denver, CO, September 6, 2016.

³ Andy Stanley. *Visioneering*. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1999), 17.

curriculum and determine the best way to make that happen. If someone has the vision to marry a person, then they will do everything they can to influence that person, hoping they will fall in love with them. If someone has the vision to start a church, then they will do all they can to see that picture come to fruition. Vision is important because people want to know where they are going and how they are going to get there. People want to know that this is not just a walk through the woods, but that there is intentionality and effort behind the dream. People will follow a big vision. People get behind visionaries.

Another key aspect for any church planter to evaluate is his ability to recruit, develop and deploy leaders. There seems to be a lack of great leadership in churches today. This can be seen in the many churches that have low church attendance. In a recent study performed by Leadership Network, it was found that the average church has one full-time staff member for every 50-60 church attendees, including children.⁴ If one extrapolates that finding and draws the conclusion that churches have determined that a pastor can effectively minister to 50-60 people, then there seems to be a tight correlation with the fact that the average church in America has 75 participants⁵ and the average pastor can lead 50-60 people. One pastor can only effectively minister to 50-75 people, and the average church in America is less than 100. There seems to be a clear correlation between the inability of a pastor to effectively pastor more than 75 people and the fact that most churches are less than 100. Pastors of small congregations, many times, but not all the time, are ill-equipped to recruit, develop and deploy leaders who can help

⁴ Warren Bird. “7 Vital Benchmark in Church Compensation – Findings from the Large Church Salary, Staff and Benefits Survey.” 2018, Leadnet.org, accessed November 15, 2018, http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SALARY-2018-JUL-Survey_Birdv3.pdf.

⁵ “Fast Facts about American Religion,” Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed October 5, 2018, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong.

shepherd people. Thom Rainer, a church statistician and researcher, says that 90% of churches will never grow to over 350 people because of the increasing organizational complexity. It is this complexity that forces the pastor to lead through people, rather than just leading people. Rainer says, “Most churches cannot or are not willing to make the type of changes that are necessary for complex organizations.”⁶ If a church planter wants to plant a growing, healthy church, no matter the size, they must be effective at recruiting, developing and deploying leaders that will enable the church to increase its organizational complexity.

Unfortunately, many church planters spend much of their time thinking through, and trying to implement, strategy, rather than spending most of their time recruiting, developing and deploying great leaders around them. Craig Groeschel, founding and lead pastor at Life Church, the largest church in North America says this about teams, “Most leaders are trying to figure out the right strategy. The best leaders are obsessed with empowering the right people.”⁷ Building and empowering teams of people are crucial for any church plant to be successful, no matter if that church is in an unchurched area or not. The church planter must evaluate whether he is a team builder or not. If he has had success in recruiting, developing and deploying people in the past, then that will be a great indicator of his potential to do it in the church plant.

During the pre-plant stage of the church planting process, every church planter must assess whether or not he is equipped and called to plant the church. A few things to be cognizant of have been listed in this project; however, the question that must be answered is

⁶ “One Key Reason Most Churches Do Not Exceed 350 in Average Attendance.” ThomRainer.com, accessed October 5, 2018, <http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/one-key-reason-churches-exceed-350-average-attendance/>.

⁷ Craig Groeschel, “Six Steps to Your Best Year of Leadership,” Life Church, accessed February 8, 2018, https://www.life.church/assets/pages/cg-podcast/cglpquote_4@2x-44c024bb5aa06741f3b9b11208ed1b0a4aa8ba06b09462f8663631ef32eaa7ab.jpg.

“how does a church planter determine if he is effectively equipped to lead a healthy, growing church plant?” If the odds of survivability for a church plant increase by over 250% where leadership development training is offered in the plant and an increase of over 400% when the church planter has realistic expectations⁸, then how can a church planter assess if he has what it will take? Every church planter believes that God calls them and yet one must evaluate why 95% of church plants still fail.⁹ Was the planter not called? Was the planter not well equipped? Did God want them to fail? If a major factor into the success of a church plant is the lead pastor, then how does he determine, without bias, that he is capable of leading a healthy, growing church? One of the processes that every potential church planter should put themselves through in the pre-plant stage is an assessment.

Most of the major church planting organizations, Association of Related Churches, SEND (North American Mission Board), Acts 29, Strategic Launch Network, all have assessments that potential church planters must go through to diagnose the health and experience of that planter. These assessments have been created to make sure that the church planter has a healthy relationship with Christ, a firm theological foundation, a healthy marriage, a good understanding of finances and the experience necessary for a healthy, growing church.

Each assessment is different in length, format and next steps, but they all gauge roughly the same areas of the church planter. These organizations, through research and interviews, have determined the most important factors for a church plant to grow and sustain health. These

⁸ Stetzer and Bird, “State of Church Planting.”

⁹ White, “*Why New Churches Fail*. “

factors that they evaluate have already been listed in this project. If a potential church planter wants to evaluate their level of capability and health in each of these areas, then they should subject themselves to an assessment. An assessment will reveal to them real, unbiased areas of growth, as well as areas of strength. These assessments are meant to reveal the truth in areas that might be blind spots and help prevent church planters from going down the wrong road if they are not equipped with the right tools. These assessments can also give the church planter affirmation if they are equipped and called. As one assessment of church planting success states, “Churches that reported aggressive church-planting results viewed assessment, training, encouragement, coaching, and mentoring as more important and strategic than financial support.”¹⁰ Every church planter should go through an assessment in the pre-plant phase to help them determine if they are truly called not just to plant a church, but be the lead pastor of a church plant.

Destination

After the church planter has determined if they are called and equipped to start a new expression of God’s Church, they must determine where God is calling them to plant this church. Pastor and author, Tim Keller, believes that the destination is absolutely crucial in what fruit will be seen in the ministry. He writes, “Yet in the end, the degree of the success of the garden (or the ministry) is determined by factors beyond the control of the gardener. The level of fruitfulness varies due to “soil conditions” (that is, some groups of people have a greater hardness of heart than others) and “weather conditions” (that is, the work of God’s sovereign

¹⁰ Stetzer and Bird, “State of Church Planting.”

Spirit) as well.”¹¹ The destination of the church plant is crucial for two reasons. One, the destination determines the strategy. Two, the church planter and his family must love the city in which they plant.

The strategy for how to reach people is based in large part on the community in which the church will begin. Since every community is different and every community has its own needs and challenges, the church planter must understand a lot about their community before knowing what strategy will work best. As one seeks to determine the location, there are two ways to help a church planter process what type of city will be ideal. First, the church planter must ask the question, “What type of people am I called to reach?” This question is vital in determining a city.

Although there are all types of people in every city, each city seems to have one of three types of people. As the author went through this process of determining where God was calling him to plant, he determined that there are three types of classifications of people, as it pertains to their faith and lack of involvement in the church. Some regions of the country and cities have what may be classified as the de-churched. The de-churched are those who would claim an affiliation with a denomination but do not currently have an active relationship with Jesus Christ. These individuals may have grown up in the church or seen the church as a social expectation, but when they grew older, it became evident that they do not have an active relationship with Jesus Christ. Many cities where the people can be classified as de-churched are found in the mid-west and southeast. A place like Charleston, SC epitomizes this mindset. Charleston was built on the idea of religious freedom, and there are churches on almost every

¹¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 14.

street corner. While the minority of the population attend church every week, the majority would say they have an affiliation with the church and a belief in God.¹²

A second classification that could be used in determining the type of people that make up the majority of the population in a city is the spiritually un-churched. These are people that would admit that they do not go to church, but that they are spiritual. By saying one does not go to church, but one is spiritual, the person does not attend church regularly, or maybe never, nonetheless they believe in a higher power or a spiritual experience or maybe even God. These are cities where people are not opposed to having spiritual conversations and even talking about God, but they claim no affiliation with a church or denomination or, sometimes, even a religion. These types of cities could even have a lot of self-professing followers of Jesus, but many of them do not attend church. These cities are spread out all over the country and would include Denver, CO, and Austin, TX. Denver, CO will be discussed later in this chapter.

