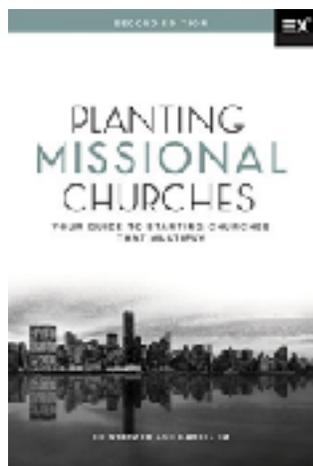


Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply

By Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im. Published by B&H, 2016.

Book Review by Warwick Alcock, Director of Strategic Operations, Village Schools of the Bible.



The authors. The authors bring impressive expertise to this important topic. Ed Stetzer serves as Senior Fellow of Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center, and is Visiting Research Professor at both Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Also, Stetzer speaks from considerable experience, having planted churches, and trained pastors and church planters on six continents.

Co-editor Daniel Im is the Director of Church Multiplication for NewChurches.com and LifeWay Christian Resources. He serves as a Teaching Pastor at a multisite church in Nashville called *The Fellowship*. He has served and pastored in church plants and multisite churches ranging from 100 to 50,000 people in Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Korea, Edmonton, and Nashville.

Why church is planting is essential? According to the authors, we must plant more churches. Here's why:

- Church planting is a Biblical mandate. The pattern we're given in the Book of Acts is church as a gospel-centered, church planting movement that takes the Great Commission seriously.
- Churches in North America are not keeping up with population growth: In 1900, there were 28 churches for every 10,000 Americans. By 2011 there were only 11 churches for every 10,000. To reach more people, the number of new churches a denomination plants each year must exceed 3% of the denomination's existing churches. (At 3% it's just breaking even — i.e. new plants are keeping up with church closures). A 5% increase is needed to grow. 10% increase is needed to thrive.
- Churches that plant churches are healthy. Churches that plant a daughter church within their first 5 years, or that financially support other church plants or leaders of new church plants, experience a higher average worship attendance, year over year, than those that do not. Also they're able to raise new leaders more rapidly than churches that don't plant. Currently, only 28% of churches in the USA participate in helping a new church. 88% of fast-growing churches are involved in planting churches.
- We need conversion growth, not transfer growth. If churches don't plant churches, they settle for transfer growth rather than conversion growth, which amounts to no more than shuffling people around. (In the USA, 96% of church 'growth' is due to transfer growth, rather than conversion growth.)

A Leadership crisis. However, we face a significant challenge. Just when more leaders are needed to plant churches, the church in North America is facing a leadership crisis.

- By 2030, all baby boomers will have turned 65. Currently, 10,000 boomers are reaching retirement age every day. And there are not enough Gen X and Millennial candidates for pastoral ministry to replace the boomers.
- Seminaries undervalue praxis. Seminaries have not been effective in producing leaders with the practical skills required to plant churches and lead kingdom movements (as opposed to just articulating abstract theological or philosophical ideas.)
- Fewer people are going to seminary. Proportionally fewer people are choosing to take seminary training with each passing year. Every ten years, not only are far fewer getting pastorally trained, but the population of the world increases by 500 million and the number of lost people grows astronomically.

Hindrances to church planting

Many existing churches don't plant. The authors give many reasons. Here are just a few.

