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STATISTICAL EVALUATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN  
MISSION BOARD'S CHURCH PLANTER INITIAL  
ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT AND THE  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER  
CHURCH PLANTING COMMUNITY

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Presented to  
the Faculty of  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Jason Alexander Walker  
May 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

STATISTICAL EVALUATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN  
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CHURCH PLANTING COMMUNITY

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This work is dedicated to my godly wife who has taught me much about selflessness and sacrifice for the glory of God.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPIA	Church Planter Initial Assessment
IO	Industrial and Organizational
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
QR	Quarterly Report



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## PREFACE

On the eve of seminary graduation, a young and passionate church planting candidate enters the room accompanied by his equally energetic bride. They are both filled with a deep longing to see God's name glorified and his kingdom advanced in their home state. With the goal of planting a church in a burgeoning city a few miles east of their hometown, the enthusiastic couple is seeking support from a prominent sending organization and are going through the standard assessment protocol. Three years prior, the aspiring pastor and his wife left jobs, homes, and families in order to pursue theological education after surrendering to God's calling of pastoral ministry. Now, on the verge of graduating from one of the world's most prestigious seminaries with an excellent academic record and a heart for reaching the lost, the pastor and his wife feel adequately equipped and are returning home as missionaries with the hope of planting a church. The last step in the process is to obtain approval from churches and sending organizations which will provide necessary support for the missionary work.

In the room of the sending organization's office, the pastor and his wife are given a stack of papers with a set of questions, literally hundreds of questions, and are told that they will be given a few hours to provide the corresponding answers. Their answers will generate a score which will be used as the primary criteria in the decision-making process regarding their support. The questions seem odd, many of them don't apply, and a number of them are poorly worded. The vast majority of the questions are not about the Bible, theology, pastoral ministry, or missions. Instead, the questions are primarily focused on personality and temperament. There are nagging thoughts in the back of the young pastor's mind that ring over and over again. "Do any of these questions

matter? What is the basis for these questions? Have any of these questions been linked to success?”

After completing the assessment forms, the pastor and his wife are ushered into another room where they wait to hear from the sending organization’s representative who is compiling the answers and generating the scores. Moments later the representative walks in and reveals the unfortunate news. Regrettably, the pastor and his wife’s personalities are simply not suitable for church planting. The recommendation is to exit the field of church planting altogether and consider a change in vocation. The conversation lasts no more than ten minutes as the confused couple is sent on their way to reflect on what just happened.

I share this story because it represents the experience of many church planters who have gone through church planter assessments and have been left with more questions than answers. I am seriously concerned that sending organizations have been making critical selection decisions based on false assumptions regarding the legitimacy of their assessment instruments. These decisions have significant implications for the advancement of the gospel, and I believe that we can do better. More emphatically, I insist that we must do better. With a background as a professional statistician, pastor, and church planter, I am undertaking this research with the hope that it will provide encouragement for church planters, improve the church planter assessment process for sending organizations, and deliver timely insights for the broader church planting community. May God be glorified through this research and may the gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed to the nations.

Jason A. Walker

Culpeper, Virginia

May 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most effective means for carrying out the Great Commission is planting new churches. In addition to following the pattern set forth in the New Testament, church planting is essential for establishing long-term gospel witnesses within local communities. However, put simply, church planting is hard. A comprehensive review of the literature demonstrates that the church planting success rate is far too low,<sup>1</sup> which underscores the reality that church planting is not only difficult but also risky for the church planter and the sending agency alike.

Church planting requires significant investments in both human and financial resources. Sending organizations are tasked with the responsibility of stewarding resources well, which implies funneling limited resources to church planters with the highest probability of success. Consequently, most sending organizations, including the North American Mission Board (NAMB), employ some version of a church planter assessment instrument in order to improve the selection and development of church planters.<sup>2</sup> A church planter assessment is a scientific assessment instrument used to evaluate the character, traits, and abilities of church planters in order to assist in the selection of qualified candidates. These assessment instruments generally include hundreds of questions and use algorithms to generate an overall score. Additionally,

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<sup>1</sup> Actual success rate data is difficult to validate and heavily dependent upon success criteria; however, most denominations and church planting resources indicate that there is a need to increase the rate of church planting success. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010); H. Stanley Wood, *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> In fact, 73 percent of regional denomination agencies report that they have a formalized church planter assessments system in place. Stetzer, *Viral Churches*, 83.

church planter assessments frequently evaluate the candidate's spouse, consider marital health, and some even include "360 evaluations" where selected references complete a portion of the assessment on behalf of the candidate from an unbiased perspective. However, these assessments are rarely statistically validated which significantly hinders the intended utility and efficacy of the instruments themselves.<sup>3</sup> Given the weight of the decisions and the importance of improving the probability of church planter success, it is necessary to bring to bear the most robust scientific methods for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Throughout its existence, the North American Mission Board has evaluated hundreds of potential church planters using a series of quantitative and qualitative church planter assessment tools. One of these assessment tools is the Church Planter Initial Assessment (CPIA), a pre-assessment tool which provides various metrics utilized in the church planter selection process. While the CPIA was largely built upon an established church planter assessment instrument, it has not been through a rigorous statistical evaluation to assess the validity, reliability, and efficacy of the questions therein. As a result, one of the objectives is to utilize robust statistical methods in order to validate and improve the CPIA by analyzing the links between the CPIA questions and church planter success. To this end, the analysis will seek to define success and identify which questions or corresponding metrics are most predictive of church planter success in order to improve the selection process and identify key areas for church planter growth and development.

While this study will focus on NAMB's CPIA, it will have extensive implications for the broader church planting community. The publication of the results will help improve church planter assessments in general by identifying church planter

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 53.

characteristics and personality traits that are most predictive of success from a statistical perspective. Accordingly, the research will provide valuable insights for church planters and sending organizations.

To be clear, applying scientific methods to the selection process of ministerial candidates inevitably raises a number of fundamental questions. For example, is it appropriate to employ science to church related decisions? What is the role of science versus the Holy Spirit in the selection process of church planters? Are church planter assessments a biblical concept? What is the benefit of using statistical methods to help shape church planter assessments? What is the definition of church planter success? Can church planter success even be measured? This thesis will seek to address these questions, among others, in order to establish a biblical framework for the associated analysis.

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

A review of the pertinent literature can be broken down into four specific categories. The first category includes key resources and reference material regarding the general use of assessments for job placement and selection throughout history. An examination of the literature in this category will produce details about the history, purpose, validity, and use of assessments in the secular realm in order to create a general overview which will serve as a necessary reference point when evaluating the use of assessments for the selection of church planters in particular.

Following the general overview of assessments, the second category will focus more specifically on the history of church planter assessments. Even though very little has been published on the topic, what has been published will essentially serve as the primary source material. Perhaps the most important publication in this category is

Charles Ridley's work, *How to Select Church Planters*,<sup>4</sup> which will be explored later in detail.

The third category of resources is comprised of works associated with church planting, church planting leadership, and church planting success. This thesis is based on the assumptions that church planting is a fundamental endeavor for accomplishing the Great Commission, that the success rate for church planting is too low, and that successful church planters share common characteristics and leadership traits which enable them to achieve a higher rate of success. As a result, it is essential to review and interact with the existing literature that highlights the importance of church planting and discusses potential characteristics of successful church planters.

The final category of resources encompasses fundamental textbooks that identify, explain, and defend various scientific methods. This set of literature will provide the mathematical and theological basis for the selected statistical techniques utilized throughout the analysis. Additionally, these resources will help ensure that the proper statistical methods are followed and that the final conclusions are based on robust analytical techniques.

### **General Overview of Assessments**

Assessment instruments have been used successfully for many years in the military, businesses, and education. Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I-O psychology), a field of study which specializes in human behavior in organizations and the workplace, has advanced the scientific knowledge, methods, and implementation techniques regarding the use of assessments for selection and placement which must be considered. *Human Resource Selection* by Barrick, Field, and Gatewood is a frequently

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters: A Self-Study Manual for Recruiting, Screening, Interviewing and Evaluating Qualified Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelical Association, 1988).



cited textbook in the field of I-O psychology that explores the validity and reliability of various selection methods.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Mumford, Owens, and Stokes' *Biodata Handbook: Theory, Research, and Use of Biographical Information in Selection and Performance Prediction* is a model resource for selection procedures and offers useful methods and proven techniques for the validation of assessment instruments.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive overview of the history of assessment tools for the purpose of selection can be found in Neal Schmitt's *The Oxford Handbook of Personnel Assessment and Selection*.<sup>7</sup> Schmitt offers a broad overview of the use of assessments and how it relates to the selection of qualified candidates. Additionally, there are a few specific examples of historical assessments that are worth exploring in more detail such as *Personnel Selection in the British Forces*, a World War II era work by Philip Vernon and John Parry that explain how scientific methods of personnel selection were applied in the British Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology has provided a contemporary list of approved principles and practices related to the validation and use of assessment instruments in Paul Sackett and Nancy Tippins' *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures*. The principles contained in this work have been adopted as policy by the American Psychological Association (APA) and represent

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<sup>5</sup> Murray Barrick, Hubert S. Field, and Robert D. Gatewood, *Human Resource Selection* (Mason, OH: South-Western, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Michael D. Mumford, William A. Owens, and Garnett S. Stokes, *Biodata Handbook: Theory, Research, and Use of Biographical Information in Selection and Performance Prediction* (Palo Alto, CA: CPP Books, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Neal Schmitt, *The Oxford Handbook of Personnel Assessment and Selection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Philip E. Vernon and John B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces* (London: University of London Press, 1949), 5.

the accepted scientific practices in the field of personnel selection.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Sackett and Tippins' work is highly relevant to the topic of church planter assessments.

