

Class Introduction: A Letter to the Instructor

Hi there, my name is Clint Clifton. I began following Jesus when I was 15 years old. From my earliest discipleship meetings with my pastor, he was challenging me to use the one short life God gave me to spread the gospel. As I began to give my life to that work, I quickly realized that church planting was the best way to spread the gospel! Over the past 20 years I've watched God use the zeal and faith of ordinary Christians to raise up new churches in hard soil. I have seen those churches produce a steady stream of new disciples in their communities. I'm convinced there is no more effective use of a Christian's life than to work to establish and renew local churches wherever we find them lacking.

What I've found is that many, if not most, modern American Christians know very little about church planting. This course is designed to be a brief introduction to the "why's" and "how's" of church planting in four sessions:

Session 1– The Biblical Rationale for Church Planting

Session 2– The Need for New Churches

Session 3– How New Churches Begin

Session 4– How Everyday Christians Can Help Start New Churches.

I'd like to thank you for your willingness to explore the content of this course. We've made all of these materials available and completely free online in order to encourage churches to use and share the content with their own congregations. This course, including the videos, work, teacher's guide, and power point presentations can be found at newcityplanting.org.

Class One: Biblical Rationale for Church Planting

Have you ever considered the incredible odds against Christianity? The self-proclaimed Son of God and his rag-tag band of merry misfits first preached the gospel on the other side of the world and, somehow, it made its way all over the globe. From Israel it spread north, south, east and west. It crossed oceans and climbed mountains; it traveled on the backs of horses, donkeys, and camels. The gospel has traversed every imaginable terrain to make its way to you and me. This happened by the faithfulness and multiplication of small churches.

Within just a few short generations, Christianity grew from an obscure regional uprising into a worldwide movement. It happened through the multiplication of churches. These churches didn't look like much at first, and the men and women who led them didn't have much training or ministry experience. These tenacious men and women stood boldly in the face of famine, persecution, and physical peril. The church is an unstoppable force. Jesus himself declares that not even hell can overcome it.

Picture a scraggy weed bursting through a crack in the median of a city street. It stubbornly pushes its way toward the sun. Think of the odds against which this weed sprouted. Its unwelcoming environment includes the constant buzz from traffic, smog, oil, litter, heat – not to mention the fact that there is virtually no nourishment – yet, there it is, stubbornly growing and stretching for the light above. City road weeds are nature's equivalent to the church. Somehow the church thrives in distress and danger; somehow it grows without abundant resources. Like weeds, with great effort and striving, churches make it! Doesn't that make you want to cheer on these gospel sprouts?

As we begin to consider the task of building God's church, let us remember that it is under the sovereign rule and protection of God. It will break through the hardest of concrete in due time.

“Church Planting is the normal business of the local church... It is where Christians are taught to obey everything Jesus commanded.”¹ – Mark Dever

The majority of Christians like the idea of church planting – conceptually, at least. Even so, the vast majority of Christians and churches will never start a church or even give serious consideration to doing so. Oftentimes, church leaders are so busy growing the ministries entrusted to them, they don't have time to think about starting new churches.

¹ Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding the Great Commission* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), under “Ch. 10,” Electronic Format.

One reason that many Christians do not more readily consider planting churches is that they are unable to pinpoint any biblical foundation for church planting. They simply do not know that the Bible commands Christians to start new churches. However, just because the average Christian doesn't know where to find scriptural support for church planting, doesn't mean that there is none. So let's start our study together by looking at the biblical rationale for church planting.

1. Church Planting is **important** because the church is **important**.

Farming matters because food matters. Hospitals matter because people matter. Church planting matters because the church matters. Not everyone sees it that way, though. Even some professing Christians don't think the church is really very important at all.²

Many in our society consider churches to be irrelevant, corrupt, antiquated and contentious (which of course is partially true). Civic and governmental authorities often consider churches as special interest groups that hinder municipal progress and profit.

Take a moment to consider two questions:

1. **What role does the church currently play in our society?**
2. **How do Christians view the church?**

Think through those questions, and listen to a church planter: Kenji Adachi.

So is the church irrelevant? No. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus' church is the most important institution in the history of the world because Jesus is the most important figure in human history. When all of the world's books are closed and time yields to eternity, the church will be celebrated as the most significant institution in human history. Authors Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck write:

We love the church because Christ loved the church. She is his bride – a harlot at times, but his bride nonetheless, being washed clean by the word of God (Eph. 5:25-26). If you are into Jesus, don't rail on his bride. Jesus died for the church, so don't be bothered by a little dying to self for the church's sake. If you keep in mind that everyone there is a sinner (including yourself) and that

² Susan Malphurs, "15 Reasons Why Committed Christians Do Not Attend Church," *The Malphurs Group Blog, The Malphurs Group: Envision Tomorrow Today*, September 21, 2015, accessed August 1, 2016, <http://www.malphursgroup.com/15-reasons-why-committed-christians-do-not-attend-church/>.

*Jesus Christ is the point and not you, your dreams, or your kids, your church experience might not be as lame as you fear.*³

So why should we love the church?

- Because Christ **loves** the church.

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” - [Ephesians 5:25](#)

- Because we can't **obey** Christ without the church.

“So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” - [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](#)

- The church helps us to see the plank in our own eyes. ([Matt. 7:3-5](#))
- The church shows us living examples of the Christian life upon which we can model our lives.

- Because the world can't **know** Christ without the church.

Paul claims that the church is the means by which God reveals his wisdom to the world:

“So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” [Ephesians 3:10](#)

- Because the church is **eternal**.