- Dependence on seminary trained professionals. In Western church culture there is a persistent but unbiblical belief that churches must have seminary-trained pastors to be legitimate. Ironically, evangelistic growth in new churches actually tends to be inversely proportional to education attainment. The following examples illustrate why waiting for seminary-trained pastors stops church planting in its tracks.
 - Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are among the most effective church planting denominations because they are open to using God-called — though not formally trained — leaders in founding new churches.
 - After the Second Great Awakening, lay preachers were highly effective in planting Methodist and Baptist churches along the American frontier. Methodist laymen were at times planting at a rate of one church a day.
 - Today in China and India the church is exploding without theologically trained pastors.
- Constantinian church model. Most churches have lost their missional focus by clinging to a 'Constantinian' model of church, rather than adopting a New Testament model of church. Rigid, tradition-bound, building-centered churches that have always had an internally-focused, attractional "come-and-see" culture and have never planted churches before, are hard to revitalize. Vested interests and ingrained thinking make it hard for them to change into the kind of outward-focused, missional "go-and-tell" planting churches that we see in the New Testament.
- Poor gospel contextualization. Customs, culture and contexts are vastly different from each other in today's increasingly multicultural and multiethnic world. Missional strategy cannot be effective unless it is tailored through thorough cultural exegesis. When churches fail to keep up with key trends and don't understand the implications of the demographic changes in our modern world, they cannot preach the gospel effectively, thereby becoming increasingly irrelevant. (More on this important topic later.)

Are there any good examples of church planting?

- Yes. On his missionary journeys, Paul planted churches that were firmly established as congregations within 5 - 18 months from start to finish; then he moved on to plant other

churches, which planted other churches. This strategy was so effective that emperor Trajan complained in the early second century AD that, referring to Christianity “*Not just the towns, but the villages and country areas too are infected with this wretched superstition.*” By the time the Roman Empire was at its peak, every second person in the Roman Empire was Christian.

- After the Second Great Awakening, in the second half of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon took London’s New Park Street Chapel from a dwindling congregation to a megachurch, established a ministerial school to develop leaders, and doubled the number of Baptist churches in London. New Baptist churches averaged more than 8 per year between 1856 and 1860. 48 churches were planted under Spurgeon’s guidance by 1878.
- In China, it’s estimated that tens of millions of underground Christians meet in house churches that multiply rapidly. (A typical house church system in China is led by a married 30-year-old man, covers a radius of 300 miles, and consists of almost 100,000 members. Weekly meetings last from dawn till dusk.)
- The Onmuri Community Church in Seoul, South Korea is a multisite church with 65,000 members. It uses a combination of video and team teaching on campuses which it has multiplied all over the city, as well as around the country and the world.
- At the denomination level, the Assemblies of God has been the largest international church planting movement over the past 20 years, now with more than 312,000 churches worldwide, having planted over 2,700 churches in America over the past 10 years. Their growth in planting has been remarkable.
- Also at the denominational level, Converge (originally Swedish Baptist General Conference), 20 years ago consisted of 600 Baptist churches. Today Converge consists of 1300 churches in 19 nations representing 17 ethnic groups.
- Saddleback Church in California, founded in 1980 by Rick Warren (with a weekly attendance these days of 20,000), has spawned so many daughter churches throughout the country, that were it a business (according to Forbes) it would be comparable to Dell, Google or Starbucks. Saddleback is the seventh-largest church in the United States with 9 regional campuses in the US and 4 international campuses in South Manila, Philippines, Hong Kong, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Berlin, Germany. Several more campuses are planned in the next few years.
- Summit Church in NC has a bold vision to plant 1,000 churches by 2050, with campuses within 15 minutes of everyone living in Raleigh-Durham.
- Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York has helped start over 300 churches in 45 cities.
- NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, has started over 180 churches, and raises up 25 church planters each year to plant more.

Clearly, God uses many different ways to spread the gospel!