### **Church Planter Assessments**

The introduction of formal assessment instruments to evaluate the qualifications of candidates for a specific job function began in Germany during World War I and were eventually adopted by church planting organizations in the early 1980s.<sup>10</sup> While the literature dealing with church planter assessments is scant, the seminal work entitled *How to Select Church Planters* was published in 1988 by Charles Ridley. As church planting was gaining momentum across all major denominations in the '70s and '80s, Ridley acknowledged that "Selecting candidates who will perform effectively as church planters has emerged as a major concern in the church growth movement."<sup>11</sup> As a result, Ridley developed a manual for evaluating church planters to improve decision making and help identify those planters who are most likely to succeed.<sup>12</sup> By performing a job analysis in 1984, Ridley identified forty-eight dimensions of a successful church planter and later narrowed the list down to thirteen essential qualities that are commonly referred to as the Ridley Profile.<sup>13</sup> It is hard to overstate the importance of Ridley's work for church planter assessments since most church planter assessments today are built upon Ridley's foundation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Sackett and Nancy Tippins, *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Bowling Green, OH: Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, 2018), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Walter Grant, "Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 82.

While Ridley's church planter profile is the most well-known, Thomas Graham and the Presbyterian Church in America began experimenting with church planter assessments in 1983 and ultimately published an article in the January 1987 edition of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* which identifies twelve characteristics of a successful church planter.<sup>15</sup> Apart from Graham and Ridley, precious little has been published regarding church planter assessments that is worthy of consideration other than a few dissertations.<sup>16</sup> The only other work that bears mentioning is Stanley Wood's *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times*, which is the result of an extensive research study aimed at evaluating the characteristics of successful church planters across seven mainline denominations.<sup>17</sup> Through his research, Wood was able to identify a profile for successful church planters and produced one of the only publications on church planter qualifications that is supported by hard data.

### **Church Planting and Leadership Resources**

There are extensive resources about starting a new church; however, the most prolific and influential author when it comes to church planting is Ed Stetzer. In *Viral Churches*, Stetzer and Warren Bird present findings from one of the most comprehensive studies ever undertaken to evaluate methods and trends regarding church planting in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Stetzer's work *Planting Missional Churches* serves as a

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Graham, "How to Select the Best Church Planters," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (January 1987): 72-73.

<sup>16</sup> In *A Practical Theology of Assessment*, John Bradley and Don Wiggins present discoveries from twenty-five years of assessing candidates. John Bradley and Don Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessments* (Colorado Springs, CO: Christian & Missionary Alliance, 2015). Noteworthy dissertations include the following: Norman K. Duncan, "A Correlation Study of Church Planter Emotional Intelligence and Church Sustainability" (PhD diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2018); Lloyd Walter Grant, "Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); and J. Allen Thompson, "Church Planter Competencies as Perceived by Church Planters and Assessment Center Leaders: A Protestant North American Study" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Wood, *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times*, xix.

<sup>18</sup> Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 4.

comprehensive guide to starting reproducing churches and highlights key methods and characteristics when selecting church planters.<sup>19</sup> In addition to Stetzer, J. D. Payne provides a useful summary of church planting practices in his work *The Barnabas Factors* by referencing the biblical example of Barnabas and the first century church.<sup>20</sup> Payne's contribution is a focus on church planting teams and team members rather than lead church planters themselves.<sup>21</sup> Finally, works on Christian leadership, such as John Stott's *Basic Christian Leadership*, are important to consider since church planting inevitably requires strong leadership skills. Stott relies on the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians and Paul's biblical example of leadership as his source for admirable leadership qualities.<sup>22</sup>

### **Scientific Methods**

When it comes to using appropriate statistical methods, Michael Longnecker and R. Lyman Ott's statistical textbook, *An Introduction to Statistical Methods and Data Analysis*, is a great place to start.<sup>23</sup> For multivariate analysis, Richard Johnson and Dean Wichern's *Applied Multivariate Statistical Analysis* represents a trustworthy resource for acceptable techniques and strategies.<sup>24</sup> Scientific methods, including data analysis, are often rejected by the church, but Vern Poythress provides a useful critique. For example,

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<sup>19</sup> Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 43-58.

<sup>20</sup> J. D. Payne, *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members* (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Payne, *The Barnabas Factors*, 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> John Stott, *Basic Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Michael T. Longnecker and R. Lyman Ott, *An Introduction to Statistical Methods and Data Analysis* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Richard A. Johnson and Dean W. Wichern, *Applied Multivariate Statistical Analysis* (New York: Pearson, 2018).

in *Redeeming Mathematics*, Poythress demonstrates that God is the creator and founder of science, which ultimately points to the beauty of God.<sup>25</sup>

### **Void in the Literature**

While church planter assessments have been utilized for decades with the intended purpose of improving church planter selection,<sup>26</sup> a literature review has revealed that few assessment instruments have been appropriately statistically validated.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the few that have been validated are many years out of date, and the analytical results have not been published for others to reference or critique. As a result, the vast majority of church planter assessments have been based upon opinions and personal experiences rather than robust statistical analysis. Many evangelical organizations have turned to general assessment instruments that measure several constructs perceived to have importance but have never been statistically linked to church planter success.<sup>28</sup>

The existing literature is full of theories, often stated as fact, regarding the characteristics and qualifications of successful church planters, but supporting evidence is significantly lacking. At the time of this writing, there is not a single publication that has proven with data that an assessment score or sub-characteristic is correlated with church

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<sup>25</sup> Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Mathematics: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 32, 145.

<sup>26</sup> The first major work on using assessments for church planter selection was published by Charles Ridley in 1988 and is the foundation upon which many church planter assessments are built. Charles R. Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters: A Self-Study Manual for Recruiting, Screening, Interviewing and Evaluating Qualified Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: The Fuller Evangelical Association, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> LifeWay's Church Planter Candidate Assessment (CPCA) is one of the only statistically validated church planting assessments that exists. Stetzer and Im, *Planting Missional Churches*, 53. The CPCA was developed in 2010 and the results of analysis have never been published. Multiple phone calls and emails to LifeWay for further comment have been declined.

<sup>28</sup> The assessment instrument utilized by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) is a good example of an assessment that is based on a general instrument that was never validated for church planters. According to Don Wiggins and John Bradley, the C&MA uses the assessment instrument developed by the IDAK Group, which was created in order to identify individual talents for general placement purposes. While subject matter experts identified a number of talents presumed to be important for church planting, this was never statistically validated. Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessments*.

planter success.<sup>29</sup> Yet, in spite of this reality, church planter assessments are widely used across all denominations to rank and select church planters who are assumed to have a higher probability of success. This practice is entirely without basis. There must be a call to dramatically improve the assessment process such that decisions are based on facts. There must also be a renewed commitment towards updating and reevaluating the assessment instruments as the world shifts and more data is gathered. To continue operating blindly is detrimental to church planters, churches, sending organizations, and ultimately to the mission given to the church to reach the lost for Christ.

### **Thesis**

A statistical evaluation of the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Church Planter Initial Assessment (CPIA) instrument will improve the selection and development of church planters, thereby increasing the probability of church planter success while providing valuable insights for the broader church planting community. The initial portion of the research will involve a comprehensive review of the literature regarding church planter assessments and an evaluation of the biblical justification for using assessments. The core methodology will focus on a rigorous statistical analysis of NAMB's CPIA instrument using proper statistical techniques. The first objective is to evaluate the validity of NAMB's assessment by measuring the predictive nature of the CPIA instrument and the associated questions/metrics contained therein. The second objective is to highlight the most leveraging characteristics of a successful church planter based on data rather than opinion. In order to accomplish both objectives, a clear and measurable definition of success will need to be identified. NAMB has generously agreed to provide the requested data for the analysis.

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<sup>29</sup> While Ridley and Graham were the first to articulate specific characteristics of a successful church planter, their initial works were based on job analyses and have never been statistically validated. If they have been validated, the results have not been published.

## **Outline of Chapters**

The following descriptions of each chapter will help outline the flow of thought and the methodology that will be followed.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a biblical justification for using assessments. This chapter is intended to answer arguments against assessments and provide sound biblical rationale for their employment. In order to critically examine the use of assessments, I will interact with the various arguments against using assessments. In particular, I will discuss how God is the source of all mathematics and his character and gifting provides the basis for using mathematics in the selection process of church planters. I will explore the Scriptural basis for the use of scientific methods to inform church related decisions and will focus specifically on the implications that can be derived from the biblical witness regarding the use of church planter assessments. Finally, I will show that church planting assessments ought to be used for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom.