A third classification that could be used in determining the type of people in a given city is antagonistically un-churched. These are people who would admit that they do not go to church and they are not open to discussing spiritual matters. Many of the people that live in these cities do not feel that it is kosher to discuss spiritual matters and may become defensive or aggressive when talking about church or God. These types of cities either have a deep history of religion that has turned the people off to any type of spirituality or they have been built upon the rejection of religion. Boston, MA, and Seattle, WA epitomize this type of mindset. Boston began as a place for religious freedom, but because of the deeply religious nature of the city and the many atrocities created by the religious factions, the people there are deeply turned off to

¹² “Religious composition of adults in South Carolina,” 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, Pew Center Research, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/south-carolina/>.

spiritual conversations. Boston church planter, Sean Sears, says some of the statements he has heard over the years in Boston are “If you aren’t Catholic, Muslim or Jewish, you’re probably a cult” and “Protestants are just pissed off ex-Catholics and need to get over it.”¹³ These comments and others like them show the disparity between a belief in God and a hostility toward organized religion or church. Another church planter in Boston, Chris Causey, says, “Boston, a city whose founding cornerstone was Christianity, now contains the highest percentage of atheists in America. That juxtaposition captures the spiritual climate of a city whose rich religious history has been largely replaced by a religious apathy. This spiritual indifference has infected the entire region of New England making it, according to Barna, the most post-Christian region in America today.”¹⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, Seattle always began as a place to get away from the religious factions that controlled most of the United States during the time period when Seattle was settled. The city was built as a place to search for gold and prostitution. The desire to speak about spiritual matters is not ingrained in the culture. These are just two cities that make up the antagonistic unchurched.

For this project and helping the reader know how to plant a church in a spiritual, yet unchurched culture, it was clear that the author needed to explore cities that were spiritually unchurched. Each planter must determine whom God has called them to reach and although every church should reach all three of these groups, every planter will be drawn to a particular type of person. Knowing who he is being drawn to will help the church planter know what type of cities to consider.

This author chose the unchurched, yet spiritual group because these type of people most

¹³ Sean Sears, interview by author, Dallas, TX, October 27, 2015.

¹⁴ Chris Causey, interview by author, Dallas, TX, October 24, 2015.

resemble his background. The author did not attend church but only a handful of times growing up as a child. In middle and high school, the author oscillated between agnostic and atheist but never was antagonist about spiritual discussions. Since the author grew up in a religious culture, Atlanta, GA, and Charleston, SC, he was more open to having spiritual discussions, although he did not believe in the existence of a God or had never heard the name Jesus Christ until he was 16 years old. This type of upbringing, one that consisted of no religious foundation, but an openness to a discussion about spiritual matters, prepared him and attracted him to people that are much like himself. As the author processed through what type of people he and his family were most drawn toward, this helped them narrow down their search of a city. They knew they needed to start a church in a city that consisted largely of people like themselves and how they grew up, spiritually unchurched.

The author knew one of the main reasons for choosing the destination was so important was because the destination was going to determine the spiritual make-up of the people that were being reached. The church planter couple must understand their targets are and what type of people to which they are drawn. If they are not drawn toward the de-churched or the antagonistically unchurched and yet they enter those cultures, then they may become increasingly frustrated with the people and that frustration will come through in their leadership and preaching. The right destination is critical because it determines the type of people being reached.

The second reason the destination is so crucial is that the church planter and his wife must love the city where they are living and ministering in. One cannot love the people in the city unless one loves the city. This is one aspect that many church planters overlook. Whether it's the appeal of suffering for Jesus, a lack of awareness concerning their family's needs, or not

understanding the long-term nature of church planting, some church planters get so caught up in the process that they forget that this is not just a job but a place where God is going to have them plant their roots for many years to come.

A church planter must care about not just growing a healthy church but must care about the needs, wants and issues of a city. They must love the city. After the author and his wife moved to Castle Rock, CO to begin the pre-launch process, this mentality was reiterated to them by a fellow pastor, Mike Caulley. Pastor Mike said, “You want to choose a location that you will grow to love. You want to be there for the long haul, even if the church doesn’t thrive or make it. Will you love the city no matter what happens with the church?”¹⁵ This mentality is essential if a church planter is going to make it clear to the people of that community that they are there for the long haul.

Since so many churches failing in the first five years, there have been many communities that have seen churches come and go and more and more people are becoming hesitant to try new church plants because they are not sure if they will be there in a few years. People do not want to get involved in a church community if there is a fear that the community will not be around long term. A church planter and his family must love the town they are in so that the residents know they are there for them, whether the church makes it or not. Moreover, if the church planter and his family do not like the city they are in, then the people will detect that quickly and question their motivation and involvement.

Picking the right location is based on being drawn to minister to the relatable type of people that make up that community and also the necessity to love the city; as such, the author

¹⁵ Mike Caulley, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO, September 15, 2015.

and his wife chose to move to a suburb of Denver, Colorado called Castle Rock. This choice was not made lightly as neither the author nor his wife had moved outside of the southeastern church culture. In fact, the author's wife had never moved outside of her hometown of Charleston, South Carolina and the furthest West she had ever traveled before visiting Denver was Birmingham, Alabama. They both knew this would not be an easy move or one that would be easy to reverse, so they spent a lot of time processing and talking about what type of city they wanted to live in.

To address the two major concerns above, they spent time praying and communicated what they were looking for. They both agreed early on that ministering to the spiritually unchurched was who they were and what type of culture they wanted to be in. They knew that they both related to these types of people well and felt that the authenticity and openness of this culture were best for their personalities and upbringing. Once they knew this was the type of people they wanted to minister too and live around, they then had to answer the question, "Could this be a city that we grow to love?"

In order to answer the question above, the author and his wife sat down at a restaurant in their hometown and discussed the values they were looking for in a town to raise their family. They knew that to love the city, the city had to be the type of place they wanted to live. If they were going to choose to uproot their family to move to a new place, they wanted to make sure that place was one that they would love and could spend a large majority of their lives there raising their kids. Throughout the discussion, five major values in a city surfaced. Once they identified those values, they only found five cities in the United States that matched those values. They then ranked the cities in order of which ones they may like most and decided that they would visit the top two. If they did not like either of those two cities, then they would go to

the next three. They put Denver at the top of the list, primarily because the author has visited before and he has been a Broncos fan since he was eight. They put Miami as the second choice because it was the most un-churched city on the list. Now they needed to visit each city and see if either were a place they would like to raise their family.

The first visit was to Miami, Florida. During that trip, the couple took time to pray over the city, talk to multiple pastors and visit a church in the area. They also looked at different neighborhoods and talked to people around the city to see if this were a place they would like to live. The trip lasted three days, and they absolutely loved the city. The author's wife loved the heat, humidity, the diversity, the closeness to their hometown and the ability to minister to many different cultures. The author loved the closeness to their hometown, the diversity and the fact that the city was so unreached and there was not a lot of great church plants or large churches. They left Miami believing that they were probably going to move there to plant a church, but they had one more visit first, and that was to Denver.

They traveled to Denver in December in an attempt to experience the cold and snow. Since they grew up in a southern, coastal city, they never had extremely cold winters or lots of snow. They knew this could be a major obstacle for them loving the city and so they wanted to experience it at its worst. The weather that weekend was typical for Colorado, but surprising to the couple. The temperature was in the mid-50s, and it was sunny the entire time. During that weekend, they met with multiple pastors, visited multiple churches, prayed over the city and drove around to different portions of the city. The author's wife loved that it seemed to be a family-friendly place to live, many options for family activities outside, the weather was mild, even in the dead of winter, and God seemed to be on the move. The author loved the sports scene, the outdoors community, the partnership he saw between churches and the openness of

people to outsiders.