Many Christians in our society give themselves to their work, their homes, their hobbies, and their families. All of those are good things, but none of them are eternal things. Jesus' church is an eternal family worthy of the investment of our lives.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. - [Ephesians 3:20-21](#)

*Virtually all the great evangelistic challenges of the New Testament are basically calls to plant churches, not simply to share the faith.*⁴ - Tim Keller

³ Ted Kluck and Kevin DeYoung, “Church: Love It, Don't Leave It,” *onfaith* (blog), *faithstreet*, n.d., accessed August 1, 2016, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2009/07/01/church-love-it-dont-leave-it/123>.

⁴ Keller Tim, “Why Plant Churches?,” February, 2002, accessed July 28, 2016, http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf.

Church Planting in the Bible

Though you will not find the term “church planting” in the Bible, that doesn’t mean that church planting is not a biblical idea. If you’re looking for it, you’ll see church planting all over the New Testament. For example:

- **Jesus was a church planter.**
Jesus, the hero of the Bible, established the universal Church, and declared that the gates of hell would not prevail against it ([Matthew 16:18](#)). He also led a small congregation of disciples, teaching them the Word of God, sharing communion with them, and commissioning them to plant more churches.
- **Paul was a church planter.**
His commissioning by the church at Antioch in Acts 13 marks the beginning of an incredible church-planting streak by the great apostle. Over the course of 13 years, Paul embarked on three missionary journeys, during which he traveled more than 7,000 miles and planted at least 14 new churches.
- **The Apostles were church planters.**
The Apostles themselves were church planters, and the book of Acts is an account of their church-planting ministry. They planted churches with little support of other churches and against great political and religious opposition. Ultimately, their commitment to obey the great commission by planting churches cost them their lives.
- **The Great Commission is a call to plant churches.**
Spoken by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission is essentially a call to plant new churches. We can say this because baptizing, teaching, and making disciples is exactly what churches are called to do throughout the rest of the New Testament! Additionally, the dozen men who originally heard Jesus say the words “baptize, teach, and make disciples” responded by spending the rest of their lives organizing new churches.

Church Planting in Acts

In the book of Acts alone, we have dozens of references to church planting. In fact, the book itself is the story of the founding of the New Testament church. Dave Bruskas highlights a few of the church planting high points in the book of Acts:

- Jesus sent his Apostles to plant the first church in Jerusalem. ([Acts 1:8](#), [2:1-47](#))
- Philip preached the gospel, compelling the members of the Jerusalem church to share the gospel with the “villages of Samaria” ([Acts 8:4-24](#)).

- Saul (Paul), the greatest missionary the world has ever known, was converted from a church persecutor to a church planter. ([Acts 9](#))
- Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church plant and led the church at Antioch. ([Acts 11:19-26](#))
- Paul and Barnabas were called directly by the Holy Spirit on mission to launch new churches, and the church prayed, fasted, and affirmed their calling. ([Acts 13:1-4](#))
- Paul’s missionary ministry of planting churches forms the rest of the story of Acts as he preached the gospel in every city, planted new churches and remained until elders were in place to shepherd the flock.⁵ ([Acts 14:23](#), [Titus 1:5](#))

Additionally, many of the New Testament letters were written to encourage, rebuke, or instruct church planters and their congregations. The majority of the prominent New Testament characters are church planters or members of church planting teams.

A Comprehensive Case

Like many doctrines in the Bible, the most compelling case for church planting is found in a synthesis of Scriptures, not in any one verse. The phrase “church planting” is not mentioned in the Bible, but then again neither is the word “Trinity.” Does that mean that the Trinity isn’t scriptural? Of course not! The synthesis of many texts leads us to a clearer understanding of the Trinity. The same is true for church planting.

Virtually every evangelistic church in North America would agree that the Great Commission applies to all churches, and that all churches and all Christians should endeavor to fulfill the Great Commission. Yet, far fewer are able to accept that every church and every Christian should be involved in church planting.

This perspective contradicts Scripture. It is important to realize that the Great Commission is fulfilled by church planting, and the Great Commission cannot be properly fulfilled without planting churches. You may think that’s a bold statement, but here are two reasons to absolutely convince you that the Great Commission is a call to start new churches:

1. The substance of the Great Commission is “Go, Baptize, Teach, and Make Disciples.” Those are the substantive activities of the local church. No other organization or entity on the planet has as its job description to baptize new believers, teach all the things Jesus commanded, and make disciples for Jesus.
2. The apostles who heard Jesus say, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” responded to Jesus’ commission by

⁵ Dave Bruskas, “Churches Planting Churches Biblically,” *Church Leaders* (blog), n.d., accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-blogs/146052-churches-planting-churches-biblically.html>.

planting churches! If the apostles heard the Great Commission and responded by planting churches, then what should we do when we hear the Great Commission? Should we respond in some other way? Who has misunderstood the Great Commission, the apostles or modern believers?

When we plant a new church, it's like we set up a disciple-making factory in a community that will soon be churning out new disciples of Jesus all the time. Planting a new church is like installing a new door into the kingdom of heaven, giving a new access point to God for our lost friends and family members.

In 1845 the great preacher Charles Spurgeon spoke to his congregation about the issue of church planting,

“We encourage our members to leave us to found other Churches; nay, we seek to persuade them to do it. We ask them to scatter throughout the land to become the goodly seed, which God shall bless. I believe that so long as we do this we shall prosper.”

Close in prayer about how the lesson has provoked your heart to adjust in light of new truths.