In Chapter 3, I will describe the various definitions of church planter success that have been used and highlight the importance of defining success when validating an assessment instrument. I will focus more generally on the leading definitions of success and discuss their pros and cons. While the traditional measurements are pragmatic, there are a number of alternative definitions, such as faithfulness, fruitfulness, multiplication, and sustainability. I will explore these options and will provide a biblical evaluation of each. After considering the various definitions of success, I will provide a short summary and path forward.

In Chapter 4, I will describe the data and methodology in detail. The ability to answer the proposed research questions hinges on the quantity and the quality of the data. As a result, I will provide a detailed description of the data and will clarify important definitions that are central to the analysis. Additionally, I will highlight potential biases in the data that might be relevant. Before engaging in advanced statistical techniques, much

can be learned from a description of the summary statistics. For example, what is the average success rate of church planters as defined by NAMB? What is the distribution of church planter assessment scores within the sample? In this chapter, I will answer these questions among others. I will provide an overview of the methodology and will summarize the research questions to be answered and the techniques to be utilized. It is essential that the statistical techniques and analysis be transparent and appropriately supported by experts in the field of statistics. Accordingly, I will describe and defend the statistical techniques used for analysis which will depend on the nature of the data and the intended objective of the analytical approach.

In Chapter 5, I will analyze the data and interpret the results. More specifically, I will assess the validity of NAMB's church planter assessment instrument. Validity in the case of assessment instruments represents the degree to which the assessments and related scores are supported by statistical evidence. In order to test the validity of a church planter assessment instrument, it is necessary to observe a statistically significant relationship between the assessment scores and church planter success. Validity is, by far, the most important consideration of any assessment instrument. As a result, the primary objective of this analysis is to evaluate the validity of NAMB's church planter assessment instrument. I will explore the relationship between assessment scores and church planter success and will describe the findings. In addition to validity, the analysis will evaluate which church planter characteristics are most predictive of church planter success. I will review the church planter characteristics measured by the CPIA and provide an analysis of which ones are most predictive.

In Chapter 6, I will summarize the analysis and discuss the implications. I will include a general summary of the findings and provide recommendations specific to the North American Mission Board based on the analytical results. Finally, I will expand the discussion to the broader church planting community and will explore the various



implications of the analysis beyond NAMB. I will propose a path forward and will identify potential future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGY OF ASSESSMENTS

#### **Introduction**

Assessment instruments for workplace selection have been around for many years, and the utility of such tools has been scientifically proven time and again in the field of Industrial and Organizational (I-O) Psychology.<sup>1</sup> While the measurement of individual differences was introduced as early as 1879, the crises of World War I and World War II provided opportunities to leverage advances in the field and significantly accelerated the development of psychological assessment instruments.<sup>2</sup> For example, in 1917 the US Army introduced the Alpha and Beta IQ Tests that were comprised of a series of multiple choice questions and were completed by over 1.7 million potential soldiers.<sup>3</sup> The Alpha and Beta Tests, which were developed for the literate and illiterate respectively, provided a letter grade identifying the applicant's potential for military service ranging from "A: High Officer Type" to "E: Unfit for Service."<sup>4</sup> A few years later in World War II, the British Royal Navy and Royal Air Force implemented a similar personnel evaluation tool that was administered to over three million recruits.<sup>5</sup> Even though the British version focused more on interviews and biographical data rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Neal Schmitt, *The Oxford Handbook of Personnel Assessment and Selection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9-24.

<sup>2</sup> Schmitt, *Oxford Handbook*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Schmitt, *Oxford Handbook*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd Walter Grant, "Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Philip E. Vernon and John B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces* (London: University of London Press, 1949), 5.

relying on multiple choice questions, the British assessment instrument collected a significant volume of data and laid a solid foundation for future scientific advances in the field.

As corporations grew in size and complexity following the industrial revolution, companies began looking for better selection methods to help differentiate between potentially successful and unsuccessful applicants.<sup>6</sup> Based on the learnings from the World Wars, assessment instruments were developed and were employed with positive results. While early instruments focused on measuring physical abilities and were used primarily in military contexts, the use of assessment instruments eventually grew to include cognitive abilities aided by advances in the fields of statistics and psychology.<sup>7</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century, using assessment instruments for the purpose of selection was a validated technique for improving the probability of hiring successful employees and was a commonplace practice within the secular arena, particularly for jobs that required high degrees of specialization.<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter, assessment instruments were developed and implemented for religious organizations, specifically for church planting.<sup>9</sup>

Today, after four decades of experimentation and implementation, the most prominent sending organizations frequently utilize church planter assessments to assist in the selection process of qualified church planters.<sup>10</sup> As assessment instruments gained widespread popularity in the secular world, it was pragmatic for religious organizations to

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<sup>6</sup> Schmitt, *Oxford Handbook*, 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Murray Barrick, Hubert S. Field, and Robert D. Gatewood, *Human Resource Selection* (Mason, OH: South-Western, 2008), 536.

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt, *Oxford Handbook*, 9-24.

<sup>9</sup> Grant, "Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles," 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Vital Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 83.

adopt similar tools. Presently, the vast majority of sending organizations among denominational and nondenominational entities include some form of a church planter assessment instrument as part of their standard church planter assessment protocol.<sup>11</sup> As a result, nearly every single church planter who currently serves in North America has taken or will be required to take a formal church planter assessment. The rapid acceptance of such tools within religious organizations can be directly attributed to their proven success in the secular industries. As the science behind assessment instruments was crystalizing in the field of I-O psychology, a genuine need arose within religious sending organizations to improve the high rate of failure among church planters. For example, Thomas Graham, one of the chief pioneers of church planter assessment instruments, describes how the Presbyterian Church in America began experimenting with church planter assessment alternatives in 1983 due to the “growing concern about more traditional methods of selecting personnel” and the high rate of failure of church planters across various sending organizations.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Don Wiggins explains from a Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) context that church planting in the 1980s was characterized by “far too many false starts and human casualties.”<sup>13</sup> A predictable solution was the implementation of church planter assessments in the early 1980s.<sup>14</sup> The church planting community has seemingly never looked back.

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<sup>11</sup> This includes The North American Mission Board, The Pillar Network, Acts 29, and Sojourn Ministries, among many others. For example, the LifeWay assessment instrument entitled the Church Planter Candidate Assessment (CPCA) is currently used by the Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Evangelical Free Church of America, and the Church of the Nazarene. This is an abbreviated list but highlights the widespread adoption of church planter assessments.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Graham, “How to Select the Best Church Planters,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (January 1987): 72-73.

<sup>13</sup> John Bradley and Don Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessments* (Colorado Springs, CO: Christian & Missionary Alliance, 2015), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Grant, “Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles,” 4.

## Objective

The historical literature indicates that church planter assessments were initially implemented from a sincere desire to improve the rate of church planter success.<sup>15</sup> This is a commendable objective and one that certainly merits creative solutions. Additionally, the Bible has been undeniably central in the development of church planter assessments since the specific skills and character traits measured by church planter assessments are generally rooted in the biblical qualifications for pastoral ministry.<sup>16</sup> However, it appears that sending organizations have proceeded directly to the development and implementation of church planter assessments without fully considering the biblical justification of the practice. Precious little has been written regarding a biblical defense for the use of assessment instruments in the context of evaluating church planters.<sup>17</sup> For years, the implied justification for the use of church planter assessments is the perceived efficacy of such tools,<sup>18</sup> yet the utility of a tool does not automatically justify its usage. Apart from the scientific rationalization, is there a biblical justification for the use of church planter assessments? What is the theological foundation that supports the implementation of church planter assessments? Given the importance of church planting and the widespread utilization of church planter assessments within modern sending agencies, it is necessary to consider whether or not church planter assessments are appropriate from a biblical perspective. As a result, the intended purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the biblical and theological justification for using scientific church planter assessments for the purpose of candidate selection.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters: A Self-Study Manual for Recruiting, Screening, Interviewing and Evaluating Qualified Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelical Association, 1988), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Only Aubrey Malphurs and John Bradley specifically deal with this topic at any length.

<sup>18</sup> Grant, "Theological Analysis of Church Planter Profiles," 4.

## **Methodology**

There are a number of potential benefits when utilizing an assessment instrument in the context of church planting. For example, a few of the cited benefits include identifying personal gifting, highlighting strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of training, and potentially averting disaster when selecting a church planter.<sup>19</sup> Although the practical benefits are widely acknowledged, there are some who frown upon the use of science as an aid for spiritual decision making and some who even considered such practices as sinful.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, a biblical evaluation is necessary to ascertain whether or not church planter assessments are an acceptable tool from a theological perspective as opposed to a practical one.

Even though Scripture does not address the specific topic of assessment instruments or the more general theme of using mathematical techniques in order to improve decision making, the biblical witness has enough to say regarding the source of math and the ultimate end of math such that a theological framework can be firmly established. As with any theological framework, the starting point should be God, his creation, and his character. Only after evaluating the implications of theology proper can the qualifications of a church planter and the biblical methods of evaluating pastoral candidates be considered. Finally, there are various inferences that can be drawn from exploring how math is used in Scripture that are worthy of reflection. In every case, the focus will be on the Bible and the corresponding implications for the use of scientific assessment instruments for the selection of church planters.