They loved the culture and the climate in the city, and while they were there they also met with three different pastors of different churches. All three of these pastors said, “If you come here, we will let you preach in our congregation and take as many people as you can.” One of the pastors, Ron Johnson, lead pastor of Restoration Community Church said, “Our church just raised \$75,000 for a church plant, and if you come here, we will give that to you.” The author and his wife left that weekend with the sense that God was on the move. Greg Surratt, the founding pastor of Seacoast Church and the ARC (Association of Related Churches), has said, “Never walk somewhere and ask God to bless you but find out where He is blessing and see if He will let you join Him.”¹⁶ The author and his wife knew that God was on the move and if He was going to allow them to be a part of it, then they wanted to move to that place. They identified that the type of people of Denver was spiritually unchurched. They discovered it was a place they could learn to love. They knew God was on the move. All of these were clear indicators that Denver, Colorado was the place God was calling them to start a new expression of His Church.

Partnerships

Once the church planter has gone through a process to determine if they are called and capable of starting and leading a healthy, growing church and after they have made a determination about the destination where this church will be located, the next major component to tackle in the pre-plant phase is partnerships. It is before the church planter moves to the city and begins the pre-launch phase of the church plant, that he must decide if he will partner with

¹⁶ Greg Surratt, interview by author, Charleston, SC, February 8, 2015.

others and if so, what is the extent of those partnerships.

The first major aspect of partnerships is determining whether or not the church planter wants any partnerships. Some church planters choose not to seek out partnerships for many reasons. Some do not want to be held accountable. Some do not believe that partnerships are a necessity. Others do not believe that partnerships can be a reality. If the planter does not want to have any partnerships, then their journey will not only be an isolated one, but it will be much more difficult and challenging.

If a person is planting a church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture, then having partnerships is a necessity. The author has discovered that people in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture, are open to discussions about spiritual topics and even open to an invitation to church; if they come to church, it takes almost a year before those individuals will start to give regularly to the church. This reality means that if you are effectively reaching lost people in an unchurched, yet spiritual area, then you must have enough funds to sustain the church for at least the first two years. In fact, others have discovered that partnerships are essential to the success of the church. One study shows that “75% of fast-growing church planters were given additional financial support from a sponsoring agency. Only 48.1 percent of struggling church plants were given additional financial support. While receiving additional funding, a majority of fast-growing church plants received from \$1,000 to \$25,000 extra over a one to two-year period.”¹⁷ This study and the experience of the author confirm the great importance of having partnerships if one is going to plant in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture.

If the planter does want partnerships, then they must determine to what extent. The

¹⁷ Stetzer and Bird, “State of Church Planting.”

church planter must ask themselves two questions to help them in determining to what extent they want a partnership to be. First, “Are there any churches, organizations or individuals who would like to support the vision of this new church plant financially?” The second question is, “Are there any churches who would like to release their people to help start this new church?” These two questions will help define what type of a partnership the church planter will form and what type of church, organization or individual to seek out for a partnership.

The first question in developing a partnership to help start this new expression of God’s Church is “Are there any churches, organizations or individuals who would like to support the vision of this new church plant financially?” This is an extremely important question as the average church plant cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Josh Mauney, president of church planting for ARC says, “On average, a ‘large church’ model church start-up costs between 80-100K. Typically with an income of \$15-20/person per week for the first three years, including adults and kids.”¹⁸ If you take these metrics, then a typical church plant will cost roughly 100K, but if that church planter wants to launch larger or have more ministry opportunities, then they will have to raise more funds than the \$15/person/week will allow. Ron Johnson, lead pastor of Restoration Church and a pastor who has planted multiple churches says that in the Denver area, “a healthy church launch will cost at least \$250K”¹⁹ and this is not including the continued cost to keep the church going after the launch.

Since most church planters are probably not millionaires, they have to figure out how they are going to get that much money to help start the church. The most effective way to raise

¹⁸ Josh Mauney, interview by author, March 10, 2016.

¹⁹ Ron Johnson, Interview by author, May 21, 2015.

that much money is through partnerships with other churches, organizations, and individuals.

Many individuals and families love to give toward what God is doing. There are many people who believe in the necessity for new churches, and they have a desire to support the movement of God in the lives of others. One of the jobs of the church planter is to discover who these people are and ask them to join him on the mission God has. In this phase of the church planting process, the church planter should make a list of every potential individual or family who might want to be a part of what God is doing in the life of the church planting family. In some way, the church planter must communicate the vision and the necessity for partnerships. Then, the invitation must be made. The individual or family must know exactly what is being asked and how much is needed. If a church planter goes into these conversations with a compelling vision and a specific request, then they should find great success in having individuals and families partnering with them in prayer and generosity. The author had a dozen or so individuals and families give toward the vision of the church.

The second group to ask for financial help are organizations. Does that church planter know of any business owners or corporations that would be willing to give toward the start of a new church? Does the church planter have any friends that could guide them in the direction of asking an organization for financial partnership? There are many Christian organizations in the United States that love helping churches and especially love helping new churches get started. The author had two organizations that he was not associated with before moving to Colorado, that became friends and believers in the vision through mutual friends, and they gave a combined \$30,000 toward the start and expansion of the church.

The third group to ask for a financial partnership is churches. If anyone believes, or should believe, in church planting, it is other churches. Every church in existence started as a

church plant at some point and those who can remember that point or those who have a burden for church planting will engage in partnership with those who are about to start a new expression of God's Church. Many churches all over the United States have a passion for seeing churches started, especially churches in some of the most unchurched areas of the nation. The key for every church planter is to be willing to ask friends and other pastors for the names of churches that might be interested in a partnership.

Once a partnership is established, the church planter can ask that church for the names of other possible churches to partner with as well. These churches can be found in a variety of ways. One church planter in San Francisco, Ben Pilgreen, said, "I just went through Outreach Magazine's largest church list and contacted every church to tell them what we were doing. Every one of them either declined to partner with me or didn't answer my request. Everyone one of them except for one. That one, however, gave \$75,000."²⁰ Churches with the heart to reach the lost and see new churches started will be willing to hear the vision and consider a partnership. They will want to know a lot about the church planter, his family, his experience and his leadership capabilities. If the church is interested in having a conversation about a possible partnership, the church planter should be prepared to make an ask from the church with a clear understanding of where that money will be used.

The church planters who have seen the greatest level of success with the raising of funds needed to launch the church through partnerships have had to do two things. One, they have had to make it very clear what they were asking the individual, organization or church to give. When someone is asked for money, most would want to know how that money is going to be

²⁰ Ben Pilgreen, interview by author. San Francisco. November 10, 2016.

used. Church planters who have done well with partnerships have given a detailed, three-year budget to their potential partners to let them know how much they are going to need to sustain the church for three years and what exactly all that money will be purchasing. These budgets are usually put into what is called a prospectus and given to the potential partners in hopes that they will see the need and be a part of meeting the need. The second thing successful church planters have done as it pertains to raising funds from partnerships is understanding what, if any, strings are attached to the partnership.

Every partnership has the potential for strings to be attached. Every partnership could have certain stipulations attached to the partnership that the church planter must understand and agree too. Some partnerships require the church planter to pay the money back to the organization. The money that the church planter receives is treated like a no-interest loan. Some organizations or churches, require the planter to pay a certain percentage of their tithes and offerings received over a period of time. ARC requires all church planters who go through their process and receive money to pay back the original amount given, so it acts as a no-interest loan, as well as pay 2% into the organization for the life of the church. Church Planters of the Rockies requires their church planters to pay 10% of their tithes and offerings into the organization until the amount of the loan has been paid back.

