

Project #6

What God Designs for a City

In the previous projects you worked on discovering who you are; your strengths and weaknesses and how you got here. Your unique journey is an incredible expression of God's creative capacity. He has crafted:

- You . . . a potential church planter – which we dealt with in Projects 3 and 4
- The church, a body of called-out believers
- The plan of salvation and a pattern by which to disciple people
- A unique city . . . and people who await you, to birth a baby church

Passion matters... Hudson Taylor, who gave fifty years to missions in China, said, "If I had a thousand lives, I'd give them all to China." If you had a thousand lives what would you give them to?

God Designed a Disciple-Making Church

A church planter's primary work will be making disciples. Disciple-making takes precedence over buildings, church administration and organizational positions. Making disciples is the task Jesus left us to do. We really do not build a church, we build people.

As you birth a church, winning the lost is not your lone priority. Surprised? You shouldn't be. The end product of the church is not converts . . . it is disciples. Think about it like this. In an either/or world, would you rather have fifty baptized and three of them be serving Jesus a year later or baptize ten and have six of them serving Jesus a year later? Developing and maturing those you win is a vital (and often over-looked) part of the work. Not only do you baptize, you are to also "teach them to obey" (Matthew 28:18-19). Making disciples involves several things.

Understand Those You Will Reach for

A church is planted within a subculture. People are people . . . but people in Newfoundland have a different rhythm to life than those living in South Texas. Understanding *specific* people...and loving them is vital. Hear it now . . . you will not remake them in your image. To attempt to do so is what the late J.T. Pugh called "Disciple Abuse." Paul was committed to become like the people he reached to in order to see them saved (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Now . . . understand beneath the differences of language, customs and clothing, which make other people seem exotic, there is a deep commonness. Pride, loneliness, fear, need for security and the struggle for survival are common. Theft, adultery, bitterness, envy and violence mar lives all over North America. Those who effectively raise healthy churches live in the real world. They give credence to life's struggles and treat people with respect. Responding to their struggles is what Jacob A. Loewen called "scratching where it itches."

Souls come open for the church planter who lives among them and learns their customs, ideas and values. A missionary who is not interested in the people cannot know the thinking and feelings of the people.¹ Souls will remain closed to him. As you think about birthing a baby church a church, how well do you understand how people think and how they arrive at those conclusions?

Effective farmers accept the conditions of the soil with which they work. Church planters also accept the characteristics of the field in which he/she works. Evangelism meets people where they are, not where we would like them to be. Let's think about needs.

Needs

It is possible to preach truth without speaking to the hearer. Jesus responded to what are commonly called "felt needs." Water being turned to wine is one example. A message can be rejected because the planter does not identify with local people enough to realize what their problems are. A struggling missionary might shrug off his ineffectiveness by saying these people just are not hungry for God. Actually, the lack of connection may mean the missionary has failed to comprehend the needs of the people. God said to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of my people...and have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings" (Exodus 3:7, RSV). It is possible for us to never "see the affliction" and "know the suffering of people." No book totally prepares new parents of the baby experience. This is also true for baby churches. An effective church planter comes to learn. What are the needs of the lost people of that community?

Make Community Impact

Baby Churches...

...can't impact everyone, but you they impact someone!

¹ Give Up Your Small Ambitions, 290.

Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). Those who birth baby churches do not sit waiting for people to come. If your idea is that building a sign or a marketing plan will birth a church – you are thinking wrong. Just as wrong as the first time parent imagining that a nice nursery with good furniture and an expensive stroller will assure a healthy baby. Church planters must establish a net that gathers in the lost.. Church planters, either evangelize here and now the context of the place and time – or are in confusion – just pinballing along.

Getting There from Here

1. Plan

David said, “We are fearfully and wonderfully made.” In the womb, God knew you. That is long-term planning. God had a plan!

History is littered with missionary efforts that ran aground because planning was too narrow, too limited or altogether missing. Planning gives “a blueprint for the future.” It is easier to plan your way backward from an ideal future than to analyze how to change the situation you are now in. Picture the kind of church you would like to have five or ten years from now in order to meet the goals.

[NOTE: Develop a very simple tool for planning then go back and challenge the plan.]

Plan – *Plan with willingness to adjust. What somebody else does in some other setting may not work for you.*

Plan – *Always be learning and learn to adjust your plan.*

2. Commit to take your time

Developing a healthy, mature, growing church is a long-range effort. If you do not have a long-range view, you will hyper-analyze short-term things that have no significant impact on the long-term.

Salvation Army founder, General Booth's eldest daughter did mission work in Paris. She became discouraged with the results during the early days of her work. Booth wrote to instruct her to keep her eyes off the waves and fix them on the tide. "To be occupied with the waves, with the ebb and flow of the spiritual battle, is to be alternately uplifted and downcast, elated and dejected. It is the unconquerable power of the tide that matters." As a church planter, follow his advice and keep your eyes on the tide. People will come and go; converts will relocate; people will decide some other church has a youth program that would benefit their kids. Such happenings are the waves; the tide is your expanding influence to the people in your community.

Work hard . . . but do not work in a hurry. Plant oaks not mushrooms, but always be planting. Churches that last are not overnight sensations. Develop a philosophy of ministering to the community, and stay with it. Do not get caught up in the short-term definitions of success imposed by others.

Spend your time in the right ways

- Get out among people. This will sound strange coming from one who is an advocate of working hard at preaching and teaching, but early in the church planting process do not spend too much time on message preparation. A farmer spends more time preparing a fallow field than he does planting it.
- There is nothing wrong with being a working pastor. Paul did it. Many effective North American Missionaries will say their getting connected with people happened on a secular job. Even if you do not need the money, you may still want to get a secular job.
- Do not spend your time pining for the "good ol' days" – when you had money or did not have to do everything yourself. In reality - those days were not that good and there were not that many people helping out. Your memory is a bit hazy. Live in the "here and now." Be content!
- Clarify your job description. What has God called YOU to do? It will make a major difference if you have a sense of the biblical job description of a church planter and stick to it.
- Punch the clock. Live by a schedule. Not having a "Church Planting Work Schedule" is a reason for failed church plants. North American society is skeptical

of preachers and sees us as parasites. Put that idea to rest . . . by working hard and consistently providing service to people and the Lord. Schedule when you get up in the morning and when you go to bed, just like “normal people.” Leave the house every morning (and not for fishing or golf) – no later than 9:00 a.m. Be a blessing in your community. Be visible.

- Focus time on:
 - Connecting with people
 - Defining and honing the vision
 - Assimilating newcomers (even before they are converted) into your group
 - Multiplying yourself through developing servant-leaders

Three questions may help clarify your thinking:

1. What do you think a disciple of Jesus is and does?

A church planter's job description is a moving target that adjusts as he moves forward.

2. What kind of church is going to be effective at reaching that community in ten years? The matter of “Future Church” is one you need to seriously consider.

3. Who do you need to become in order to lead a church ten years from now?