### **God's Creation, Character, and Gifting**

Church planter assessment instruments depend on mathematical algorithms, statistical relationships, and scientific methods to produce various results that are used in

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<sup>19</sup> Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessments*, 21.

the evaluation and selection of church planters. As a result, the fundamental question regarding the justification of using church planter assessment instruments centers around the biblical support for utilizing the underlying mathematical methods. If it was inappropriate to use mathematical methods for decision making within the church, church planting assessments would be rejected necessarily because of their heavy dependence upon math. Additionally, for church planter assessments to even make sense, math, and more specifically statistics, must be reliable. If this assumption is proven false, the tools would be meaningless, and the results would lead to confusion rather than assistance. Consequently, the suitability and reliability of mathematical principles are foundational for the implementation of church planter assessments, and the primary evidence in support of mathematics is found in the creation, character, and gifting of God.

### **God's Creation**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, mathematics can be defined as “the abstract science of number, quantity, and space.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, at the most basic level, the primary defense for the use of mathematics in a religious setting is rooted in the creation of quantity and space from which numerical relationships derive meaning. When God created the world, he instituted the foundational laws of physics and mathematics by which the universe is governed. Without these laws, the entire cosmos would collapse in a spectacular heap. The mathematical principles that rule creation have existed since the beginning of time and are merely discovered by man, not created by man.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, math only exists as a tool to describe what has been created. Consequently, mathematics can accurately be viewed as an integral part of creation and not as independent from

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<sup>21</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., “Mathematics,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v.

<sup>22</sup> Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Mathematics: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 17.

creation. Paul’s declaration in Colossians 1:16 that “by him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him”<sup>23</sup> categorically includes the realm of mathematics and scientific law. The phrase “in heaven and on earth” indicates the comprehensive sphere of Christ’s creative work and is intended to apply to the material and immaterial alike.<sup>24</sup> This includes but is not limited to the scientific principles that govern creation,<sup>25</sup> such as mathematics. Furthermore, the statement that “all things were created by him and for him” suggests that, not only are mathematical principles created by Christ but they have, as their ultimate end, the glory of Christ. Christ is the source of mathematics, but he is also the sustainer of mathematics. Consider Colossians 1:17 which states that “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” In a very real sense, Jesus Christ is the “cohesive” that holds the structure of mathematics together.<sup>26</sup> As Grudem asserts, Colossians 1:17 reveals that “God’s providence in creation provides a basis for science.”<sup>27</sup>

The fact that mathematical principles even exist is a compelling arguments for the existence of God.<sup>28</sup> Scientists can work within mathematical principles and can even help describe the physical laws that govern creation, but they have no answer for the source of the laws themselves.<sup>29</sup> As James Nickel points out, “[Only] biblical Christianity

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<sup>23</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995.

<sup>24</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 61-62.

<sup>25</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 316.

<sup>26</sup> James Nickel, *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2001), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 317.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 2005), 81.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 136.



can account for the ability to know mathematical truths.”<sup>30</sup> The modern day mathematician attempts to separate the practice of science from the source of science. In so doing, the practice of science has not only become an exercise devoid of theological significance, but it has also been promoted falsely as a construct opposed to the biblical worldview. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why math is often viewed by skepticism within the church. However, this is only an illusion as mathematics is not a neutral discipline.<sup>31</sup> Even those who ignore the true source of mathematics must still operate under biblical assumptions in practice. When properly understood, mathematics is essentially a theological exercise and can only be rightly applied when in submission to the Creator. An atheist may use mathematics to obtain accurate answers but will inevitably fail to acknowledge the Creator that math is intended to glorify. In fact, history has shown that mathematics eventually stagnates when employed by unbelievers yet thrives when employed by those who have submitted to a higher law.<sup>32</sup> Scripture indicates that mathematics was created by God and assumes the existence of an Intelligent Designer.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the biblical account not only identifies the source of mathematics, but it also reveals the proper application thereof. God’s command in the garden to “fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28)” applies to all elements of the earth, including the sciences. The earth is replete with numerical relationships, and it is man’s duty to exercise dominion over the earth by utilizing the mathematical principles that God embedded in the fabric of creation.<sup>34</sup> When God placed Adam in the garden to “work

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<sup>30</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 233.

<sup>31</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 196.

<sup>32</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> William Dembski and Jay Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 225.

<sup>34</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 13.

it and take care of it (Gen 2:15),” he was giving Adam the authority to employ the various resources available to him, both physical and non-physical. Even in the naming of the animals, it is implicit that Adam was using the rudimentary principles of science, such as pattern recognition, classification, and category identification. Using these tools as an aid, Adam was working within the framework that God established in order to accomplish his God-given directive. From the garden it can be observed that mankind is free to apply mathematics and even encouraged to do so as a tool to aid in the mandate of dominion.

The legitimacy of mathematics is founded in creation. When God created the world, he also created math such that it points to him as Creator. When God encouraged man to subdue the earth, he authorized math as a useful tool for employment towards that end. When he declared that his creation was “good (Gen 1:1-31),” he indicated that math is not a neutral discipline but rather one that has purpose and meaning as it relates to the created order. Mathematics represents a biblically justifiable means of describing the arrangement of God’s good creation.<sup>35</sup> Since God ordained mathematical laws, they are not inherently evil. Certainly, they can be misused, but the laws themselves were created “by him and for him.” Finally, as part of his creation, mathematics brings glory to God and ultimately points to his perfect character.

When it comes to applying math to decision making within the church, it may be argued that decision makers should seek God’s direction in concert with prayer and biblical wisdom rather than relying upon mathematical equations and scientific theory. However, such an argument presents a false dichotomy. Yes, it is absolutely true that sending agencies ought to carefully and humbly seek God’s will regarding the selection of church planters through prayer and careful study of God’s Word regarding the qualifications of a pastoral candidate, but that does not invalidate additional aids. For example, God created mankind with a logical mind and expects that logic will be

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<sup>35</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 217.

employed in decision making.<sup>36</sup> This is evidenced throughout Scripture, but an Old Testament example can be found in Isaiah 1:18 when God calls his people to “reason” together. The Hebrew word for “reason” that is used in Isaiah 1:18 is a term often used in a legal setting and describes employing logic to make a compelling case based on the presented evidence in order to prove what is right.<sup>37</sup> In the context of Isaiah, God is presenting evidence to the Israelites that they are a rebellious people who deserve judgment. Those who continue in rebellion will be justly punished, but those who repent will be mercifully forgiven. The logical response is to repent and be made “as white as snow (Isa 1:18-20).” In this case, the appeal to repent is not only grounded in the theological truths regarding God’s merciful character, but it is also rooted in an assessment of the logical consequences of repenting or not.

Similarly, in the New Testament, Paul appeals to logic in his famous Sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17. Acts 17:17 describes how Paul was “reasoning” with the people every day in the synagogue and in the marketplace to whomever was present. The Greek word for “reasoning” carries with it the connotation of “speaking to someone in order to convince”<sup>38</sup> and “arguing about differences of opinion.”<sup>39</sup> As Paul reasoned with those present, he used a series of logical arguments to call them unto repentance. In fact, the very language Paul uses “has the ring of Greek philosophy for Paul was attempting to build what bridges he could to reach the Athenian intellectuals.”<sup>40</sup> Paul acknowledges

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<sup>36</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Brown, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 407.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, “Insert Greek word,” in *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), v. 8, BibleWorks.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, “Insert Greek word,” in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (Swindon, UK: United Bible Societies, 1996), v. 8, BibleWorks.

<sup>40</sup> John Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary 26, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 370.

that the people are very religious as they built an alter to an “unknown god (Acts 17:23)” and then appeals to their religious bent by describing the gospel in a way that would resonate with them by quoting their poets and using familiar imagery. This, then, is another biblical example of how logic can be used as a helpful tool to facilitate decision making for the glory of God.

While prayer and Scripture are the twin pillars of wise decision making, God has provided additional aids that are appropriate to draw upon, such as logic as described in Isaiah 1 and Acts 17. As an extension of logic, mathematics can also be used as a valuable tool that can be incorporated into the decision-making process as needed. As Vern Poythress states, “[When] God created the world, he also ordained all the characteristics of the world. It is he who specifies all the truths about the world, including the truths of mathematics.”<sup>41</sup> Since math contains truth created and ordained by God, it is fully appropriate to appeal to such truths when evaluating various decisions in a prayerful, biblical, and logical way. It would be a lost opportunity to do otherwise.

### **God’s Character**

In Romans 1:20, Paul proclaims “[Since] the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” If mathematics is part of God’s creation and his divine nature can be seen in what has been created, it follows from Romans 1:20 that God’s attributes can be observed in mathematics. Take, for example, the reliability of mathematical principles. What makes math reliable? What ensures that two plus two equals four each and every time? Simply put, math is reliable because God is reliable. As made clear in Malachi, God never changes. In Malachi 3:6 God declares, “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not

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<sup>41</sup> Poythress, *Redeeming Mathematics*, 145.

consumed (Mal 3:6).” This passage not only highlights that the very being of God remains changeless but also his ethical dealings with his people.<sup>42</sup> The faithfulness of God and his corresponding mercy to the sons of Jacob are based on the unchanging character of God himself. His character is reliable and, as a result, his actions are reliable. Similarly, James states, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (Jas 1:17).” The implication is that good gifts come from a good God who is constant and reliable, unlike the changing of lights in the sky.<sup>43</sup> In theological language, this is called God’s immutability, and it is a central element of God’s character.<sup>44</sup> God’s immutability is essential to his character because “variation in God would spell the death of His own perfection.”<sup>45</sup> God’s people are able to rely on his promises because they are confident in the unchanging, never ending, consistency of God’s perfect character.<sup>46</sup> Even in a philosophical sense, math is necessary rather than contingent. Mathematics would function in the same way regardless of the context just as God would be the same in every conceivable world.<sup>47</sup> As Walter Smith so eloquently wrote, “We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree, and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.”<sup>48</sup>

In the same way that God is reliable, math and other scientific laws can be depended upon because of the dependable nature and character of their creator. Since the

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<sup>42</sup> Bruce Ware, “An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 24, no. 4 (1986): 431-46.