Throughout the project, the author discovered that most individuals and churches that choose to partner with a church planter do not require the funds be repaid in any way, but many organizations that are not churches do require some type of investment back into the organization. Once the church planter has determined if there are any individuals, organizations or churches that will partner with them financially, the next question the church planter must ask, as it pertains to partnerships, is “Are there any churches who would like to release their

people to help start this new church?” The first question helps to determine how much money a planter will have and the second question helps to determine how many people a planter will have. Both of these are crucial factors in a church plant. Geoff Surratt, the church planting pastor at Southeast Christian Church, says “The two most important factors in church planting are people and money.”²¹ These two elements are essential for the life and health of a church, and the church planter must determine if there are any possible partnerships to obtain both.

Many churches planters are unaware that there are churches who would like to partner with a new church by sending people to help launch the church. One survey found that “68% of churchgoers say it takes them 15 minutes or less to get from their home to their place of worship.”²² If this is true, then the majority of unchurched people will not drive more than 15 minutes to church, making the larger churches that are more than 15 minutes away from the plant location key candidates for partnership, particularly if they have a heart for church planting.

The church planter must determine if there are any church who might be interested in helping start a new church, ideally more than 15 minutes away from where the church will be located, and then muster up the nerve to ask these churches for their partnership. If a church planter is going to make this type of request from a church, then they should give the church two options. One, ask the church if they would ask their congregation to send people who live in that area or close to that area for a set period of time. A period of six months or one year is a great timeframe to ask people to commit to joining the church, give their money and serve. If

²¹ Geoff Surratt, interview by author. Denver, CO. April 5, 2015.

²² “Findings from the Baylor Religion Survey, Wave 5,” September 2017, Baylor.edu, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.baylor.edu/baylorreligionsurvey/doc.php/292546.pdf>.

the church planter can have a group of people he knows for at least six months will give their finances, energy, and resources toward the church, it is a huge boost of confidence and helps create momentum. Another option the church planter can present to the potential partnering church would be to ask them to ask the congregation to switch churches completely. This is a bigger request because it means removing that person's family, finances and energy from the church completely; however, some churches understand that this option is best for some of their people.

If someone is going to reach their neighborhood effectively, then they will want to be a part of a church that is closer to their neighborhood. If the new church plant is going to be healthy and a good representation of Christ to the community, then the partnering church may be open to releasing their people to this new faith community. Adding these new people, whether they stay for 6 months or 60 years is huge for the momentum of the church, especially at the beginning. When guests walk in on launch Sunday, and they see 300 people in the crowd versus 50 people in the crowd, it will make them feel more at home and that this could hopefully be a community of which they might want to be a part. This momentum is essential for a church plant early on, and partnerships with individuals, organizations, and churches are one key factor in developing and maintaining this momentum.

The author knew that these partnerships would be essential to the successful launch of a larger, healthy body of believers in a spiritually, unchurched culture. He determined that he wanted to have as many partnerships that he could find and would make sense. The author believed it was like NASCAR. Having as many sponsors as you can find will enable you to have the resources needed to set the church up for possible success. The author started with reaching out to individuals, primarily family members and pastor friends to ask for their

support. About a dozen of those individuals and families responded and started supporting the church, with their finances, monthly. They were able to choose four different options. They could give a one-time gift. Usually, these were larger than \$100 in size. The other three choices were monthly, recurring giving; some chose to give for 6 months, 1 year, 3 years. Although those were the options, no one gave for three years, and only one family gave for one year. The majority of the people committed to a one time gift or six months. After the author exhausted his reach with individuals and families, he turned his attention to churches. He knew the entire key to successfully raising enough funds to launch well rested on his ability to develop partnerships with churches.

To find churches that would partner with this new church plant, the author started by praying for God to move mightily and to bring the right people into his life. In a matter of 9 months, God had answered his prayers, and there were two dozen organizations that were interested in what a partnership would be. The author gave options to each church, much like what he presented to individuals. He asked churches to partner financially either through giving a one-time gift or monthly giving for 1-3 years. If a church were to partner for 1-3 years, they could determine if they wanted to give that monthly or in a lump sum every year. The big request always centered on a multi-year partnership. Giving a one-time gift was a blessing, but for sustainability, the need was for multi-year partnerships. In exactly the opposite to the individuals, the churches that gave a one-time gift gave much smaller gifts ranging from \$500-\$3000 and the churches that committed to multi-year partnerships gave anywhere from \$6000-\$125,000, with one church giving \$250,000 over two years.

In total, the author was able to establish 24 partnership with churches and organizations and another dozen or so partnerships with individuals and families. These partnerships brought

in a commitment of over \$1 million. Not only was there a great return with the financial partnerships, but the author also established partnerships with four churches that sent people to help with the launch. In all, over 100 people came from different partner churches throughout Denver to help with the pre-launch and launch phase of the church plant. These partnerships proved invaluable. The launch of the church, the healthy process by which the team went through, maintaining health in the church planter's family and creating and capturing the momentum needed to launch large would not have been possible without these partnerships.

The pre-plant phase is vital in creating and establishing a healthy, life-giving church in an unchurched, yet spiritual area. It is in this phase that the church planters discover not only their calling but their gifts and abilities in relation to starting and leading a church. It is also a time for the planter and his wife to discover where they will plant the church, what type of people God is calling them to reach and how they will build a partnership that will be essential to launching a healthy church in an unchurched, yet spiritual area.

Chapter 5

Pre-Launch Phase

As stated in chapter four, the goal of this project is to create a strategy to successfully start a church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture. It is within this chapter that we will continue exploring the principles and methods used to plant a church, as well as the results of testing such methods and principles. This chapter will focus on the pre-launch phase. The pre-launch phase is that time period after the planter has moved into the plant area, but before he has officially launched the first service of the church. The pre-launch phase usually begins 6-12 months before the launch date and is a critical time period, and four essential aspects of planting must be engaged at this point. Within this period the church planter must do four things. First, he must determine the mission, values, and strategy of the church. Second, he must determine the strategy of the actual launch. Third, he must recruit and develop a launch team. Lastly, he must engage in creative evangelism. These four components are essential for any church plant but are critically important for the church planter to understand in his context.

Mission, Values, and Strategy

Every church, whether or not it is communicated, has a mission, values, and strategy. Christine Hoover states, “The church plant often takes on the personality and passions of the church planter and his wife. This is why it’s important to cling to Christ with biblical vision.”¹ For a church planter to be successful, he must take time during the pre-launch phase to determine how these three will guide his church and the decisions he makes for the church.

¹ Christine Hoover, 25 Things I’ve Learned from Church Planting, September 2013, The Gospel Coalition, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/25-things-ive-learned-from-church-planting/>.

Nelson Searcy says, “Success begins with a specific plan to move you from where you are to where you want to be. In other words, success begins with strategy.”² As a church planter, the church is non-existent and developing the mission, values and strategy are essential to getting it to where the church planter, and God, wants it to be.

The mission of the church should be very similar to all other churches in the world because the church’s mission comes straight from the words of Jesus. Jesus gave his followers three major commands. Two of those commands are found in Matthew 22:37-39. It states, “And he (Jesus) said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The third commandment Jesus gives is found in Matthew 28:18-20. “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” These three commandments are essential for every follower of Jesus; therefore, for every church.

Every church planter must determine how these three commandments will be lived out in the mission of the particular church he is being called to create. Although every church has the same mission, that mission can be articulated and lived out differently, depending on the culture and what God is saying to that particular church. This mission should be determined when the church planter has moved to the new city so that the mission is specific to the area, the people, and the culture that the church is focused on reaching. According to Will Mancini, every

² Searcy and Thomas, *Launch*, 48.

church has a unique focus and opportunity to advance the Kingdom of God through what he calls the church's "Kingdom Concept."³ Within this Kingdom Concept, each church must understand three things. First, their "Local Predicament." This is when the church understands the unique needs and opportunities where God has placed the body of believers. The second piece that must be understood to fulfill its Kingdom Concept is the "Collective Potential." This is when the church begins asking and understanding the unique resources and capabilities that God has given the people of that particular church. And lastly, the church must understand the "Apostolic Esprit," which is understanding what particular focus of the church most energizes and excites the leadership of the church. When a church can identify these three areas, then it can understand its ability to fully reach and minister to the people in that particular area. Every church planter must be asking the questions, "What is our Kingdom Concept?" "Who has God designed us to be?" "What is our unique focus and reason for being in this town or city?" Once a church planter can discern whom God has called them to be and what needs He has called them to meet and what gifts and opportunities He has given that particular church, then the church can effectively determine who they should be and could be in the community God has placed them in.

