

Words of Advice to Church Planters

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

I'm a church planter. By His grace and by a call that I never would have foreseen for myself in seminary, God gave me the awesome privilege to care for His people and preach His Word to His sheep of Christ Fellowship Bible Church. We began with two families. One of which left shortly after we planted. We have been in existence almost seven years and are still committed to the *exact same* commitments that we had when we began. My heart goes out to church planters -- for I am one! But I want to encourage fellow church planters with one simple truth, though some elements of local church ministry may be different in a church plant (no staff, no building, no secretary, etc.), the *main essentials* in a local church still remain the same. I want to give **four simple words of advice to church planters**.

1. Pray with Importunity

Whatever you do, PRAY. You can do much after you've prayed, but you can't do anything till you've prayed. And that's especially true when planting a church. Devote yourself to prayer. Give your early morning hours to prayer. Grab a man and ask him to pray with you. When you have discipleships with other brothers, pray with them (by teaching, modeling, instructing, and looking at the prayers in Scripture). When you're with God's people in the corporate assembly, ask what you can pray for and then *do it*, right then and there with them. Pray for God to save people. Pray for God to sanctify His elect. Pray for God to give holiness to His people, urgency in our evangelism, love for the congregation, and compassion for the lost. Pray for your sermons. Pray for your outreaches. And while you're at it, remember to have a prayer meeting where the church gathers corporately, together, regularly, for calling upon God. A church that prays together stays together. A church without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and susceptible to all the winds and storms of heaven. Church planter: pray!

2. Preach the Word

When the Apostle Paul was facing imminent death, he gave a very solemn and crystal clear charge to young Timothy: to preach the Word. It's not ambiguous, nor is it unclear. It's not debatable. Nor is it even negotiable whether or not people want it or like it. God has given you a charge, if you're a pastor, and that charge is that you *must* feed His people with His Word. Note those two essentials of *what* and *how* you are to discharge the proclamation of the Word. You are to *preach*. This is the *how*: you are to preach -- to herald, to announce, to cry out, to relay God's message to God's people without alteration, addition, or subtraction. And remember the *what*: you are to preach *the Word* -- the Scriptures, the written Truth and objective revelation that God has given in the authoritative and sufficient Bible (Genesis - Revelation). Nothing more and nothing less. Don't be cute and clever and tell stories to get laughs. Don't spend more time on your illustrations and one-liners than you do on your exegesis and poring over the text in prayer, study, application.

3. Shepherd the Flock

The Apostle Peter give a very clear charge to the elders to "shepherd the flock of God among you." This is a very clear charge that you cannot overlook. It's from God the Spirit to you directly, through the pen of the Apostle Peter. Man of God, shepherd of Christ's people: you are called to care for the souls of His people. Don't just care for physical needs or give them what they want to hear. You're the soul-doctor and spiritual physician -- you have the remedy for sin and sickness. That remedy is the gospel of Christ! Of course you cannot save or heal or sanctify anyone by *your* power. That's why you must be faithful to serve Christ and His people as an undershepherd for their souls and their spiritual well-being. Consider how Christ is *your* Shepherd: He is present with you, He communicates with you in the Word, He is available when you call out to Him, He feeds you with Himself as you study Truth in the Bible, He guards you, He watches over you, He protects you from the Evil One, and He's vigilantly caring for you. So it is with you as an undershepherd for His blood-bought sheep. You must vigilantly watch over them by caring for their souls. You shepherd them by feeding them good, nourishing food (=preaching), you intercede for them by coming to God in prayer on their behalf (=fervent intercessory prayer), you guard them from error by standing as a watchman sounding the alarm when danger looms on the horizon and by establishing God's people in sound, biblical truth. Man of God, shepherd *your* flock there with you. Don't consume yourself with getting a big name or being a conference speaker. Care for the souls that God brings your way in your local church -- whether that's 2 or 20 or 80. And shepherd them joyfully.

4. Prioritize your family

That which qualifies you to be a shepherd of the flock at large is your already evident shepherding of your smaller flock in your home. Man of God: love your wife as your *first* ministry. Love her well. Shepherd her soul well. Pray with and for her. Disciple her. Remember to care for her soul first. Ensure your wife has good, enjoyable time with you. Date her. Know her. Learn her. Satisfy her. Keep close communication with her. And remember that your wife is not the 2nd employee of the church-plant. She doesn't need to do the secretarial work, the administrative items, the piano playing, and the organizing of events. In fact, it's probably better that she *doesn't* do these things so that others can jump in and serve. And don't neglect your children. Your children need *you*. They don't need a stranger in the home that they can call "pastor." They need their father to discipline them and train them up in the ways of God, in the fear of God, and model holiness for them. When you sin, repent of it, ask for their forgiveness, and move on with joy. Lead them in regular, daily family worship. Again, your leadership and spiritual soul-care in your home is *that* which pre-eminently qualifies you to be a shepherd of the flock of God as a whole. So whatever you do and whatever you neglect, don't let it be your family. Love them. Care for them. Pray for them. And remember: they're not a hindrance to your ministry; they *are* your first ministry.