<sup>43</sup> Kurt Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary 36, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, Year), 86.

<sup>44</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 163.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 94.

<sup>46</sup> Barrett, *None Greater*, 109.

<sup>47</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 144.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Smith, “Immortal, Invisible,” *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 6.

God who ordained mathematical laws is unchanging, it naturally follows then that the laws that govern the world he created would also be unchanging.<sup>49</sup> This is the fundamental reason why two plus two will equal four in every circumstance, in every culture, in every application, and in every century. God is reliable and the laws that he created are reliable. In the context of church planter assessments, this means that such tools can be reliable indicators insofar as they utilize the mathematical laws and principles that govern creation because of the immutable nature of the Creator.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from the immutable nature of God, mathematics also displays a myriad of additional divine attributes. Consider, for example, the infinite nature of God. The mathematical model includes integers with neither beginning nor end. It is possible to subtract or add to any number regardless of how large or small. In the same way, God is an infinite being without beginning or end (Rev 1:8). Mathematical principles also apply in every time and space continuum. There is not a single inch of the universe nor a millisecond in time where two plus two does not equal four. Here is yet another glimpse into the divine nature, specifically God's omnipresence. What about the omnipotence of God? In a very real sense, the power of mathematical laws is absolute. They cannot be broken by man or beast no matter how resilient or cunning one might be. Nothing can escape the mathematical principles set forth by God, which highlights the absolute power of the law's Creator.<sup>51</sup> What about God's omniscience? Many examples can be provided here but one needs only to count the stars to marvel at God's infinite knowledge. It is

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<sup>49</sup> Poythress, *Redeeming Mathematics*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Please note that not all church planter assessments are rooted in sound mathematical principles, as many of them have never been statistically validated. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 53. As a result, not all church planter assessments should be considered reliable indicators of church planter success.

<sup>51</sup> Poythress, *Redeeming Mathematics*, 17.

estimated that there are approximately  $10^{26}$  stars.<sup>52</sup> This number is beyond human comprehension yet God numbers the stars and knows them by name.<sup>53</sup> Once again, math demonstrates the glorious attributes of God in unique and powerful ways. Furthermore, math reveals how God is orderly, precise, just, knowable yet incomprehensible, visible yet invisible, eternal, good, wise, along with many other divine characteristics.<sup>54</sup> As a result, math has been called the “handmaiden of theology”<sup>55</sup> because of how it reveals the glory of God. Truly it can be affirmed that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge (Ps 19:1-2).”

Mathematics is rooted in the character of God and reveals the divine attributes of God. God is the definitive source of each mathematical law, and they glorify him when properly employed. However, this could be taken one step further. Math, when understood from a biblical perspective, “serves to assist God’s people in fulfilling God’s mandate of worldwide evangelism.”<sup>56</sup> It is not simply acceptable to use mathematics for the glory of God, it is genuinely expected that God’s people would utilize math to aid in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It would be a waste of God’s resources and a rejection of his precious gift to spurn the tool provided by God for assisting in the pursuit of the church’s mission to reach the lost.

Math is a useful tool that can be used for God’s glory and is an extension of the dominion mandate in Genesis. Albert Mohler makes a similar point in his article on vaccinations when he asserts that Christians are authorized to use vaccinations as “an

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<sup>52</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 261.

<sup>53</sup> Gen 1:16; Ps 147:4-5.

<sup>54</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 258-63.

<sup>55</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 224.

<sup>56</sup> Nickel, *Mathematics*, 235.

extension of the doctrine of creation and the dominion God has given to humanity as revealed in the opening chapter of Genesis.”<sup>57</sup> While some may argue that getting vaccinated proves a lack of faith in a sovereign God, this stance is practically untenable when pressed to its logical conclusion as those who make such arguments still seek medical treatment for a broken arm or other illnesses. Similarly, math is an extension of the dominion mandate rooted in creation. Those who argue that math should not be used as an aid in decision making still rely on math every day when they get in a car or fly on a plane. The fundamental justification for using mathematical principles and church planter assessments by extension can be found in the created order and in the character of God. As the Psalmist proclaims, “The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them (Ps 111:2).”

### **God’s Gifting**

While the use of mathematics in general can be justified by examining God’s creation and the way things operate within the world, church planter assessments more specifically find additional support when considering God’s gifting of those whom he has called into service. From Scripture, it is clear that every human being was created by God and in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). This implies that every individual has value and divine worth as an image bearer of God.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the Bible reveals that God is intimately involved in crafting and shaping each person in a unique way.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, it can be established from Ephesians 4:11 that there are diverse roles of service as Paul declares that God “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists,

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<sup>57</sup> Albert Mohler, “Vaccines and the Christian Worldview: Principles for Christian Thinking in the Context of COVID,” Albert Mohler, last modified December 14, 2020, <https://albertmohler.com/2020/12/14/vaccines-and-the-christian-worldview-principles-for-christian-thinking-in-the-context-of-covid>.

<sup>58</sup> Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessment*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessment*, 27.



and some to be pastors and teachers.” Based on these truths, it can be concluded that God’s unique calling aligns with his unique gifting since he gifts those whom he calls.<sup>60</sup> This conclusion is enormously important in the context of church planter assessments. If God’s calling is aligned with his gifting, then it is possible to assess one’s calling by evaluating the corresponding gifts. This validates the objective of church planter assessments which seek to evaluate an individual’s gifting by mathematically measuring skills, temperaments, and abilities in order to identify an individual’s calling.

A biblical example of how God uniquely gifts those whom he has called can be found in Exodus 31:6. As God was instructing Israel in the building of the tabernacle, he declares to Moses that “in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you.” This passage demonstrates that God provides individuals with the skill necessary to do the tasks that he has called them to do. God was assuring Moses that, even though the task to build the tabernacle appeared difficult, the necessary skills had been given to the Israelite community to successfully complete the job.

The analogy of the church as the body of Christ teaches a similar message. Paul says in Ephesians 4:16 that “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” In the parallel passage of 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul highlights the fact that “the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.” The implication is that each member of the body serves a different function but is necessary for the growth of the whole. The unique gifting of every member enables the mission to be accomplished when the parts are working in harmony. Consequently, church planter assessments are not only justifiable but are also

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<sup>60</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 80.

extremely beneficial since they assist in the discovery of one's God-given gifts so that those skills can be most utilized for the benefit of the body of Christ and the advancement of the kingdom of God.<sup>61</sup>

Fundamental to the implementation of church planter assessments is the biblical truth that God uniquely gifts individuals for accomplishing their specific calling. If this assumption was inaccurate, church planter assessments would be measuring characteristics of individuals that may or may not relate to their calling to plant a church, and the results would be spurious at best. However, given the biblical witness, there is a link between gifting and calling, and church planter assessments are helpful when evaluating particular gifts because not all who desire to plant a church are called to do so. The passage in Ephesians 4 makes this abundantly clear since only "some" are called to be pastors and not "all." Furthermore, the use of math systematically helps reduce bias in the process of gift evaluation. The selection of King David in 1 Samuel 16 is a prime example of how personal perceptions can be misleading. David's brothers were initially paraded before Samuel under the assumption that they possessed the necessary qualities for serving as king. In the same way, well-meaning Christians are often encouraged to seek the role of a church planter based on invalid assumptions regarding their gifting. The use of mathematics and data analytics can help cut through the fog and provide objective measures for evaluating temperaments, skills, gifts, and abilities which ought to improve the probability of selecting the right candidate.

There is an important distinction that needs to be made between God's gifting and God's design. The few sources that specifically discuss the theological justification for church planter assessments suggest that the primary justification is based on God's innate design of an individual. For example, Aubrey Malphurs states that God's design is unique for each individual and "includes such things as our temperaments and our natural

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<sup>61</sup> Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessment*, 24.

gifts, talents, and abilities.”<sup>62</sup> Consequently, “God’s call for our lives can to a great extent be detected by his design of our lives.”<sup>63</sup> Using this logic, church planter assessments are valid insofar as they detect God’s innate design which indicates God’s calling. John Bradley uses the same logic when considering Exodus 31 as he locates the skill given to the tabernacle workers as being part of their innate design. When seeking for biblical justification for church planter assessments Bradley states that “Exodus 31:6 was key Scripture I was looking for—God declaring that He had created us with innate ability to do certain tasks.”<sup>64</sup> The problem with this line of reasoning is twofold. First, the interpretation of Exodus 31:6 that the skill given to the tabernacle workers was based on their innate design is hermeneutically flawed. The context of the passage clearly highlights that it was the indwelling of the Spirit of God that led to the increase in wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and workmanship (Ex 31:3). As Ferguson clarifies, the skill given to the workers in Exodus 31 came from the Holy Spirit<sup>65</sup> and was not part of the innate design of the individuals themselves. The second problem associated with the innate design argument is that there is a significant difference between God’s gifting and God’s innate design. Innate design is a static construct given to individuals at birth, whereas God’s gifting is a continual process of growth and maturation that follows from a variety of formative processes including conversion, regeneration, the indwelling of the Spirit, discipleship, church teaching, edification, among others. The point is that God uses various circumstances, people, events, and the guiding of the Spirit to shape an individual’s character and gifting for ministry. The implication is that a particular candidate may not have the required gifting to be a successful church planter presently

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<sup>62</sup> Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 80.