Movement Development

Ultimately what's needed in our time is the development and multiplication of church-planting gospel movements like we see in the book of Acts. Below is what a movement ecosystem might look like today:

- Synergy. Churches partner with other churches, para-church ministries, seminaries, denominations and networks, working together, harnessing all people — including lay people — in the mission of God. Partnering means removing the silo mentality whereby churches isolate themselves from others. Partnering acknowledges the universal reign of Christ as we set aside our own preferences and ambitions, and submit to one another in loving cooperation.
- Creativity. Churches are innovative and creative about how and where churches can be planted. Venues can be as diverse as university campuses, homes for the disabled, private homes, businesses, community centers, restaurants, schools, bars, jails and coffee shops.
- Leadership development. Churches combine resources to form 'Leaders Collectives' to develop leaders for gospel-centered church planting movements.
- Educational variety. Leaders are equipped and multiplied rapidly through various educational models with a focus on praxis — including internships, service learning, distance learning, and strategic alliances with churches, denominations, para-church ministries and ministry networks.
- Movement planting. Church planting networks plant, not just new churches, but entire movements of new churches.
- Multi-ethnicity. Churches are multiethnic. Because we now live in an increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic society, church planting movements must be effective at communicating the gospel authentically into the various cultures and ethnicities around and among us. Multi-ethnic churches send a message that cultural enemies are brothers and sisters in Christ. They demonstrate the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.16-21) and unity (Gal 3.28). The Antioch church is a great example. The Antioch church included the following leaders who, but for the gospel, would never have seen eye to eye with each other:
 - A Jew from Jerusalem (Barnabus)
 - A Jew from Tarsus and a Roman citizen (Paul)
 - An African (Simeon, called Niger)
 - A man from the capital city of Libya (Lucius of Cyrene)
 - A stepbrother of Herod Antipas, a Roman tetrarch (Manean)

Pancakes and waffles. Regarding multi-cultural and multiethnic churches, one of the compelling contrasts that the writers use is the difference between pancakes and waffles. The traditional (Constantian) church model lends itself to a pancake-like culture — a culture that is largely homogeneous, like a pancake. Think back to the predominant culture of the 1950s in the USA.

However, our world is changing so fast that, culturally and ethnically speaking, our world is better represented by a waffle than a pancake. Each depression or pocket in the waffle represents a different ethnicity or sub-culture. Healthy churches learn to contextualize the

gospel for each ethnic group and sub-culture. This calls for the kind of flexibility that traditional churches find hard to address. However, flexibility for the sake of the gospel is thoroughly Biblical. As Paul said:

“I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19-23)

In this review, we have barely touched the surface of the contents in this book on *Planting Missional Churches*. The book is comprehensive, detailed, very well substantiated with up to date research, and thoroughly Biblical. Because it is so comprehensive, it is a great book to read, not just for church planting, but in order to understand the state of the church in North America. Church leaders will appreciate the context it provides for informed decision-making. If you are a follower of Christ and desire to be missional, read it. This book is very highly recommended.

How Village Schools of the Bible can help

One point that the authors emphasize as being of crucial importance is the centrality of God’s Word. God’s Word is God’s Power. For over 30 years, Village Schools of the Bible has been faithfully fulfilling its mission to teach God’s Word so that God would change lives. Whether in traditional churches or in new church plants, people need, as the authors point out, a clear pathway for spiritual formation — we provide that kind of pathway through Cover-to-Cover Bible survey.

D. A. Carson, one of the most insightful and gifted exegetes of our fast-changing American culture, has said that the most meaningful way to teach the Bible is by tracing the Christological plot-line from Genesis to Revelation¹. The authors of this book affirm this. People of all ethnicities and cultures relate better to God’s story than to abstract theological topics or disjointed moralisms. We at Village Schools of the Bible help people see their part in God’s story, the Scarlet Thread of Redemption, and we encourage students to listen for God’s voice speaking personally to them through His Word. The Cover-to-Cover study of God’s Word is transformational. This most common feedback we receive from students is “Cover-to-Cover Bible Survey changed my life!”

We are excited about what God is doing through missional church planting movements. Whether through our online capability or our on campus classes, we are ready to partner with churches anywhere to help disciple the people of God. God’s Word, centered on the gospel of Christ, is foundational. As Paul wrote, the gospel is of *first importance*. (1 Cor. 15:3)

¹ Carson, D.A. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Zondervan, 1996.