Class Two: The Need for New Churches

A net gain of 3,205 churches is needed each year for the American church to keep up with population growth; this is far [greater] than the actual yearly gain.⁶

– David T. Olson

It is my observation that people rarely consider how churches begin and almost never consider how they end. Churches, just like people, have life cycles. They are born and they die. They close their doors, they sell their buildings, they liquidate their assets, and they stop gathering. If you don't believe me, get on a plane to Jerusalem and look for the church first pastored by James. Then skip over to Turkey and see if you can still find the church meeting at Antioch. Those churches closed, disbanded, and scattered. American churches are closing too, and not just one or two at a time – they are closing by the thousands. This Sunday morning when you go to church, about 135 fewer American churches will be gathering than did the same time last week. That is 600 churches disbanding every month and 7,000 churches melting under the heat of an increasingly secular society each year.⁷ You see, church planting is important not just because the church is important but:

- **Church Planting is important because the church is dwindling.**

Take a moment to consider two questions:

1. **Does the fact that the church in America is dwindling surprise you?**
2. **Why do you think churches are dwindling?**

Think through those questions, and listen to a church planter: Brian Collison

Imagine if the human race were in the same predicament. It would be disturbing and unsettling, and my guess is that people would get pretty aggressive about repopulating the world. The church in America is in this exact predicament. We are an endangered species; if nothing changes, the America of the future will look very similar to the western Europe of today.

⁶ Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008. 16.

⁷ Steve McSwain, "Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore," *The Blog, The Huffington Post*, October 14, 2013, accessed July 28, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mcswain/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to-b_4086016.html.

Western Europe experienced drastic changes over the course of the 20th century. In particular, during the 1960s it experienced terminal decline of virtually all of its large, organized churches and the pervasive Christian culture, which influenced Western Europe for centuries, virtually disappeared. Today the streets of major cities throughout Western Europe are peppered with church buildings that lasted longer than the congregations that erected them. Hundreds of church buildings are now being used as restaurants, nightclubs, concert venues, cafés, modern condominiums, museums, and mosques. They stand as stark proof that western culture is spitting Christianity out of its mouth. The Huffington Post reports,

“Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the “religiously unaffiliated.”⁸

The change is not really that shocking if you think about it. Churches are made up of sinners, and sin kills everything it touches. As long as sinners are going to church, churches will be dying. As long as churches are dying, new churches are necessary. Every year in America about 4,000 evangelical churches begin.⁹ Of those started, 35% close before their 5th anniversary,¹⁰ leaving about 2,600 new churches planted annually. While churches are dying at a significantly higher rate, each year in the U.S. approximately 7,000 churches close their doors forever. All things considered, the number of churches in the U.S. is decreasing by about 4,400 churches per year,¹¹ while our population is growing by about three million people per year.

- **Church Planting is important because most existing churches are plateaued or declining.**

Researcher Aubrey Malphurs recalls this quote from Win Arn,

“Today, of the approximately 350,000 churches in America, four out of five are either plateaued

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Olson. *The American Church in Crisis*. 16.

¹⁰ Stetzer, Ed, and Phillip Connor. "Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007." North American Mission Board. 2007. Accessed January 8, 2016.

¹¹ Thom Rainer. "Thirteen Issues for Churches in 2013: Issues 1-6." *Thom Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches Together*. (blog), n.d., Accessed January 8, 2016. <http://thomrainer.com/2012/12/thirteen-issues-for-churches-in-2013-issues-1-6/>.

or declining. Many churches begin a plateau or slow decline about their fifteenth to eighteenth year. 80-85% are on the down-side of this cycle.”¹²

So why not just help dying churches?

We should help dying churches, but church renewal is not enough. We must also plant churches to reach people with the gospel. We have to increase the “birth rate” (by planting new churches) and decrease the “death rate” (by helping old churches). We should do everything we can to help renew churches in our city that have fallen on hard times, and we should do everything we can do to plant new churches in our communities.

What’s happening to the church?

- **The church is getting bigger.**

Individual churches are getting larger and larger. Today, the average American church has 75 members, a number that has been steadily increasing over the past few decades. Some churches are getting very large. Over the past 50 years we have seen an explosion of megachurches in North America. Megachurches are those with more than 2,000 people in attendance each weekend. The number of megachurches in America has nearly doubled every decade over the last 50 years. In fact, researcher Ed Stetzer claims that there are as many megachurches in the Nashville area today as there were in the entire country in 1960.¹³ 50% of all churches in America average less than 100 in worship attendance. 40% of all churches in America average between 100 and 350 in attendance. 10% of all churches in America average more than 350 in attendance.¹⁴

- **The church is getting smaller.**

An interesting thing happens when you start questioning folks about their church attendance. It is what researchers call the “halo effect.” It is what the rest of the world calls lying. For instance, Gallup polls report that about 40% of the population claims regular church attendance, while in truth only about

¹² Aubrey Malphurs, “The State of the American Church: Plateaued or Declining,” *The Malphurs Group Blog, The Malphurs Group: Envision Tomorrow Today*, September 5, 2014, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.malphursgroup.com/state-of-the-american-church-plateaued-declining/>.

¹³ Stetzer, Ed “The Explosive Growth of U.S. Megachurches, Even While Many Say Their Day is Done” February 19, 2013. (Christianitytoday.com)

¹⁴ Thom Rainer, “One Key Reason Most Churches Do Not Exceed 350 in Average Attendance,” *Thom Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches. Together.* (blog), March 25, 2015, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/one-key-reason-churches-exceed-350-average-attendance/>.

17% of Americans attend church regularly.¹⁵ Each year the population of the United States is growing but the percentage of Americans attending church is decreasing. Kelly Shattuck fleshes out this reality by addressing a misperception of Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, known for their scholarly church research:

“We knew that over the past 30 to 40 years, denominations had increasingly reported a decline in their numbers,” Marler says. “Even a still-growing denomination like the Southern Baptist Convention had reported slowed growth. Most of the mainline denominations were all reporting a net loss over the past 30 years. And at the same time, the Gallup polls had remained stable. It didn’t make sense.”¹⁶

The statistics did not make sense because they were wrong. In truth, 40% of Americans are not going to church on a given weekend.