<sup>64</sup> Bradley and Wiggins, *A Practical Theology of Assessment*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22.

but may grow into an effective planter as the necessary gifts are further developed over time. This is an encouraging conclusion and one that is completely absent in the innate design argument. If the skill to be an effective church planter is based on innate design only then there is no hope for those who do not have what it takes from birth, which is an unfortunate outcome of this line of reasoning. Such logic has the potential to severely discourage aspiring church planters and is an additional reason why it is essential to view the skill that aligns with calling as gifting rather than innate design.

## **Church Planter Qualifications and Evaluation**

### **Church Planter Qualifications**

In addition to God's creation, character, and gifting, further justification for the use of church planter assessments can be found in the biblical qualifications of a pastor. Church planting is, by definition, a pastoral role.<sup>66</sup> As a result, it is helpful to acknowledge that there are a set of pastoral qualifications laid out in Scripture that are equally relevant for church planters.<sup>67</sup> The lists of qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 are especially revealing as they are remarkably detailed. Paul has carefully provided a thorough description of what a pastor ought to look like. This insinuates that churches ought to evaluate potential elders and pastoral candidate to assess whether or not they satisfy the biblical qualifications of the office. After all, what would be the point in providing a list of qualifications if they were not intended to be used for the purpose of evaluating and selecting pastors? First Timothy 5:22 also provides warrant to be thoughtful in the selection of men set apart for ministry as Paul warns, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily." To that end, churches typically organize a pastor search

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<sup>66</sup> H. Stanley Wood, *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 30.

<sup>67</sup> Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 84.

committee to evaluate, analyze, assess, rank, and eventually select a pastor. This evaluation is carried out by church members who utilize various means available to them such as reading resumes, conducting interviews, observing sermons, employing logic, among others. Even still, the qualifications presented in Scripture are merely a baseline, and there is still potential for mistakes. Search committees may lack information, ignore information, or hire a qualified candidate who is not a good fit for the context. Such nuances make it important to employ all the tools available when selecting a pastor.

It is universally acknowledged that pastoral evaluations are not only appropriate but also prudent, especially in light of the list of qualifications presented in Scripture and the risk of hiring an unqualified candidate. Church planter assessments, then, are simply an additional tool for evaluating the qualifications of a pastoral candidate and are extremely similar to the techniques employed during an interview. In both cases data are provided, received, and interpreted in order to assist in the evaluation of a pastoral candidate. Using this logic, it is just as appropriate to use an assessment instrument as it is to use a series of interviews as an aid in the selection process of church planters.

### **Church Planter Evaluation**

The biblical qualifications of a pastor are obviously important to evaluate when selecting a church planter. However, church planter assessments also measure numerous personalities and character traits that are generally assumed to be influential when planting a church. For example, the North American Mission Board's Church Planter Initial Assessment instrument measures broad factors such as leadership, vision, and multiplication along with over forty additional subcategories that roll up into an overall score.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the underlying principle that undergirds all church planter

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<sup>68</sup> The CPIA was provided to the author by the North American Mission Board as part of an initiative to improve the assessment instrument.

assessment instruments is that personal characteristics, traits, and attributes are observable and that they are measurable. Is there biblical evidence that supports the idea that a person's character can be observed by others? After all, as 1 Samuel 16:7 declares, "man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Can anyone other than God truly measure what is inside a person or observe what is in the heart? Can human perceptions regarding how an individual is gifted by God even achieve some level of accuracy?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to Scripture where it will be shown that there are a number of passages that imply the possibility of observing and measuring personalities and character traits. For example, when speaking to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:34, Jesus states that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." The Greek word *περίσσευμα*, which is translated "fills," is used only here in Matthew and literally means "abundance" or "overflow."<sup>69</sup> In other words, Jesus is saying that the heart is full, in fact it is overflowing, and the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart.<sup>70</sup> Hence this can be viewed as an example of how a person's gifting may be observed by others. According to Jesus, what a person says, and presumably what he does, is a clear indication of that which is inside of them. Consequently, church planter assessments have legitimacy since they are designed as observation tools which capture what is spoken in written form in order to draw conclusions regarding what is unwritten, namely the character of the heart.

The concept of speech revealing what is in the heart is not unique to Matthew's Gospel since this notion is referenced throughout the Bible. James provides a similar perspective in James 3:11-12. In the context of controlling the tongue, James asks

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<sup>69</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33a, ed. Bruce Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Year), 350.

<sup>70</sup> John Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1990), 273.

whether or not a fountain can produce “both fresh and bitter water” or whether “a fig tree can produce olives or a vine produce figs.” These rhetorical questions assume a negative response since salt water is uncharacteristic of a spring, just as olives are uncharacteristic of a fig tree.<sup>71</sup> Salt water does not come forth from a spring because that would not be consistent with the nature of a spring. A fig tree does not produce olives because it was created as a fig tree, not an olive tree. In the same way, these illustrations insinuate that what is produced, whether speech or actions, ultimately reveals the character of a person, “for each tree is known by its own fruit (Luke 6:44).”

One could argue that these passages reference good and evil rather than the more neutral character traits that are measured in a church planter assessment, such as leadership and vision. However, while Matthew 12 and the corresponding passage in James 3 certainly include the concepts of good and evil, the same principle applies to the personalities and characteristics associated with an individual’s gifting and pastoral calling. This can be seen more clearly in 1 Timothy 4:11-16, a passage which is particularly relevant for church planting and pastoral ministry in general. In this text, Paul is instructing Timothy to persevere in the pastoral responsibilities given to him.<sup>72</sup> Since Timothy was a young pastor and there was a tendency for others to “look down on his youthfulness (v. 12),” Paul charges Timothy to “show yourself an example of those who believe (v. 12)” and to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (v. 13). He even encourages Timothy to “take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all” (v. 15). The reason Paul was urging Timothy to strive after excellence in the reading, preaching, and teaching of the Word was so that others would observe his progress and presumably affirm his calling

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<sup>71</sup> Richardson, *James*, 161.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary 34, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 137.

to the pastorate. Thomas Lea and Hayne Giffin write in their commentary on 1 Timothy, “If Timothy obeyed Paul’s advice, his friends in Ephesus would not see him as an inexperienced youth but as a growing man of God.”<sup>73</sup> Evidently, Paul was assuming that Timothy’s pastoral gifts and God-given leadership abilities would be observed by the early church in such a way that his calling would be affirmed. Here, then, is biblical support for the concept of how characteristics and abilities associated with one’s gifting and pastoral calling can be displayed, observed, and even evaluated by others.

Not only does the biblical witness imply that personal character can be observed, it actually invites Christians to actively evaluate others accordingly. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he warns his followers that there will be “false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt 7:15).” This is a serious caution given by Jesus and one that is doubly important to heed because of the apparent deception.<sup>74</sup> Even though false prophets are ravenous wolves on the inside, they present themselves as sheep on the outside. How will a Christian be able to identify such deceptive characters? Jesus concludes in Matthew 7:20 that “you will know them by their fruit.” In similar fashion to previously mentioned texts, a person’s character is revealed by the words and deeds that proceed from the heart. However, this text is slightly different, in that it specifically encourages believers to observe the fruit of potential leaders in order to evaluate their character. Church planter assessments seek to evaluate character by asking questions regarding fruit and validating that fruit with the perspective of others who are closely associated with the individual in question.

In summary, Scripture teaches that internal characteristics are revealed by what proceeds out of the mouth. An individual’s fruit ultimately demonstrates a person’s

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<sup>73</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 140.

<sup>74</sup> Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1982), 339.



character and discloses elements of their gifting. Additionally, pastoral gifts and abilities can be observed and measured as indicated in 1 Timothy, and Christians are even encouraged to evaluate the fruit of potential leaders when affirming their calling. This is particularly significant in the context of church planter assessments since they are developed under the assumption that character traits and pastoral gifts can and even should be measured.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, church planter assessments are employed by sending agencies because assessment instruments in general have been scientifically proven to improve the selection of qualified candidates. The practicality of assessment instruments is evidenced by the secular industries and represents significant potential within the field of church planting. However, the theological justification for using assessment instruments to improve the selection of church planters has received little attention since initial adoption in the early 1980s. A small handful of accessible writings address the biblical support of church planter assessments but do so only at a cursory level. This research provides a more thorough treatment of the subject.