As the author processed the mission component of the church, he realized that the culture in the church that was being planted lacked two elements: a sense of community and attention on loving one's neighbor. On top of that, multiple pastors had warned the author, "Don't try to build community here. People in Colorado don't want community." But the author believes that God created each person for community; therefore, he knew a part of the mission

³ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, And Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 85.

was having this idea of building community and loving one's neighbor. After reading *The Art of Neighboring* by Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak, the author decided that having the "neighboring" theme was going to be essential to the church reaching lost people and living out the commandments of Jesus.⁴ At that point, the author determined that the mission statement needed to center around neighboring and he and his team created, "Helping people become intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus." This mission seemed to be what embodied the leadership of the church, the heart of the people who came to the church, the desperate need of the people in the community, and the biblical mandate to love God and love others found in Matthew 22:34-40. People are longing for relationships, for friendships, and for Jesus. The author believed that if people learned how to neighbor well, build relationships and care for others, then that would lead to open conversations about the Gospel.

Once the specific mission of the church is identified, the church planter must determine what values will guide him and the team's decision-making moving forward. Values are what help to guide a person or organization toward the mission and vision. Cynthia Restivo, a certified John Maxwell coach, says this about personal values, "Values unite our calling/vocation with our design (personality, strengths, gifts, talents, skillsets). Our values compel us to lay down our life or rise to the fight. Values chart our course; determine decisions and choices; unite or divide us."⁵ When discussing the importance of an organization having values, she says,

Values anchor an organization; they keep the main thing, the main thing. This is important in the ever-changing culture of organizations; business and non-profits. Many companies, business, and organizations chase the ever-moving carrot in order to obtain

⁴ Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).

⁵ Cynthia Restivo, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO. September 29, 2018.

success. It can be a wild goose chase as organizations chase the latest trends. When a church leads the community with values, people find connection, their place, purpose, and meaning; fulfillment.

Values are essential for any organization to stay true to who they are and values can be the lens by which the church or organization can make a decision that will best benefit the church, organization, and community. One author said, “The values, our Motives, on the deepest level are those mission non-negotiables, or as one pastor calls it, the ‘die-fors’ – things that we are ready and willing to die for. They represent what we are not willing to sacrifice in the accomplishment of the mission”.⁶

When the author of this thesis discovered the importance of values, he and his team decided to discern what is most important to them and what is already being lived out in the core group that would help start the church. As the team prayed through and processed this important aspect of the church, they came up with six values that eventually became four. The first of the four values is to Develop and Deploy. This value focuses on the desire of the church and leadership to help people discover their gifts, calling and purpose and then to raise them up and send them forth to accomplish that purpose, whether that is within the church, the marketplace or some other community. This value stems from passages such as Exodus 18:13-26 where Moses was struggling with leading the people of Israel and doing too much while still having too much to do. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, told Moses he needed to institute better leadership in order to better care for the people of Israel and lead them well. Another passage that speaks to this value is Acts 6:1-7 where the apostles realized there was a need to better care for the Hellenist widows. The apostles knew that they need to raise more leaders so that the

⁶ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 129.

widows would be taken care of and the apostles could continue preaching God's word and prayer.

A second value the team decided upon is Contagious Generosity. This value focuses on the desire God has for each person to live a generous life and to display the love of Christ through their generosity. The team believed that if a person would be generous and those stories were told, then it would be contagious for others. This value stems from passages such as Proverbs 11:24 which states, "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." Passages like this one show people that God has created and called them to live a generous life.

A third value the team decided upon was Celebrate Family. Celebrate Family means to celebrate, serve, care for, encourage and help grow the people God has placed in one's life. Family does not just mean immediate family, but rather the friends, co-workers, classmates, and family God has placed around someone. To celebrate them means to pull out the best in them and to spur them on toward Christ. This value stems from passages such as Matthew 12:46-50, which is where Jesus makes it clear that family is not just mothers and brothers and fathers, but family is those who are a part of God's family. Another passage that speaks to this value is Romans 12:9-13. This passage gives the reader a great understanding of what it means to celebrate others. To love what another, outdo one another with honor, serving one another, praying for one another, showing hospitality. All of these elements are essential to celebrating the family God has placed around a person.

The final value the team decided upon was Authentic Community. This value speaks to the desire that God wants His people to be in and live out an authentic community, where relationships with one another can be real and honest while growing in their faith. One of the

greatest examples of this type of authentic community found in Scripture is Acts 2:42-47. It is here that the reader sees a picture of the early church's characteristics: a group of people seeking to grow in their relationship with God that had "all things in common" and were willing to help one another out in times of need. It is this type of authentic community that allows people to have their greatest potential for life transformation. This is the value that is most dominant in the author's church and the one that the church is most known for in the community.

Once the values have been determined, another part of the pre-launch phase is determining the strategy of the church. Every church has a strategy, even if it is not intentionally lived out. A strategy helps the organization implement the values and the mission of the organization. In the case of the author's church plant, the strategy for living out the values and mission would consist of weekend worship services, weekly community groups, serve-teams, and a membership process. These four are essential for this particular church plant to thrive and live out the values and mission of the church.

The weekend worship services would give people an opportunity to come to know Jesus and learn what it means to follow Him. These worship services also give the congregation a chance to learn how to be an intentional neighbor throughout the week. The weekly community groups and serve-teams would give people a chance to engage in an authentic community. Although these groups and teams display the four values at all times, the value that is most lived out through these two groups is an authentic community. These are groups or teams where people can know and be known. They pray for one another, share life with one another, study Scripture with one another, and perform outreach opportunities with one another. The membership process allows people to take greater ownership in the church. Members have

committed to the values of the church, living out the mission of the church and have made a commitment to Christ. Members are asking to be held accountable, as well as receiving the opportunity to speak into matters concerning the church and what God is doing in the community. At the onset of membership, these members receive extensive communication about what is happening in the church; then they are expected to set the example for the rest of the congregation in how they live out the mission statement and the values.

The mission, values, and strategy of the church are crucial in helping the church planter make crucial decisions that will affect the direction of the church. These key elements allow the church planter to have a lens to look through when making decisions and helps establish the culture of the church. Once the mission, values, and strategy of the church are determined, then the church planter must determine the strategy of the launch.

Launch Strategy

Every church planter must determine what their strategy is going to be launching the church. After a church planter has gone to training and received some coaching, he probably has an idea of what strategy he will implore to get the church started. Every strategy is different, but they all have the same goal, to launch a healthy, life-giving church that reaches people who are far from Christ. However, although the goal may be the same, not all strategies are the same. After spending months researching different strategies through interviews, studying results of other church plants, and going to training and coaching sessions, the author determined that the best strategy to launch a healthy life-giving church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture was through the preview service model.

The preview service model is one that many guys have used in highly unchurched areas of the country. One of the first church planter to use this model was Nelson Searcy, who

launched a healthy, vibrant church in New York City. Searcy also wrote a book called *Launch*, which gives a great picture of the preview service model. When discussing the strategy, Searcy writes, “Success begins with a specific plan to move from where you are to where you want to be. In other words, success begins with strategy.”⁷ He then goes into how a church planter can create strategy along with goals and next steps to accomplish those goals.

When giving the next steps, he outlines a plan for church planters to use that involves the monthly pre-view service model. Searcy writes:

You need steppingstones to get you from where you are to your launch date. We call these steppingstones “monthly services,” though you may also hear them referred to as “preview services” or “sneak-preview services.” Monthly services are real services that you begin holding three to six months prior to your launch date. They are the absolute best strategic precursor to your launch.⁸

Searcy then goes on to explain why they are so beneficial. Some of those benefits include attracting a launch team, build greater awareness of the church, allow you to test your location and key personnel, and gives you a chance to grow. There are many more benefits of having preview services, and it was because of these benefits that the author chose to go this direction.