- **The church is getting more professional.**

The more professional the church becomes, the more unlikely it is that everyday Christians will see themselves as fit for legitimate gospel services. Though there is nothing wrong with formal training or professional vocational ministry, the church must embrace the fact that God’s criteria for service in his kingdom have to do with character not credentials.

It is important for us to remember that Jesus picked up his recruits off of the beach, not out of the synagogue. Formal theological training is not a prerequisite for the pastoral ministry. While it may be helpful, it is not necessary. The Christian who meets the character standards for an elder explained in 1 Timothy and Titus are every bit as qualified (perhaps more qualified) for ministry than those with seminary degrees. Paul reminds Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:12 that God allowed him to serve in ministry because of his faithfulness, not because of his credentials.

The American church saw the greatest growth during the nation’s westward expansion, both in terms of conversions and church planting.¹⁷ These were the days of circuit-riding preachers. These missionary pastors had a high commitment to spreading the gospel on the frontier and required little in exchange for their work. Take the life of one circuit-riding preacher as an example:

¹⁵ Kelly Shattuck, “7 Startling Facts: An up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” *Church Leaders*(blog), n.d., accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

Jacob Young was just 26 years old when in 1802 he took on the responsibility of forming a new Methodist circuit along the Green River in Kentucky. He had little prior training and little prospect of outside assistance. He developed his own strategy to evangelize the region: "I concluded to travel five miles... then stop, search the neighborhood and find some kind person who would let me preach in his log cabin and so on till I had performed the entire round." On a number of occasions, he found groups already gathered, waiting for a preacher to arrive. Wherever he could, he established class meetings run by local leaders to carry on the work in his absence. In one location he discovered a society run by Jacob, an illiterate African-American slave. Jacob's preaching and leadership impressed Young. By the end of his first year as a circuit-rider Young had gathered 301 new members and for his efforts received just \$30 – a cost of 10 cents per new member. Circuit-riders like Jacob Young began with little formal education. But they soon became students as they followed the example of Wesley and Asbury who used their time on horseback for reading.¹⁸

It would be rare to find a pastor in North America today with the commitment and evangelistic fervor that Jacob Young and his circuit-riding peers had. In just a few generations, this saddle-slinging, rough-and-tumble, cowboy-pastor-that-works-for-free had been replaced by the modern, professional pastor.

Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and the heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness, there is no professional tenderheartedness; there is no professional panting after God.¹⁹ –John Piper

- **The church is getting more inclusive.**

Though many churches have remained faithful to the gospel message, as a whole, more churches than ever are accepting doctrines and teachings of other religions as valid and acceptable. Doctrines and practices that would have been widely rejected by Christians and churches a few decades ago are widely accepted today. As doctrinal clarity fades from the Christian church, and the distinction between the world and the church is harder to see, the church's usefulness is called into question.

- **The church is getting less effective.**

Many denominations and groups are reporting a steady decline in baptisms. The Southern Baptist Convention, for instance, has seen a steady decline in the numbers of baptisms since 1999, down by nearly 100,000 baptisms in the past 15 years.²⁰ Other denominations are reporting similar statistics. So what do we do about it? **We plant churches!**

¹⁸ Steve Addison, "Rapid Mobilization, How the West Was Won," *Mission Frontiers* (blog), July 1, 2015, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/rapid-mobilization>.

¹⁹ John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*. B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN. 2013, 1

²⁰ Green, Emma, "Baptists, Just Without the Baptisms" May 14, 2014 (theatlantic.com)

“The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else--not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes--will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. - Tim Keller²¹

Common Objections to Church Planting

I often ask pastors I meet if they have ever led their church to plant another new church. Although most have not, they have a positive view of church planting. They commonly express to me their desire to lead their congregation to plant new churches. When I ask why they haven't, I generally get responses like these:

- **“We just don't have the people to send.”**

Usually what is really meant is, “We have a bunch of ministries now that are understaffed. We will have to wait until all the ministries are staffed. When that impossible task is accomplished, we will consider starting a new church.” This is teaching people that fulfilling Jesus' mission is equal to staffing the ministries of our church. It is not necessary or even possible for your church to be perfect before you obey the Bible's command to spread the gospel.

- **“We don't have the money.”**

Church planting is only expensive because we think that, in order to have a legitimate church, it has to begin with a five-piece worship band, a modern facility, a sophisticated sound system, and theater lighting to set the mood. How much does it cost to share the gospel with your neighbor? How much does it cost to meet in your living room? Church planting is about making, baptizing, and teaching disciples – all of which are free! Using money on ministry is not bad. In many ways, money can enhance our ministry, but money is not required to raise up new leaders for gospel ministry. The vast majority of pastors in the world are volunteer or bi-vocational pastors who somehow find a way to conduct meaningful ministry with little to no money.

²¹ Keller. “Why Church Planting?”

- **“Our people aren’t ready for that yet.”**

This one may be legitimate for a time. Some congregations are genuinely not ready, but priority number one should be to get them ready. Mission is at the center of God’s design for the church, so we have to make [Ephesians 4:12](#) the job description of every pastor: “Equip the saints for the work of the ministry.”