Starting with creation, a theological framework for the use of church planter assessments, and mathematics in general, can be established. Math is part of God's created order, and the use of math is implied in God's command to exercise dominion over the earth. Additionally, math reveals elements of God's perfect character and demonstrate his divine nature in unique and powerful ways. Furthermore, God gifts his people with unique skills and character traits that can be observed and even measured because of how one's fruit reveals one's character. Churches are expected to assess pastoral candidates to evaluate whether or not they possess the biblical qualifications for a pastor and are encouraged to employ the tools and methods available to them for this purpose. As a result, church planter assessments stand on a firm theological foundation.

Successful church planting requires effective leaders, and sending agencies ought to utilize the tools and aids that God has provided for the selection of qualified candidates in order to best steward available resources. Given the theological justification and practical significance, church planter assessments ought to be used for the glory of God.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEFINITION OF CHURCH PLANTER SUCCESS

#### Introduction

##### Defining the Problem

In simple terms, assessment instruments are predictive tools. They are designed to predict a particular outcome in the workplace that is chiefly desirable by the hiring entity. Experts in the field of workplace assessments agree that “the primary inference in employment contexts is that a score on a selection procedure predicts subsequent work behavior.”<sup>1</sup> While the outcome may vary depending on the nature of the job, the outcome predicted is generally some measurement of success. Fundamentally, the objective of any assessment tool is to aid in the selection of more qualified candidates by predicting which candidates will be more successful or, at the very least, have a higher probability of being successful than the alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

In the church planting context, assessment instruments are widely used by sending organizations to predict the success and failure of future church planters in order to improve the financial stewardship of limited church planting resources by increasing the odds of success.<sup>3</sup> For example, if one church planter has a higher probability of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Sackett and Nancy Tippins, *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Bowling Green, OH: Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, 2018), 5. The Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology developed key principles for the validation and use of selection procedures, including workplace assessment instruments which are documented in *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures*. These principles represent the scientifically agreed upon methods for using such instruments and are considered the gold standard for the proper and ethical treatment of selection procedures. Consequently, the methods used in this research will closely align with the procedures laid out by the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology in the aforementioned document.

<sup>2</sup> Sackett and Tippins, *Principles for Validation*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement*

success than others, it is considered good stewardship to financially support the church planter with the highest success probability as opposed to the other potential candidates, especially when funds are limited. Church planter assessments help facilitate the church planter selection process by forecasting success. Consequently, the proper implementation and evaluation of church planter assessments requires a clear, consistent, biblical, and measurable definition of church planter success. The aspiration to increase success is a worthy objective and assessment instruments are suitable tools, but without a definition of success, church planter assessments predict an outcome that is ambiguous and potentially undesirable.<sup>4</sup> Regrettably, such a definition is largely absent from the available literature. Significant research revealed no single publication in print that defines church planter success in connection with the creation, implementation, and validation of a church planter assessment instrument.<sup>5</sup>

### **What Is at Stake?**

From a practical and mathematical standpoint, an assessment instrument can only be validated in association with a clear definition of success. It may appear obvious, but success must be defined and measured in order to test whether or not a church planter assessment accurately predicts the desired outcome. In other words, the validity of any church planter assessment rests on how well the assessment predicts success as defined, or perhaps assumed, by the various instrument administrators. It is impossible to observe

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*Makers* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Daman, “Defining Success in Pastoral Ministry Part 1: When Our Definition of Success Becomes Misguided,” Wheaton College: Billy Graham Center, August 12, 2021, <https://wheatonbillygraham.com/defining-success-in-pastoral-ministry-part-1-of-3/>

<sup>5</sup> LifeWay’s Church Planter Candidate Assessment instrument (CPCA) is one of the only church planter assessment instruments that claims to be statistically validated. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 53. However, the definition of success that was used in the creation and validation of the CPCA is unavailable. Multiple attempts to contact LifeWay leadership through phone and email were unfruitful. A brief discussion with Kevin Walker (Research Associate at LifeWay responsible for the CPCA) in August of 2020 revealed that the CPCA success criterion is not available nor is the evidence of statistical validation.

how well a particular tool predicts success when success remains ambiguous. Defining success is not just an important step in the process of validation, it is a necessary one. More specifically, it is essential to define church planter success in order to evaluate the validity of NAMB's Church Planter Initial Assessment (CPIA) instrument, which is one of the primary objectives of this research. As a result, defining success is a profoundly practical exercise for this study. While defining success is necessary for the validation of NAMB's CPIA, it has significantly broader implications for the church planting community.

As mentioned in chapter one, church planting is risky and has the potential to create substantial collateral damage. The presumed failure rate is high resulting in discouragement, depression, and resignations of church planters across the globe. In fact, the data suggest that at least one out of three church planters will walk away from their endeavor without having planted a viable congregation.<sup>6</sup> The statement that “thousands are leaving the ministry convinced that they are failures”<sup>7</sup> is perhaps doubly true of church planters. Without a clear definition of success, church planters and those that evaluate church planters fill the void with personal expectations and unspoken assumptions. As Kent and Barbara Hughes rightly point out, “the feelings of failure are usually fueled by misguided expectations of success.”<sup>8</sup> What is more, the weightiness of the ministry also contributes to the intense feelings of responsibility and culpability. When faced with the perception of failure, church planters often feel guilty since church planting has eternal consequences. A misguided view of success has the potential to distort the purpose of ministry, the understanding of ecclesiology, and the truths of

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<sup>6</sup> Chris Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal: How to Rethink Size, Success, and Significance in Ministry* (Middletown, DE: Author Academy Elite, 2019), xxv.

<sup>7</sup> Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, 9.

theology, simply because it places a burden on church planters that God did not intend.<sup>9</sup> All of this highlights the importance of developing an accurate and biblically appropriate definition of church planter success.

### **The Challenge of Defining Success**

What is church planter success? How can it be defined? Are there degrees of success that can be identified? While important, developing a definition of church planter success is surprisingly challenging and inherently precarious. If a church plant never reaches financial independence but continues for decades with a bi-vocational pastor, is it successful? If a church planter engages with a community and sees numerous lost souls come to Christ but never establishes a corporate gathering after three years of ministry, is the effort a failure? How should a rural church plant be classified if it closes the church doors after years of faithful evangelism and service to the needy? Hopefully these questions demonstrate the need to proceed with caution and sober-mindedness. Defining success will inevitably label the opposite as failure and will disparage the precious investment of labor, prayer, evangelism, fellowship, planning, fundraising, discipleship, and the like for church plants and planters that do not align with what is classified as success.<sup>10</sup>

The simple fact that a consensus has not been reached regarding the definition of church planter success is indicative of the prevailing difficulties. Certainly, one of the challenges to overcome in developing a definition of success is the fact that the topic is filled with strong opinions and elicits even deeper emotions. For example, after interviewing one hundred pastors of large and flourishing congregations, Darius Salter

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<sup>9</sup> Daman, “Defining Success in Pastoral Ministry Part 1: When Our Definition of Success Becomes Misguided.”

<sup>10</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, xxv.

notes that “no two pastors defined success in exactly the same terms.”<sup>11</sup> This result leads Salter to question whether or not it is even possible to define ministry success, arguing that “ministry success is paradoxical,” and any attempt to define it “is both futile and false.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed the lack of agreement among pastors and church planters regarding success reveals the underlying problem with using expert opinion as the rule for ascertaining critical definitions.

### **Guiding Principles**

Given the various challenges and strong opinions, it is necessary to begin with a few guiding principles. First, a church planter’s identity rests not on personal achievements but on the marvelous work of Jesus Christ. As Henri Nouwen declared, “If you know you are the Beloved, you can live with an enormous amount of success and an enormous amount of failure without losing your identity.”<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the definition of success and failure, a church planter’s worth, hope, and joy are rooted in Christ and in Christ alone.<sup>14</sup> The church planter has a permanent hope, an eternal destiny, a certain victory, a precious Savior, and a guaranteed salvation no matter the results. Any follower of Christ, including church planters, can say along with Paul, “may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14).”

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<sup>11</sup> Darius Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry: Profiling Pastoral Success in Flourishing Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1990), 54.

<sup>12</sup> Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry*, 195. Ironically, Salter’s work is based on surveys and interviews of “successful” pastors as defined by Salter to be pastors and church planters leading congregations of over five hundred members and averaging approximately 1,650 attendees. Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry*, 12. This sample is not only significantly biased but also presupposes a definition of success that is numerically driven and untenable for the vast majority of pastors in the world.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Nouwen, “Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry: Jesus Establishes the True Order for Spiritual Work,” *Leadership Magazine: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 85.

<sup>14</sup> For example, John 1:12, Gal 2:20, 2 Cor 5:17, Rom 8:37.

