



WHAT IS A SEED CHURCH AND WHY WOULD YOU START ONE?

By Robby Christmas & Mark Warnock

It is pretty widely understood that the primary rationale for planting new churches is to reach people. New churches are the best at reaching new generations, new people groups, new residents in an area, and for reaching unchurched people in general. We plant churches, in short, because we want to reach lost people with the gospel. This is what Jesus commanded us to do. Said another way, we plant churches for lostness, right?

FOR LOSTNESS OR FROM LOSTNESS?

The typical church planting process goes like this: we gather leaders, a core team, and raise funds so that we can get a church started—worship service, kids and student ministry, and groups for adults. Along the way, the new church disciples and trains people in hopes that they will reach their families and friends with the gospel.

The sequence, in summary, is start a CHURCH, to make DISCIPLES, who will share the GOSPEL. Many new churches get started this way, and some of them are effective at reaching lost people. As the diagram indicates, most of the effort gets put into the first step. But is this really the best way to reach lost people? One danger of this model is that it is possible to start a church without actually reaching lost people. You can get a new church up and going strong by attracting existing believers. This is great, but why did you start it in the first place? Often, the objective to reach lost people can fall away in the midst of all the effort to get the church up and running.

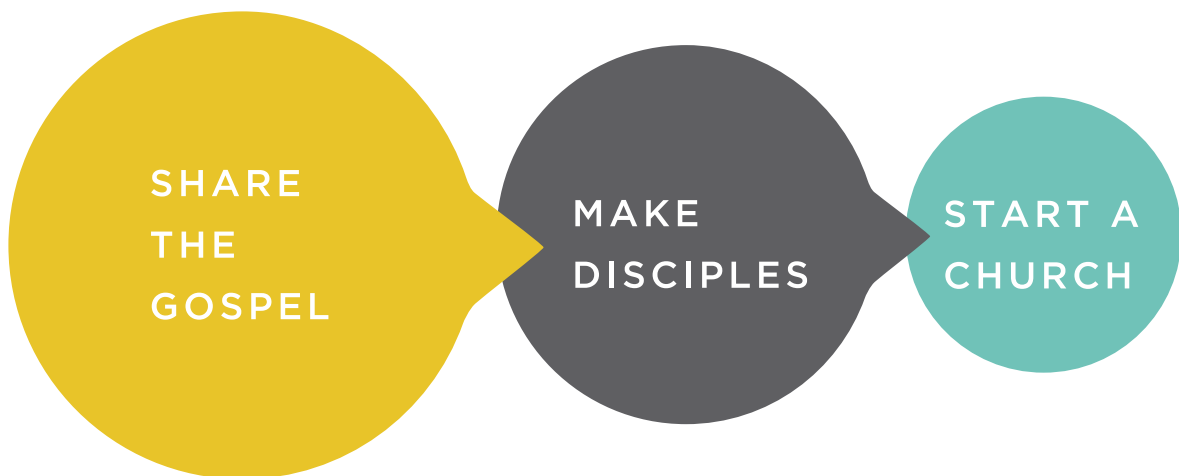
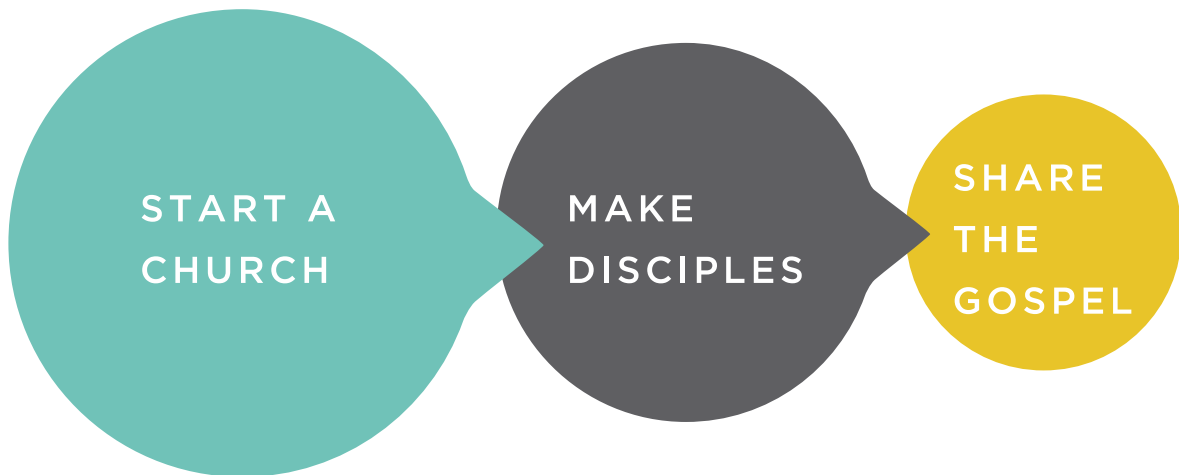
The Seed Church model reverses the typical process. Taking its cue from the book of Acts, it starts with generous GOSPEL sharing, leading to making new DISCIPLES of Jesus, and then gathers them into groups, and ultimately, a CHURCH.