- **“I don’t feel God leading us in that direction.”**

If you do not feel God leading you to obey the Great Commission, it is possible that you are relying more on your own desires for ministry than the desires God expresses in His Word. A strong commitment to the Great Commission will be required in order to lead any church to give away resources that could be used for the growth of their own congregation. Many people say that they are going to wait until they reach 300 or 500 or 1,000 attendees before they start a new church, believing it will be easier then. Church planting does not get easier as time goes on and churches get larger. In fact, it gets harder. Once a church begins thinking primarily about itself – its growth, its comfort, and its facilities – turning its attention back to reproduction is nearly impossible. There is no better way for a congregation to stay focused on the mission of spreading the gospel than to lead them to plant other churches early and often.

Close in prayer.

Class Three: How New Churches Begin

*Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.
– Dwight L. Moody*

The aim of this course, at least in part, is to open your mind to the possibility that God might use you to help plant a new church. It is possible that God would call you to a change in profession, but it is also entirely possible that God might use you in your current profession. As you are introduced to a bi-vocational church planting team, consider new ways God could use you to make himself known.

In this section we're going to explore how new churches begin. First, we'll examine modern and biblical church planting models. Then we'll tackle specifically how one goes about starting a new church. Let's turn our attention first to the common ways churches are being started in North America today.

Modern Church Planting Models (7 Ways)

- **Parachute Planting**

A planter and their family move into a new location to start a church from scratch. The planter has very little connection with or existing support within the new area. The planter and his family are “pioneering” new territory. Where there is great risk, there may be great reward, but this approach is not for the faint of heart.

- **Sent by an existing Church**

An existing church or church planting organization provides the initial leadership and resources (funds, people, etc.) to start a new church, including the selection of the church planter. Often the church planter is selected from within the organization and has already bought into the vision, values, and beliefs of the sponsoring organization. The existing relationship allows for a close working relationship between the “mother” and “daughter” churches. Although the new church is autonomous, the sponsoring organization often has significant influence in the new church (including decision making during the pre-launch phase). Advantages often include increased financial resources and the ability to draw core team/launch team members from the sponsoring organization.

- **Partnership Between Organizations**

This is a rapidly growing trend where an organization (or many organizations) committed to church planting implement a plan to plant churches. These informal alliances are referred to as collaborative or partnership networks. The participating organizations often share common beliefs and a passion for starting new churches.

- **House Church**

Small groups/cells (5-20 people) form and multiply via a network of people meeting in homes. In some cases, the individual cells are connected in a larger network that meets together periodically in a large group setting. This relational model focuses on personal growth, care, and teaching through one-on-one and small group discipleship. Groups are birthed through multiplication, and, often die, only to resurface months or even years later. This model requires very little funding.

- **Multi-site Church**

An existing church opens new locations. The idea is for one church to have many meeting locations. Motives range from reaching more lost people to making more room at an existing location. The multi-site movement that has taken root over the past 30 years in North America has renewed the vision of reaching entire regions or cities with a single church and has jumpstarted the missionary impulse of many churches.

- **Church Replant**

An existing, struggling church decides to close in order to make room for a new church. The restart is usually in the same location under new leadership. In a church replant, the assets of an old congregation and missionary zeal of the re-planter are the foundation upon which a new congregation is formed.

- **Church Split**

Unfortunately, this model of church planting most often results from disunity. A split typically occurs when internal disagreement leads a congregation to conclude there is less energy required to “split” or “divorce” than to resolve differences and reconcile. The underlying factors causing the split often develop over years. And, in many cases, the dysfunctional character traits of the old church carry

forward to the new churches.²²

Biblical Church Planting Models

- **Jerusalem Model**

A church in one location is scattered to numerous locations, and churches are planted in the places where they are scattered. [Acts 11:19](#) clarifies, “Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.” Though the believers were not scattering from Jerusalem voluntarily, they continued to be a witness for Christ, and their witness ultimately resulted in new churches.

- **Antioch Model**

A church sends an apostle to a town where he preaches the gospel and organizes those who come to faith into a new church. This is the model of church planting that Paul used throughout his church planting journeys in Acts 13-20. Paul’s pattern was to provide basic instruction on the Christian life and then to appoint elders to “Put in order what remains,” ([Titus 1:5](#)); in other words, to organize a new church.

- **Ephesian Model**

A church invests quality time training several individuals who are then sent. “What Paul accomplished in Ephesus was as unique as it was brilliant. He made Ephesus a training center from which the Gospel would go forth, and where young men could be trained to plant churches. Paul rented a meeting place called the Hall of Tyrannus where he preached and taught every day from 11:00am -4:00pm. This part of the training went on for two solid years. Paul trained the following men there:²³

- Titus from Antioch
- Timothy from Lystra
- Gaius from Derbe
- Aristarchus from Thessalonica

²² David Phillips, “Church Planting Tutorial: 7. Church Planting Models,” *PASSION4PLANTING* (blog), n.d., accessed July 28, 2016, <http://church-planting.net/church-planting-tutorial-church-planting-models/>.

²³ Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church: A Comprehensive Guide to Starting and Sustaining Authentic Christian Communities*. 2009 David C. Cook Publishing

- Secundus from Thessalonica
- Sopator from Berea
- Tychicus from Ephesus
- Trophimus from Ephesus
- Epaphras from Colossae

The work of these Ephesian trainees led Luke to say, “All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” ([Acts 19:10](#)).

- **Roman Model**

Christians from various churches coordinate their efforts to plant a church together in a new area where they form a new church. This is an effective means of church planting today. The western church is saturated with experienced and knowledgeable Christians. The redistribution of Christians to cities where the gospel is needed in order to form new churches is the challenge of our day.

After exploring modern and biblical models, it is now time to consider the types of *church planters* that might lead one of these new churches.

There are three types of Church Planters:

- **Vocational church planters**

Vocational planters give their vocations to God as an act of worship. They make church planting their primary vocational pursuit, giving themselves fully to the establishment of a new church. Vocational church planters prepare for planting by saving enough money to sustain their families until the church can fully support them, or they partner with churches and other organizations that help underwrite the cost of church planting until the church reaches financial sustainability.

