

Church Planting - A Call or a Competency By *Phil Stevenson*

All eagles are birds, but not all birds are eagles. We have all heard this type of reasoning. We can make a similar statement about church planting. All church planters are called, but not all who are called are church planters. So how do you know if your personal calling is to plant churches?

There seem to be two kinds of calls. Both are illustrated in scripture.

First there is the **Damascus Call**. It is distinct and undeniable. Paul received such a call on the road to Damascus. There was a light, a falling to the ground and a voice. Paul knew that he knew that he was called. The specifics would still need to be fleshed out, but there was no denying the call.

Mike & Leanne Hamilton are planting a church in Vancouver, British Columbia. They had lived their whole lives in the eastern part of Canada. Mike was on a Mission trip. He was spending time in prayer. God spoke clearly to him during this prayer time. He was to go plant a church in Vancouver. He had never been to Vancouver, but the call was clear. In sharing this with Leanne, he discovered she too had been in prayer at the same time. God had spoken to her heart and told her they were to go to Vancouver. This was a Damascus Call. There were details to work out, but the call was undeniable!

The second is the **Emmaus Call**. This is illustrated by the two disciples who had left Jerusalem after the crucifixion. On their trip to the village of Emmaus, Jesus pulled up alongside them. It took them time to discover who they were with. The process was developmental in nature. However, once the discovery had been made, it was clear and they possessed conviction. They were able to take action.

Jim & Jerolyn Bogear were key staff members of mine. They joined me knowing that the church's mission was about parenting churches. They had no desire to plant a church. Instead, they wanted to participate in helping the parent church grow and reproduce. God began working on their hearts. After five years, it became clear that they were to plant. Their call was an Emmaus Call. It took time to develop, but it was just as definite.

Regardless of the type of call you may experience, there are steps that can be taken to flesh it out. There was a study headed by Dr. Charles Ridely. He undertook the task to determine characteristics shared by successful church planters. He conducted countless interviews and in-depth research. He boiled these characteristics down to thirteen. I will share three of them here. If you are interested in doing a self-evaluation on all thirteen, go to www.newchurchspecialties.org. Click on "Assessment." You will want to select self-assessment exercise.

These are the **BIG THREE**; I believe these three must be in place. If any of these are not in the equation, it is a strong indication that planting may not be the best use of your ministry investment.

SPOUSAL SUPPORT

If you have a heart to plant a church and your spouse is not on board, I have one word of advice: DON'T! I understand that this is important in any ministry, but it is amplified in church planting. The husband and wife must be in this venture together. It is too much work for it to be approached with only half of your partnership's passion. You can get away with this, to some extent, in an established church, but it almost certainly spells disaster in a church plant.

I shared a meal with a couple who was considering planting a church. The husband shared his dream for this new church. He spoke earnestly, with conviction and passion. As he spoke, I watched his wife's face. I could tell she did not share his enthusiasm. I broke into his monologue. I turned to his wife and asked her what she thought about all of this. She responded, "Well, if this is what he wants to do, I will support him." I turned back to the husband and told him, "Do not plant this church. You need to wait until God touches your wife's heart as He as seemed to have touched yours."

They did not plant. I connected with them several years later. The husband thanked me for not letting them plant. He told me it was the best thing they never did.

INTRINSICALLY-MOTIVATED

A planter has to be a self-starter. They have to be persistent. There are no built in jobs. When you lead an established church, there are many things that are already in place. There are committees and teams that need to be managed. There is a budget in place that needs attention. Members of the congregation are in need of pastoral care. A sermon needs to be readied each week. These are some of the built in jobs that need attention. You are held accountable for them.

Few of these exist in a new church. The expectation is that a church comes out of the planter's efforts. In time, the sponsoring organization, or parent church, will want to see the planter build his/her core into a growing, healthy church. Someone who is unable to motivate themselves can easily find all kinds of reasons not to do the necessary things to start a new church.

If you need a great deal of structure and accountability to set out and accomplish tasks, church planting is not for you. A planter has to be able to set their own goals on a daily basis. They have to know how to fill a calendar with productive activities. They have to be willing to do this with little or no outside prodding.

RELATES WELL TO THE UNCHURCHED

The number one reason for church planting is evangelism. It is not to design a church for disgruntled believers. It is not to start a church that finally gets it "right." Church planting is to reach a lost world.

A young man approached the father of the young girl he wanted to marry. "Sir," he said, "May I have your daughter's hand in marriage?" The protective father said to this boy, "Son, do you like my daughter?"

"Sir," he replied, "I love your daughter."

"I know you love her, son, but do you like her?"

It was a valid question. We throw the word "love" around flippantly. We tend to do things we really like. We may say we love lost people, but do we like them? Do we spend time around them? Do we hang out where they do?

If this not something you naturally enjoy, then planting may not be your calling. You must be able to understand things from their perspective. You must be drawn to them. It has to come from your heart. Have you shared Christ with someone this week? If so, this is a good indication that you have a deep love for those separated from Jesus.

These three characteristics are non-negotiable. You have to have them. They are essential to effective church planting.

Establishing a call to plant does not mean that you have all the tools necessary to plant. There are three components that will help any potential planter hone their understanding and skills.

A formal assessment is critical. This needs to be multifaceted. It should include interviews, simulations and interactions. There are many organizations that provide these.

An effective coach should be contracted. Planters need a coach who has been trained. An effective planter coach is not necessarily one who has planted a church. The best coaches are often pastors of established churches who understand church multiplication. Many denominations have trained coaches. New Church Specialties provides excellent training for coaches and maintains a list of certified coaches.

A planter needs to receive quality training. This training must be principle-driven, not personality-driven. It should provide "hands on" opportunities. The training needs to allow for the differences in the planter's style, planting location and unique call to plant. It needs to be comprehensive.

Formal assessment, effective coaching and quality training create a solid foundation for successful and effective planting. Planting is a combination of a distinct call from God and a developing of competencies.