In leading up to the launch of the church, the author of this thesis decided to hold two preview services. The first one was promoted with a mailer and there ended up being 305 people at the first service. The second service was only promoted through word of mouth and a marketing tool used at the first preview service, and 276 people attended. This was a huge start for an area that consistently has had poor attendance turnout at church launches. Through the process of utilizing the preview services, there were 50 adults added onto the launch team, a ton

⁷ Searcy and Thomas, *Launch*, 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

of exposure to the community, the ability to work out some technical kinks before launch day and a confidence that God is doing something unique and special.

Not every church planter believes they can do the preview service model. Many, because of constraints of finances or time, believe they need to launch sooner, rather than later, and so they choose to forgo the preview service model, set a launch date and hope that it goes well. However, for those who have used the preview service model, the vast majority have reported great findings with it and said that it led to their success in planting a healthy, growing church in an unchurched area of the nation.

Although many church planters who have used this model support its effectiveness, including the author, there are some warnings that every church planter must understand before choosing this particular strategy. One church planting coach gave a warning when he said, “You should only do a preview service if you have enough money and people.”⁹ The coach did not give any specific numbers when it came to money and people, but it was clear to him that if a church planter tried to do a preview service without enough of those two key components, then the strategy might backfire on him. The author spent roughly \$10,000 without including staff salaries on the first preview service, and only \$2,000 was given that day during the offering. So there was a net loss of \$8,000 not including salaries. The second preview service was much less, costing roughly \$3500 and only receiving about \$2,000 again. In all, there was a cost of just under \$10,000 for both previews, not including salaries. If a church planter does not have the funds to make this type of initial investment, then they should be cautious in attempting this strategy.

⁹ Mauney, Church Plant Training.

Likewise, a preview service is going to take a lot of volunteers and staff to pull off. Not only does a church planter need the key leaders such as a worship leader, kids director, and tech leader, but many roles must be filled for a guest to have a great experience. If a church planter cannot create the type of atmosphere and environment he would like to have on launch day during those preview services, then this strategy will only be detrimental to the launch of the church. The author had 75 launch team adults on the team before the first preview service. This was plenty of people to create a welcoming atmosphere from the parking lot throughout every area of the church. Having that many people already on the team allowed exactly the kind of experience that was desired on launch day. If a church planter cannot create the desired experience, then he should either delay the launch of the church or not choose the strategy of preview services.

Launch Team

One of the crucial components for any church plant is a growing, healthy launch team. A launch team is a group of people who understand their mission is simply to launch the church. As a church planter and church planting coach, Josh Mauney says, “Your launch team is not your core team, not your executive team, they are your launch team. Their one goal is to help you launch the church.”¹⁰ A launch team is vital for any preview services, they are vital to the marketing of the church, they are vital to creating the culture of the church, and they are vital to helping fund the launch of the church. Even though this is one of the most crucial components of any church plant, many church planters do not know how to recruit, develop or deploy their launch team.

¹⁰ Mauney, Church Plant Training.

Recruiting a launch team takes time, intentionality and the help of others. When a church planter and team move into a new city, especially if it is a city they have never lived in before, they must determine how they are going to recruit launch team members. Will they put ads on Craigslist? Will they hand out flyers around town? Will they visit other churches hoping to take people from other congregations? How does a church planter engage launch team members? One church planter said that for him to find launch team members, he would “stand on the sidewalk downtown and hand out flyers inviting people to come to an interest meeting.”¹¹ Another church planter said his strategy was to simply “invest in his neighbors, help them come to Christ and then join the launch team from there.”¹² Every church planter must determine what their strategy is going to be so that they know how they are going to get from a team of just him or him and his family to a team of dozens or even over 100 people.

The Association of Related Churches encourages every church planter to get to at least 30 adults on the team. They know if a church planter can get at least 50 on their launch team, then they will launch very healthy. One ARC staff member said, “The majority of churches launch with at least four times the number of people on their launch team. So if a church planter can get to 50 adults, he will launch with 200 people.”¹³ ARC believes in this so much that they will not launch a church planter unless he has at least 30 adults on his launch team. They do not want to see a church plant fail and they believe this is one of the most crucial areas on which the church planter should focus.

¹¹ Wayne Hanson, interview by author, Castle Rock, CO. October 10, 2017.

¹² Drake Elkins, interview by author, Boulder, CO, February 18, 2018.

¹³ Michael Smith, interview by author, Birmingham, AL. April 7, 2015.

There are multiple strategies for recruiting a launch team. The author used two specific strategies. First, he invited dozens of people from his hometown and from around the nation to join him and his family in planting a life-giving church in an unchurched, yet spiritual area. He cast a clear vision, talked about the ways each person could contribute and invited them to come along for the journey. As people would say they were interested, the author would then meet with them, ask them to sign a covenant that explained they were not promised jobs at any point and that they were going to contribute to the launch and growth of the church. The author knew the more people who would move with him, the more likely the church would launch healthily. These were people he had mentored and discipled. Most of these people were a part of the church the author was on staff at previous to planting, so they understood the culture he believed God was calling them to create. He also knew these people could help contribute in big ways. After inviting roughly one hundred people, the author had over sixty move themselves or their families from around the country to Castle Rock, Colorado. This was a huge momentum boost because the author had people he trusted, and it also made an immediate impact in a small town of 50,000 people, and most of those sixty people were moving from Charleston, South Carolina. It allowed for many conversations and people who were interested in what was happening.

Another strategy the author employed was to ask local churches if they would be willing to partner with this new church plant and a part of the partnership would be them sending people to help launch the church. This is not a strategy that every church planter has been able to employ; however, in places where churches are like minded and Gospel-focused, this is a strategy that can work.

Within this strategy, the church planter approaches churches that are 15 minutes or

further. The reason for 15 minutes or further is because there are studies that talk about the weekly attendance of people increases when they are 15 minutes or closer to their church.¹⁴ People are likely to attend church often because they live close. Conversely, those living further are less likely to be engaged in all the activities in their churches. By connecting to churches that are further away than the 15-minute drive may uncover Kingdom-minded leaders who are willing to come in partnership and to let their members leave to become actively involved in helping to launch a new church plant that is closer to their homes. If a church has 100 people come from a town 15 minutes or further away, where a church planter is going to plant a church in, then that church has 100 people who are potentially not as connected, and the new church might be a better fit for them to impact the town they actually live in, instead of a different town. Churches that are further away from the launch location but have people who live in the launch location area are perfect candidates to partner with for the launch of the new church. If the pastor of the church further away is kingdom minded, then he may be open to releasing some of his people to help launch the church.

Once the church planter has identified any churches that may be far enough away, but have people who possibly live close to the launch location, then the church planter should seek to have a meeting with the pastor. In that conversation, the church planter should cast vision, talk about his kingdom mindset and why the area needs another church and then be willing to ask the lead pastor if he is open to partnering with him in launching the church. A partnership could involve financial support, but in the case of a launch team, a partnership is a willingness for the lead pastor to release congregation members to help start the new church.

¹⁴ “How Far Do Americans Drive to Church?” FactsAndTrends.net, accessed October 18, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/09/21/far-americans-drive-church/>.

If the lead pastor of the church further away is open to a partnership, then the lead pastor should open up the dialogue by giving options. One option for the partnership church is to encourage people to change churches and make the church plant their new church home. This is a harder sell for most pastors because it means losing potential serve-team members, givers, and others who are bought into the church. However, if a pastor can allow this, then there will be greater support from that church long term.