- **Bi-vocational church planters**

Church planters may support their family through other means while working primarily for the financial, numerical, and spiritual growth of the congregation. Generally, bi-vocational planters wish to be vocational planters but are concerned about the strain a full time salary would put on a young congregation.

- **Volunteer Church Planters**

These planters continue with dedicated vocational employment in another field while simultaneously working to establish a new church. The majority of modern church planters fall into this category. Volunteer church planters are commonly entrepreneurs, business owners, or those with flexible jobs that allow them availability throughout the workday to meet with people for evangelism, discipleship, or ministry. Ideally volunteer church planters work in the communities where they are planting a church. In such cases, their work environments give them the ability to make evangelistic contacts throughout the workday.

How does one go about starting a new church?

There are ten basic steps included in starting a new church. These steps are found in *Church Planting Thresholds: A Gospel-Centered Church Planting Guide*:

- **Confirm your calling.**
Am I truly called to ministry? How can I know?
- **Prepare yourself and your family.**
Am I ready to be a pastor? Am I prepared spiritually and emotionally? Is my family ready to support me in this endeavor?
- **Recruit a mentor and a partner.**
Who will guide me through the process of church planting? How do I find a mentor? Who will work with me to plant this new church?
- **Plan out your new church.**
How will this new church come into being? What will we teach, what is our goal?
- **Gather necessary resources.**
Where will we get the money and the other resources we need to plant this new church?
- **Assemble a missionary team.**
Who will work with me to plant this new church? Who will run the various ministries we will offer? How will I identify and invite others into this work with me?

- **Befriend your community.**

How will my community know that our church is here? How can we meet our community leaders? What can we do to cause them to trust us?

- **Begin worship services.**

When should we begin weekly worship services? Where should we meet? What will the services be like? How will I learn to preach?

- **Order your church biblically.**

How will our new church be structured? Who will make the decisions in our church? How are problems dealt with in our new church? What does the bible say about church government and structure?

- **Repeat the process by training new leaders.**

How can we train new leaders for church planting when we still need leaders in our own church? How will we support those we send to plant new churches?

Close in prayer.

Class 4: How Ordinary Christians Can Begin New Churches

Church planting does not need to be complicated or expensive, and it does not need to be done by professionals! Everyday Christians are called by God to start new churches. The requirements given by the apostle Paul for those who serve in pastoral ministry are *character qualifications*. The qualifications for pastoral ministry do not include experience, expertise, or education. Jesus picked up his recruits from the beach, not the synagogue. God is looking for the holy, faithful, and humble. If church planters do not have to be professionals, and church planting does not have to be complicated or expensive, what exactly is needed to start a new church?

Take a moment to consider this question:

What do you think is necessary to have in order to start a new church?

Think about this question, and listen to a church planter: James Hinton

Only one resource is necessary for a church to begin planting another church, and it has nothing to do with buildings or budgets. That one necessary resource is a ready leader. Churches are planted by missionary-pastors sent by kingdom-building churches. So, if you've picked up *Church Planting Thresholds* looking for the "church planting silver bullet," here it is. The only thing you absolutely must have in order to plant a new church is a scripturally qualified, missionary-pastor to send.

- **A ready leader is the only necessary ingredient in church planting.**

Where do ready leaders come from? They are made, not born. Talk to any successful leader about how they got where they are today, and you will hear a story of mentorship, discipleship, and investment. There are two helpful acronyms borrowed from the world of international missions that can help us to recognize the right types of people to develop for a ministry in church planting.

- **FAT People make great church planters.**

Paul's Ephesian church-planting model discussed in the previous chapter requires developing leaders for church planting. Therefore, finding new potential leaders for the kingdom of God is priority number one.

Faithfulness, availability, and teach-ability are the essential qualities for those being developed for pastoral ministry:

- **Faithful**

Those who are quick to obey Jesus when they know what He wants them to do are worth the investment. Some guys struggle with the same sins over and over again, and seem unwilling to take the drastic, eye-plucking, hand-chopping measures that are required to really mortify the flesh ([Matthew 5:29-30](#)). Those who are willing to take these measures inevitably grow faster and gain victory over areas of sin in their lives more quickly. There was a young man who was confessing that he was addicted to pornography. He said he would do anything to escape from its clutches. When someone asked him if he was serious enough to promise that the next time he went to a pornographic website, he would let someone toss his laptop into a creek, he stared into their face for a few seconds in deep contemplation, then promised them he would. Months later he told them that simple promise helped him gain victory over his pornography addiction. The point is God is not looking for perfect guys. He is looking for guys who are serious about obeying Jesus, even if it's costly.

- **Available**

Consider Clint, a pastor who lives in Northern Virginia, where everyone is always busy. Careers are demanding and traffic is atrocious. As a result, there are a plethora of excuses for not being able to meet for personal spiritual growth. When Clint invites someone to meet for discipleship, and they actually do it, he knows that their spiritual development is a priority to them. Invest your time in those who stretch to make themselves available.

- **Teachable**

This is perhaps the most important piece, but also the most difficult to discern at first. A person's teach-ability has to do with their willingness to implement instruction, even if they are not convinced it is credible. *The Karate Kid* offers a helpful picture. Remember when Mr. Miyagi told Daniel to paint the fence and wax the car when all Daniel wanted to do was learn Karate. Miyagi recognized some areas of Daniel's life that needed development, even though Daniel did not. The same will be true for those you disciple. Invest your time in those who heed your advice and instruction even when it does not make complete sense to them.

Consider this question:

Are you yourself faithful, available and teachable?