So, instead of planting a church *for* lostness, we plant a church *from* lostness. The seed church model has several advantages.

- As in the typical model, most energy goes into the first step, which in this case is sharing the gospel. It is an evangelism-first approach to breaking into lostness.
- It costs almost nothing to get started.
- Since they are so inexpensive to start, you can start dozens of them for less than the cost of one typical church plant.
- Even before a church is started, much good is done in the process and little is lost: the gospel is being shared, and people are being discipled and gathered into groups.

In short, then, a Seed Church is a seed which we hope will grow into a church. It begins with reckless gospel sharing in an area, in hopes of making new disciples of Jesus that can be gathered into a new church.

FOR LOSTNESS MODEL



FROM LOSTNESS MODEL

HOW TO START A SEED CHURCH

A seed church begins with a key leader: a person with a passion for a place or a people. This leader might have a burden for his neighborhood, or a trailer park, or immigrants, or farmers. He or she will then gather a small team of like-minded evangelists and disciplemakers who join themselves around the vision for reaching this place or people with the gospel.

The first step is for this team to share the gospel liberally and recklessly among people in their area of focus. The planter will train his team to do this, teaching them simple, reproducible gospeling tools, and modeling for them how to use those tools in the harvest.

The planter and his team will engage regularly and intentionally in gospel sharing both among people they know and people they don't yet know: whether by going door to door, starting conversations at a park or playground, or any way they can find and connect with people.

Eventually, this team will find people responsive to the gospel who become new disciples of Jesus. The next step, then, is to teach these new disciples to obey Jesus, including his command to go and make disciples. The new believers will immediately be taught the gospel and sent to share it among their friends and family, and will join the team in having gospel conversations. In addition, the new believers will be baptized, be taught to pray, to love their neighbors—everything that Jesus commanded us to do.

A group of people, mostly seen from the waist down, standing in a row. They are wearing various casual clothing like jeans, trousers, and patterned shirts. The image is dark and serves as a background for the large white text.

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AND RECKLESSLY

The planter and his team will gather these new believers into groups. The DNA of these groups will include obedience-focused Bible discovery, regular loving accountability, training in gospeling and discipling tools, and involve specific actions steps for the week ahead.

Then, once the planter and his team have gathered a large enough group of disciples, they will move towards having weekly gatherings for worship and teaching—services we naturally associate with church. The benchmark we use for that threshold is 4 groups that involve 50 adults (not counting kids and students), half of whom are new believers.

WHO IS BEST SUITED TO PLANT A SEED CHURCH?

A strong seed church planter may not be who you think. He is not necessarily a good speaker, a theological expert, a star Sunday School teacher or whimsical youth pastor. He is not necessarily a Bible college or seminary grad. A lot of times, people we see as “pastor types” do not make good seed church planters. Strong seed church planters have two characteristics.

APOSTOLIC GIFTING

In Ephesians 4, Paul lists five equipping gifts/roles: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Some people think that last two are really one role combined, as in “pastor-teacher.” The Western church is very unfamiliar with the first three. For simplicity, let’s think of the first three gifts as one: Apostle-Prophet-Evangelist, or APE.

People with this kind of gifting are passionate and eager to press into lostness. They don’t mind engaging people with weird hair or lots of tattoos. They gravitate toward people and ministry that ordinary church people might be intimidated by, and for this reason, they can sometimes ruffle feathers in established churches. They get excited about meeting new people and talking with them about the gospel. Their sweet spot is not in a study or a committee meeting—it’s on the streets.

CONVENERS

Strong seed church leaders are also able to gather and motivate people toward a shared mission. Lone wolf types are not what we’re after. Have you ever met a person who could get people to come to a party? Or who started a Bible study and three weeks later it was running 30 people? Some people have the ability to convene people, to get people to come and join a group.

This is an important skill because one lone gospel sharer will not be able to start a seed church. It takes a committed team, and the lead planter will need to have the skill to gather that team.

KEEP LEARNING

At Family Church, the Seed Church model is still very new to us, and we have lots to learn, but we have a handful of them that are showing great promise. Our first official Seed Church, Family Church Boca, launched in October of 2017.

If you give the Seed Church strategy a try, we’d love to know how it goes and what you are learning. Feel free to reach out to us at the email addresses below.



MARK WARNOCK is the Residency Instructor for Family Church in West Palm Beach.

mwarnock@gofamilychurch.org | Twitter @markwarnock



ROBBY CHRISTMAS is a Church Planting Catalyst with NAMB working with Family Church.

rchristmas@namb.net | Twitter @RobbyChristmas



FAMILY CHURCH NETWORK