Another option is to ask the pastor to encourage people to be a part of the church for the first six months of the church. He can communicate that he is not asking the people of his church to switch churches completely, but rather go help start the church and give it a good boost for a few months. This allows the new church to have people who are there, serving and, hopefully, giving, for a few months. This also gives peace of mind to the existing church pastor that he is not losing church members forever, but he is being kingdom-minded and helping another church get going while inspiring his people to live missionally.

A third option that can be presented to the pastor is allowing some of the congregation to come and be a part of the launch team and launch day. Having the most people at the launch day helps people who attend that are not on the launch team feel like there is real momentum and excitement with this new church. It enables people to see that something is happening and hopefully have a desire to be a part of it. This option is the lowest “risk” for the lead pastor at the existing church because he is just asking his people to be a part of the new church until the first day. The danger in this option is that if you have a large portion of people leave after the first day, then it might hurt the momentum moving forward.

If a pastor chooses all three options to give his congregation, then that church is going to be fully engaged in the startup of the new church and could potentially be a financial partner as

well. This type of partnership is ideal, and if a church planter can get two or three of these types of partnerships, then he will have the potential of having a large launch team and launch event.

Once a launch team has been recruited, the church planter must determine how he is going to train this group to be ready for launch day. The church planter must keep in mind throughout the process that this is not a core group or executive team. This is not a team to make high-level decisions, but rather, a team to help launch the church. All the training should focus on launching the church. The training of the launch team should focus on two areas. One, creating the culture of the church. Two, establishing the appropriate teams needed to execute an excellent Sunday experience.

The first part of the training must be focused on creating the culture of the church. The culture is determined by people living out the mission statement, the values and the strategy. The culture of the church is going to be felt immediately. It will be heard, seen, felt and experienced from the moment the first guest comes through the front doors. The church planter should take a few weeks and take his entire launch team through the church's mission statement and discuss how it is to be lived out through the life of the team and individual. Then the team should be taken through each of the values of the church and how those values will impact the culture and the decision making of the church leadership. Lastly, the team should be taken through an understanding of the strategy and how the strategy will effectively move people from where they are to living out the mission of the church. Once the church planter has effectively taught through the culture of the church, then he must focus on establishing the appropriate teams needed to execute a great Sunday experience.

If the Sunday experience is going to be essential to the strategy of the church, then establishing the teams to create that experience are crucial. The church planter must discover

the gifts and passions of each person on his team and help them choose an area of service where they will thrive, as well as a place where people will feel most cared for and welcomed. Most Sunday worship experiences can be broken down into three crucial areas, worship ministry, guest experience, and kids' ministry. These three areas are the most crucial for a Sunday experience being great. The church planter must identify people who can lead each of these areas and then help people choose what area they will serve in. Helping people discover their gifts and passions will enable the church planter to position people in one of these three areas.

Once the church planter has recruited team members from his hometown or other ways within the launch city, including asking other churches to partner with him, then he must turn his attention to training. Once he has communicated and taught through the culture of the church and how to create the experience he wants every person who steps foot into the church to have, then the church planter must focus on releasing people to do their roles. He must allow the leaders to lead their teams without micromanaging too much. He must keep a finger on the pulse on each team to make sure they are learning and doing what will help create the right experience, but he also has to empower his leaders to lead their teams and start establishing rapport and trust.

Creative Evangelism

Many times when people think of evangelism, they think about the senior pastor sharing his faith from the pulpit and helping people come to know Christ in a corporate setting. It is a strategy known as invest and invite. The strategy tells people to invest in their friends and then eventually invite them to church. The expectation is that once they are invited to church, then they will be told about the Gospel and might place their faith in Jesus. As Tony Morgan describes the strategy:

We were challenged to invest and invite. If we invested in a relationship, eventually there would be enough trust established to invite our friend to church. At that point, the church would take over. All we had to do was get them to church where our friends would hear the Gospel message, get plugged into a small group and start serving. The invest and invite strategy worked...and then it didn't. The problem with the invest and invite strategy is we expect 'the church' to be responsible for discipleship. We, of course, forget that we are the church. And, I think we forget that when Jesus said, 'go and make disciples of all nations,' this wasn't the direction for an institution – this was intended to be the mission for every Christ-follower. That's *you and me*.¹⁵

Not only does this strategy not seem to work well in a highly unchurched culture, but since a church plant does not begin with a building or even an established body of believers, the church planter must create a foundation of creative evangelism for the church to reach people and grow. This foundation will not only ensure that he is sharing his faith, but that his church will not be built on a come and see mentality, but rather a culture that shares Christ with people in one's everyday life.

In an unchurched, yet spiritual culture, the importance of how the church planter and church view evangelism is incredibly important. Garry Poole, the author of *Seeker Small Groups*, says, "In a culture like Denver, a culture that many people don't have a history of church, you must lower the bar of evangelism."¹⁶ When the author pressed more into what he meant by "lower the bar of evangelism," Garry said, "When people think of evangelism, they think of a pastor leading someone to Christ in a few minutes, or they think about a street corner preacher yelling at people. The bar for evangelism is set too high. It's our job as pastors, in this type of culture, to lower the bar of evangelism and show that everyone is called and can

¹⁵ Tony Morgan, "Invest and Invite...and Invest." TonyMorganLive.com, accessed November 5, 2018, <https://tonymorganlive.com/2012/02/27/invest-and-invite-and-invest/>.

¹⁶ Garry Poole, interview by author. Denver, CO. November 5, 2015.

evangelize.”¹⁷ This “lowering the bar of evangelism” means that every person feels confident in sharing their faith at some level and every follower of Jesus knows it is their duty to share their faith with others. Dave Runyon, stated it this way, “We should lower the bar of evangelism so low that you can’t crawl underneath it. Everyone person should not only know how, but believe they can.”¹⁸ However, for people to know they must share their faith and to have confidence doing so, the pastor’s job is to create a vision and system that will make it easy for people to do so.

One of the important pieces for creating the right vision and systems for helping people share their faith in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture, is to make sure evangelism is relational. In an unchurched, yet spiritual culture, people are willing to engage in spiritual conversations, but if they believe they are a project or just a box for the Christian to check off in route to being a good Christian, then the unchurched person may immediately be turned off to the conversation and maybe to that individual as well. The person evangelizing must not see the person as a project, but rather a creation of God that is deeply loved by the Savior of the world. If the person sees the individuals as a creation of God, rather than a project, then they will approach their relationship as friends or neighbors or coworkers, rather than a project or something the Christian feels they have to do. This relational approach is effective everywhere in the world, but it is essential in an area where people are not familiar with church or maybe have some negative preconceived notions about church.

The author decided to create a system for his church plant that helped keep this focus of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dave Runyon, interview by author. Denver, CO. December 4, 2018.

relational evangelism at the forefront of the church. This mentality is seen and promoted through the mission statement, as well as how to live out the mission statement on a daily basis. The mission statement of the author's church is "Helping people become intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus."¹⁹ Every week this mission statement is stated from the pulpit, there are multiple messages given throughout the year on the topic, people are taught on the subject during the membership meeting, and every person is reminded of the mission at least once a year through surveys. Keeping this mission in the forefront reminds people of why the church exists and the expectations of being a part of such a church.

To continue to emphasize the effectiveness of intentional neighboring, the lead pastor and other teaching pastors will tell stories of congregation members who have been living out the mission. Testimony videos will be shown during service and through social media to remind people of not just the importance of living out the mission, but how lives can change when one chooses to do so. However, this mentality will not be something the church lives out unless it is instilled from the very beginning of its inception.

One way the author tried to instill this mentality of creative evangelism in the church during the pre-launch phase was by asking launch team members to throw cookouts and parties. At these cookouts and parties, launch team members would invite neighbors, co-workers, and friends who were not connected with the church or had no religious background at all. The launch team members would also strategically invite the lead pastor and his family, as well as a few other launch team members. If the launch team member were single, then they would make

¹⁹ "About us," FrontRange.org, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://frontrange.org/about-us/>

sure to invite a married couple from the launch team, and if the launch team member were married, they would invite a couple of single people from the launch team. This was to ensure that no matter what stage of life people were in, there would be someone from the launch team to connect with them.