- They are willing to be **MAWL'd**

The second acronym used when providing on-the-job training for those with ministerial aspirations is MAWL (Model, Assist, Watch, Leave). This is something you can begin doing right away with FAT people in your ministry who are eager to gain ministerial experience. The process begins with simply allowing those you are training to go with you as you accomplish the work of the ministry.

- **Model**

If you are going to visit someone who is in the hospital, bring a FAT guy with you. If you are going to study for your sermon, invite a FAT guy to study with you. Be sure to explain everything you do, and do not hold back anything you have learned along the way. Say something like, "I try never to leave the hospital without praying for the person who is sick," or "I find that I study best in the mornings, so I set aside two mornings a week for sermon preparation." Invite a FAT guy and his family to join you and your family for devotions, or dinner, or some other opportunity that allows them see how you interact with your family. It is not rocket science. Simply invite FAT guys to see the behind-the-scenes footage of your life.

- **Assist**

Once a particular area of ministry has been modeled, it is important to let the trainee assist. Maybe have them do some research for a sermon. Allow them to join you in teaching a section of the new members course, or to help fill up the baptistery. When it seems like they have a handle on what they are doing, start assisting *them*. Allow them to take the lead on the visitor follow up, then debrief with them after it is over.

- **Watch**

Once it is clear that they know what they are doing, just sit back and watch. This might mean allowing a FAT guy to preach a sermon, or lead a small group while you sit in the crowd. It might mean allowing them to put an outreach event together from start to finish. Expect that they will do it a bit differently than you, and probably not quite as well, but leaving them alone to make their own mistakes is part of the process of training. Be sure to tell them afterwards what they did well and what areas you think they could improve.

- **Leave**

This part is critical and probably the most difficult because it requires you to get out of the way. It's a much different experience to lead something on your own without the watchful eye of a mentor in the crowd. Your presence could actually prevent those you're training from feeling fully empowered to lead. Eventually, when you feel they have a good grasp on what they are doing, leave and allow them to accomplish the task without you. As always, be sure to talk with your trainees afterward to see how things went. Give them room to grow, make mistakes, and experience firsthand some of the joys and difficulties of pastoral ministry.

Is God calling me to start a new church?

I believe there are three aspects to receiving a "calling" from God to serve in pastoral ministry. Many talk about calling as some sort of mystical subjective experience. I believe the calling to pastoral ministry is a bit more objective than that and includes three elements.

- **Calling includes Aspiration**

In [1 Timothy 3:1](#), the Apostle Paul prefaces his list of qualifications for an elder with this statement: *"If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."* The Greek word translated as "aspire" means "to stretch one's self out in order to touch or to grasp for something."²⁴ The word "desire" means to "long for" or "lust after."²⁵ Paul is saying that to be fit for the job of elder, one must stretch for it and lust after it. God is a master at producing desire where there once was apathy. The same God who wired men to desire women, and sharks to long for blood, will grant a person a voracious appetite for the spread of the Gospel. The psalmist felt this passion when he said, *"I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness"* (Psalm 84:10). Peter and John felt it when they said to their captors, *"We cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). This is the kind of gut-level drive you will need to plant a new church.

²⁴ Joseph Henry Thayer and Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm. "ὀρέγω: Strongs G3713." *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers*. Sixth Printing. ed. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003.

²⁵ Ibid. "πιθυμέω: Strongs G1937."

- **Calling includes Adequacy**

The Bible cites roughly 25 qualifications (attached below) for the elder. Scripture is emphatic that these are essential qualities for the man of God who will lead a local congregation. These are baseline character qualifications for anyone serving in pastoral ministry. Those considering a calling to pastoral ministry should carefully and prayerfully study [1 Timothy 3](#) and [Titus 1](#), and compare their lives to the standards of those passages. In addition to the scriptural qualifications given in God's Word, there are some secondary qualities commonly found in fruitful church planters. Scripture does not mandate these qualities, thus you should not consider them mandatory, either. However, it is wise for aspiring church planters who lack these qualities to work diligently to develop these areas, and seek the help of those who obviously possess them.

- **Calling includes Affirmation**

Affirmation of a sending church itself is the indispensable third confirmation. Though some may believe God is calling them to plant a new church, if the elders and members of the current church do not agree with them, this is a major red flag and should result in slowing down the church planting process (if not ending it all together). The local church is the means by which God will expand his kingdom.

Denominations and para-church organizations are tremendous resources for the church planter, and should be utilized to the extent that they are helpful. However, these organizations cannot replace the local church as the central authority in the establishment and renewal of the local church. Potential planters should seek help from godly individuals who know them well, and employ them to give an honest assessment of their weaknesses. They should ask them difficult questions such as: "Do you consider me to be self-controlled?" "Do you think I am a good manager of my household?" Encourage them to listen to the answers given and to take the suggestions and evaluations to heart.

Can I still help start churches even if I'm not called to be a Church Planter? Yes.

Becoming a church planter is not the only way people can help to start new churches. For many, joining a church planting team is a very tangible way to help start new churches. Church planting teams are often in need of committed Christians to serve in key ministry leadership positions. Take a few minutes to look over the examples below to see if your gifts and talents could be of use to a church planting team.

- **Prayer Advocate** – The Prayer Advocate is responsible for promoting personal and corporate prayer in the life of a new church. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) establish a monthly church-wide prayer meeting

for members and attenders; (3) create an efficient means of communicating time sensitive prayer concerns to the congregation; (4) create an efficient means of communicating church prayer needs to key supporters and partners; and (5) work with other ministry leaders to ensure that prayer plays a key role in their ministries.

- **Worship Leader** – The Worship Leader is responsible for magnifying the greatness of God and Jesus Christ through the planning, conducting, and promotion of the music and worship programs of a church. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) participate regularly in leading worship music at gatherings on Sundays and at other events from time to time; (3) recruit, develop, and lead a worship team; (4) work with pastors to select worship song sets that are gospel-centered and Christ-exalting; (5) establish and lead rehearsals; and (6) help in the oversight and coordination of other areas related to worship—sound, lights, video, etc.
- **Discipleship Director** – The Discipleship Director is responsible for promoting discipleship in a church to help people grow in both knowledge of and obedience to the Word of God. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) equip mature Christians with the tools and resources necessary to disciple others; (3) identify less mature Christians in need of discipleship; and (4) establish and facilitate disciple-making relationships throughout the congregation.
- **Outreach Coordinator** – The Outreach Coordinator is responsible for the overall planning, development, and deployment of the outreach ministries of a new church, including the local, national, and international mission fields. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) develop and maintain local and international mission programs; (3) recruit, train, and support a network of volunteers to lead various outreach opportunities; (4) plan and lead mission trips, both locally and abroad; (5) work with church leadership to establish a presence for the church at community events; and (6) network with various small groups and individuals to accomplish the outreach goals of the congregation.
- **Children’s Ministry Coordinator** – The Children’s Ministry Coordinator is responsible for the planning, conducting, promoting, and evaluating a comprehensive and balanced ministry to a children and their families. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) plan programs and activities for the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development of our children and their parents or guardians; (3) enlist and equip ministry leadership and volunteers; (4) evaluate and secure literature, resources, and teaching material; (5) develop and implement policies for the safety and security of the children; and (6) coordinate and staff the care of young children during worship services and special church-wide events.

- **Communications Coordinator** - The Communications Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the media and message of a church is consistent, biblical, and clear. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) manage content and aesthetics for all forms of church communication including web, social media, and print; (3) act as the funnel through which all communications pass before being released; (4) work with various ministry heads to produce a consistent, articulate message to the community and to the congregation; (5) manage the church membership database, keeping track of visitors and those who attend outreach events hosted by the church; (6) regularly inspect the website for outdated information and broken links; (7) provide content for any of the church's social media posts or campaigns; and (8) ensure that the church is utilizing the best communication methods available to reach the largest number of members and attenders.
- **Technical Director** – The Technical Director is responsible for leading a team of volunteers to provide high quality support for audio, video, and lighting used during worship gatherings and other events as needed. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) recruit volunteers; (3) provide training opportunities for volunteers to gain the necessary skill set for success in their area; (4) initiate and plan ongoing training on a regular basis; (5) schedule the needed volunteers for each service or event and communicate their responsibilities in advance; (6) initiate repairs and replacements for critical equipment; and (7) establish a plan to prepare and execute quality video, display, and lighting elements for each service or event.
- **Service Coordinator** – The Service Coordinator is responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the church worship services including service formats, order, themes, and special programs. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) manage the logistics of all worship services; (3) work alongside the preaching pastor and the service leaders to create a cohesive presentation of service elements; (4) act as the point of contact for all elements of the worship service; and (5) develop a team and a system that will keep everyone involved informed.
- **Student Ministry Director** – The Student Ministry Director is responsible for planning, conducting, promoting, and evaluating a comprehensive and balanced ministry to youth and their families. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) plan programs and activities for the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development of youth and their parents or guardians; (3) enlist and equip ministry leadership and volunteers; (4) evaluate and secure literature, resources, and teaching material; (4) develop and implement policies for the safety and security of youth; (5) plan and conduct special projects, such as camps and retreats; and (6) coordinate youth outreach and mission trips.

- **Treasurer** – The Treasurer is responsible for properly receiving, dispersing, accounting, and safeguarding church funds within policies established by the church. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) develop and implement policies and procedures related to receiving, accounting, and dispersing church funds; (3) maintain records of funds received and dispersed; (4) enlist volunteers to receive, count, and deposit money; (5) maintain records of contributions and prepare and distribute contribution statements; (6) reconcile monthly bank statements and correct ledgers as needed; and (7) make regular reports to the church or leadership as directed by church policies.
- **Small Group Coordinator** – The Small Group Coordinator is responsible for organizing the small group ministry for the development and care of disciples, the encouragement of biblical community, and the ministry to the lost. This person should (1) maintain a healthy and growing spiritual life and lead others to do the same; (2) collaborate with church leadership to build and implement a system of small groups; (3) develop and implement procedures that promote attendance and participation in small groups; (4) be familiar with curriculum resources and make recommendations for classes and groups; (5) recruit and develop leadership for future groups; (6) provide accountability and further training for current small group leaders.

These are just a few of what could be dozens more positions that are needed in new churches. As God calls individuals to lead the forming of new churches, seriously consider how you can be involved. Certainly there are meaningful ways to be involved at a distance through prayer, financial support, and volunteerism, but nothing will cause you to grow as a Christian like striving together with a team of likeminded Christians to establish a new church in a community that needs one.

Close in prayer.

BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4

- **Above reproach**
- **The husband of one wife**
- **Believing children**
- **Sober-minded**
- **Not arrogant**
- **Not quick-tempered**
- **Self-controlled**
- **Respectable**
- **Hospitable**
- **Lover of good**
- **Upright**
- **Holy**
- **Disciplined**
- **Holds firm to the Word**
- **Able to give sound instruction**
- **Able to refute bad instruction**
- **Able to teach**
- **Not a drunkard**
- **Not violent, but gentle**
- **Not quarrelsome**
- **Not a lover of money**
- **Not greedy**
- **Good manager of household**
- **Keep children submissive**
- **Not a new convert**
- **Well thought of by outsiders**

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