At these cookouts and parties, there would not be an agenda of promoting the church or asking people to join the launch team. In fact, the entire agenda was to build relationships. The author believed that if launch team members built healthy relationships with people, then eventually people would come to church and get connected. After throwing at least half a dozen of these parties, every person, except for two, who came to these parties eventually came to the church, and some became regular attendees.

These parties would teach each launch team member that evangelism did not have to be difficult. Also, it put the responsibility on each person to share their faith and be an intentional neighbor. The author wanted the launch team to view themselves as evangelists, as intentional neighbors, and not put the entire weight of responsibility on the lead pastor. Taking this strategic approach during the pre-launch phase not only helped to ensure that the mentality of neighboring was being instilled in the life of the church, but it helped bring many people to launch day and many other weekend services after launch.

Another crucial aspect of creative evangelism is community service and marketing. The author believes that a church should exist to be a blessing to the town it is located in. To be a blessing, one must find out what the town's needs are and how the church can make a difference. This is God's calling for all believers no matter where they live. We see this calling to the Israelite people who are living in exile. They must have desired to go back to their home, but it was where God had placed them for that time of their lives. God says to them, "But seek

the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7) Tim Keller states, “Loving and serving the city strengthens the hands of the people of God, who bear the message of the gospel to the world.”²⁰ If a church wants to make a difference in the city, then it must love and serve the city.

When the author arrived in the town in which the church would be launched, one of the first things he did was set up a meeting with the mayor. In that meeting, he asked the mayor what the church could do to serve the town. The mayor gave some suggestions, and the church immediately began living out those suggestions. For example, the mayor asked the church not just to want to be in the town parade with all the other churches, but to clean up after the parade. He asked that the church clean up the trash left by onlookers and help make the town look beautiful again. The mayor, one year later, told the author that the church was now the town’s go-to-church for serving people and needs. This was a huge statement to hear from a high official, but this is what every church should strive to become known as in their town.

Along with serving the town, a new church plant should create many opportunities to market the church, especially during the pre-launch phase. This is the period where no one in the community has heard of the church, so this is the most critical time for the church to get its “brand” known in the community. The author understood this truth so he and the launch team took advantage of every community event to give out coffee mugs, pens, Chap Stick and anything else that might be useful to a person. One each of these items was the branding of the church, name, and website. Even if a person did not go straight to the website after receiving a mug, it helped the person to see the name and identify the name of the church with something

²⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 142.

positive. Along with providing free merchandise, the author had his team hand out invites, put door hangers on houses, and send out thousands of mailers. Not one of these techniques would have been highly effective on their own, but when you include all of these ways of serving and marketing together, the author saw great results.

Once the author determined the values, strategy, and mission, created the strategy for how to launch, recruited and developed a launch team, and engaged in creative evangelism, he prayed that God would use all these steps to plant a successful, vibrant, growing church. After five months of recruiting a launch team, two preview services and lots of creative evangelism opportunities, Front Range Christian Church was launched on February 9, 2014. There were 467 people in attendance, and five people made decisions for Christ. Since that time, Front Range has seen over 450 people make commitments to Christ, marriages restored, healings take place, and 23 other churches have been started because of Front Range's influence. There have been many challenges along the way and many missteps, but the pre-plant and pre-launch phase of the church, helped the author and his team be prepared for God choosing to do miracles and displaying His sovereign grace.

Conclusion

Church planting is an absolutely essential component to the growth of the church and the reaching of people for God's Kingdom. As it states in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."²¹ God is patient because He wants all to come to a salvation relationship with Jesus Christ. He longs for people to know Him, to pursue Him, to

²¹ 2 Peter 3:9

love Him. But, in order for people to know Christ, they must be told about him and in order for people to be told, someone must speak. New churches are one of the greatest ways to spread the Gospel of Jesus to the world; therefore, more church plants must be started to see more people come to faith in Jesus.

Although church planting is an absolute necessity, it is also incredibly difficult for many reasons. Sometimes the church planter doesn't have the experience necessary to start and lead a growing, life-giving church. There are many reasons a church planter chooses to start a church, but if the main reason is not because they sense a direct call from God, then they will not make it through the tests and trials of planting a church. In addition, the church planter needs to have the appropriate leadership experiences that will be used and tested during the planting process and leading the church. If the planter does not have the call, nor the experience, then the likelihood of him succeeding is slim.

Another reason a church plant fails is because the church planter doesn't study, understand and know how to reach the culture in which the church is in. Every city has a different culture and when it comes to reaching lost people, each city seems to lean toward one of three types of people. The people of the city might be de-churched, meaning they used to attend church, but for any number of reasons, they have stopped. The culture of the city might lean toward an unchurched and antagonistic culture. This type of culture has people who do not attend church and are not open to the idea of the Gospel or Christianity. A final grouping of lost people that might dominate a city is the unchurched, yet spiritual. This group of people do not attend church, but they are open to spiritual conversations. This is the group that this project focuses on because this is the city in which the author moved into.

If the church planter doesn't understand this uniqueness of the culture and how to relate

and reach the particular group that dominates the city, then the church planter will have a very difficult time reaching lost people and growing the church. In addition, there are certain values that dominate each of these three types of cultures, and the church planter must understand these values and know how to relate the Gospel to these values. If the church planter isn't okay living in a culture founded on these values and knowing how to impact these values with the Gospel, then the church planter will either not like the city in which they live or they could become disgruntled with the values and people of the culture.

A final piece that helps a church planter to find success in launching a new church is within the process they use. Effective church planting involves a two-step process. The first step is the pre-plant phase. This phase is essential to helping the church planter discover their calling, discern where God is calling the planter to launch a church and the partnerships that will be necessary to launch the church effectively. This step is vital to understanding the culture, the values and growing a love for the people of the city. In addition, this step in the process is essential to gaining the traction needed to raise money and establish a launch team. Without a church planter walking fully through this step, they might not build the foundation and the partnerships needed to successfully move into the next step in the process.

The second step is the pre-launch phase. It is within this phase that the church planter has already moved to their launch city and they are determining the mission, values, and strategy of the church, the strategy of the launch, learning how to recruit, developing and deploying a launch team, and engaging in creative evangelism. This step is crucial to recruiting the people that are absolutely essential in building the team that will help launch the church. In addition, it is during this stage that people are becoming aware of the church through marketing and creative evangelism. If a church planter misses this step, then they will miss the best chance

to let the community know there is a new church starting and the values of that new church.

If a church planter skips one of these stages or does not work through the entire process of both phases, then the likelihood of him launching a healthy, growing church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture drops drastically. A church planter can help minimize his risk and potential failure by working through the components of each of these phases healthily with continued coaching, feedback, and accountability. The author worked through each component of this process, including the soul searching needed to determine if the calling and experience was there. The church the author started has been in existence for 5 years now and God has done some amazing things. The church launched with 467 people on the first day and the church has continued to see God use each of the elements listed in this project to continue growing a healthy, vibrant church that is serving and reaching the community.

The process has worked to start a healthy, Gospel-centered, growing church in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture. Planting a church is difficult, especially when it is in an unchurched culture, but if someone can follow the steps outlined in this thesis, they can increase their chances of not just surviving, but thriving in an unchurched, yet spiritual culture. Church planting is essential. We need more church planters who are willing to walk into some of the hardest places on the planet, to reach those who are far from Christ. It is a hard process and it takes a lot of sacrifice, but with the right process and the grace of God, the church planter can see a lot of success in pushing back the darkness and reaching people for God's Kingdom.

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February 25, 2015

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IRB Exemption 1737.022515: Unique Church Planting: A Strategy for Reaching a Post-Christian, Un-Churched, yet Spiritual Culture

Dear Ernest,

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 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 46:101(b):

(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 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

(434) 592-4054

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