A second guiding principle is that man is not the ultimate judge of pastoral success.<sup>15</sup> Only God can perfectly judge the righteous deeds of his servants, and he will reward those who serve him well, even when there is little success as measured by human standards.<sup>16</sup> Scripture repeatedly clarifies that success in God’s kingdom is radically different than success as measured by man.<sup>17</sup> There are numerous examples in the Bible that highlight the staggering difference between man’s interpretation of success and God’s righteous evaluation. Moses was able to procure water from a rock to the delight of the masses but to his shame before God.<sup>18</sup> Asa was able to use an alliance with the king of Aram to escape certain defeat—a brilliant military tactic that produced admirable results by human standards but a clear lack of faith in God, and an action that led to Asa’s downfall.<sup>19</sup> Abraham’s calculated interaction with Hagar successfully produced a child but had disastrous consequences because it was not according to the will of God.<sup>20</sup> Solomon, with his wealth, wisdom, and wives would be considered a success by any worldly measure, yet “his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God” and, as a result, his reign came to a tragic end.<sup>21</sup> These examples and many more highlight how the final judgement regarding what is and is not success must be reserved for God.

Finally, and in light of the previous points, God’s Word must be the standard by which church planter success is defined. Opinions will vary, personal experiences will differ, and disagreements abound, yet God has provided enough instruction in Scripture

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<sup>15</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Rom 2:16, 2 Tim 4:8, and 1 Cor 3:9-15. The passage in 1 Corinthians is particularly instructive as it highlights that man’s work will be “tested by fire” and the eternally significant work will be rewarded. Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 68.

<sup>17</sup> See Matt 18:1-6, 20:16.

<sup>18</sup> Num 20.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Chron 16.

<sup>20</sup> Gen 16.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Kgs 11.



such that the general parameters of success in church planting has a foundation that is knowable, if only in part. When evaluating the definitions of success, God's Word is the ultimate source of truth and the definitive basis of pastoral accountability.

### **The Numbers Definition**

The most commonly employed measurements of church planter success involve some variation of the "numbers definition." This definition assumes that church planter success is directly related to the magnitude of some tangible and numerical figure. For example, common numbers definitions relate church planter success to the number of church attendees, the number of church members, the number of quarterly baptisms, the number of families serving the church, the number of dollars associated with the church budget, the number of lay leaders involved in discipleship, the number of disciples being made, the number of dollars received in annual tithes, or other variants of the same.

Arguments have been made for decades in support of one or more of these numerically-based definitions. As a case in point, Myron Widmer argued in a 1986 *Adventist Review* editorial that church attendance ought to replace church baptisms as the primary definition of success.<sup>22</sup> Widmer's primary rationale for rejecting the baptism measurement was that it "could lead to the misdirection of a church's efforts" as a pastor may place too much emphasis on evangelism over pastoral care.<sup>23</sup> For Widmer, church attendance was considered to be a more holistic measure. It will come as no surprise that numerical growth continues to be the primary yardstick for measuring success in today's data-driven environment.<sup>24</sup> While each one of the measurements that fall within the numerical-success category have nuances and slightly different focus areas, the collective

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<sup>22</sup> Myron Widmer, "Baptisms: Sign of Success?," *Adventist Review*, November 1986, 4. While Widmer was focused on church success rather than church planting success, the differences are minimal. The thrust of his argument applies to both existing churches and new churches alike.

<sup>23</sup> Widmer, "Baptisms: Sign of Success," 5.

<sup>24</sup> Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry*, 134.

emphasis is on numbers, size, and magnitude. In a digital age where everyone tries to fit everything into a spreadsheet, numbers are king, even in church planting.<sup>25</sup>

Even when numerical success is not overtly championed, it is so ingrained into the fabric of church planting language today that it is implied. While the voices in the church planting community do not singularly advocate numerical definitions of success, there is a subtle message that, in aggregate, overwhelmingly promotes numerical growth.<sup>26</sup> The modern-day church planter is bombarded with insights from church growth experts, marketing strategists, launch teams, cultural specialists, and mega-church success stories that the message is communicated loud and clear. Success will be measured by the size of the church's membership. Church plant coaches communicate to young planters that "healthy churches are growing churches."<sup>27</sup> Unspoken expectations have reached a point in church planting and in pastoral ministry where "nearly all of our efforts to help churches are directed at making them grow numerically."<sup>28</sup> Unknowingly, Great Commission language has also contributed to a measurement mentality. As Colin Marshall and Tony Payne write, "the goal of Christian ministry is relatively simple and, in a sense measurable: are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ?"<sup>29</sup> Such statements, while appropriate in context, are subtle reminders to church planters that others expect tangible results, namely disciples, to be successful. Even the numerical reporting statistics that church planters are required to provide to sending organizations help further internalize the feeling that success is viewed in a numerical light.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jay Gilmore, "Measuring the Pastor's Success," *Ministry: International Journal for Clergy*, (May 1990): 12.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> This statement was an often-repeated refrain by well-meaning church plant coaches during the late 2000s and my time as a church planter in Northern Virginia.

<sup>28</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Sydney, New South Wales: Mathias Media, 2021), 14.

<sup>30</sup> This insight comes from personal experience as a church planter supported by the Southern

There are obvious benefits to using a numbers definition of success in church planting. The primary benefit is that such measurements are easily obtainable. Anyone can track attendance, baptisms, or financial contributions with pen and pad. Data regarding quarterly and yearly progress are available and can be collected, analyzed, and visualized without significant effort. Secondly, these figures are easily comparable. A church planter in any given situation and context can be held up against another using a plethora of statistics. Thirdly, numerical success measures are easy to understand and communicate to internal and external stakeholders.

Nevertheless, numbers can be misleading. While an increase in church numbers may potentially point to spiritual growth, they do not automatically indicate as much. Many claim to be God's children and yet are far from the Lord and continue to practice lawlessness (Matt 7:22-23). In this world, the wheat reside along with the tares, and man is unable to calculate the percentage of each (Matt 13:24-30). The visible church does not always align with the invisible church. What is more, a church plant with diminutive statistics may be enormously fruitful. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a tiny mustard seed. When viewed by the world, it may appear insignificant, yet it is poised for dramatic growth (Matt 13:31-32). A church plant may follow the same pattern and have minimal numerical significance while abundant spiritual fruit is developing behind the scenes. Consequently, from a biblical perspective, numbers do not tell the whole story.<sup>31</sup> If church attendance or some other form of numerical success is the

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Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and the North American Mission Board during the late 2000s and early 2010s. The quarterly reporting requirements included measurements such as the number of church attendees, financial giving, number of baptisms, etc. The most recent quarterly reports requested by the North American Mission Board provided for this analysis in July 2020 are less focused on numerical growth and more focused on strategies that the church planter is using to make disciples, multiply churches, pursue sustainability, and reach new believers. That being said, an entire generation of church planters have been measured by numerical growth statistics, and this mentality has lodged deep into the modern-day church planting psyche.

<sup>31</sup> Shawn Lovejoy, *The Measure of Our Success: An Impassioned Plea to Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 21.

measure by which a church planter is evaluated, there may be an unhealthy temptation to draw a crowd and increase numbers using worldly methods.

### **Alternative Definitions of Success**

The limits associated with numerical measures signals a need for alternative definitions of church planter success. For example, consider the “sustainability argument.” Church planters who are able to lead a church towards financial independence and long-term sustainability may be classified as successful regardless of how large the church becomes.<sup>32</sup> Multiplication is another example of an alternative definition of success since a church planter who makes disciples or who fosters the missionary beginning of another church may be considered successful, even if the original church plant remains seemingly insignificant from a numerical perspective.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, success can be defined as a church planter who remains faithful to his calling to preach the Word of God, prayerfully leads, and shepherds the flock in spite of lackluster numerical growth. Likewise, church planters who produce spiritual fruit and demonstrate growth with respect to personal piety and corporate spirituality may also be evaluated as successful apart from the various numerical considerations. What are the alternative definitions of success and what are the advantages and disadvantages associated with each?

### **Sustainability**

The first alternative definition of success that warrants discussion is the concept of sustainability. Discussions with leadership at the North American Mission Board about the classification of church planter success revealed that sustainability is their

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<sup>32</sup> The North American Mission Board would classify a sustainable church plant as a successful church plant.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to sustainability, NAMB promotes multiplication as a secondary criterion of success.

primary criterion. To be more specific, the expectation at NAMB is that a church planter is able to establish a church that is self-supporting at the end of three years when external funding drops out. If a church plant is supporting itself, holding corporate worship services, and giving to missions after a three-year period, NAMB would consider the church plant and the church planter a success.<sup>34</sup> One of the advantages of this definition of success is that, while some numerical growth is necessary for a church to obtain financial independence, the primary objective is not numerical growth but rather a lasting gospel witness. Church numbers are inevitably required for a church plant to support itself financially, but the pressure to grow large and grow quickly is mostly removed. Furthermore, persistence is required by a church planter to continue past the point of external financial support.

An additional benefit of defining success in terms of sustainability is that success may be achieved with very little financial resources. For example, bi-vocational church planters may labor in ministry for many years with limited church giving or financial support from sending organizations. Bi-vocational church planting was modeled by Paul, is exceptionally common around the world, and is often flourishing with opportunity.<sup>35</sup> House churches represent another example of achieving sustainability with limited resources. The house church model provides a unique prospect for church planters to continue in ministry when contributions are low and is well represented in Scripture.<sup>36</sup> Bi-vocational church planters or church planters who follow a house church approach may achieve sustainability success even when the numerical measurements of success suggest otherwise.

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<sup>34</sup> Ken Miller (Assessment Coordinator, NAMB) and Randy Ferguson (Pre-Assessment Director, NAMB), interview with author, December 7, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Peyton Jones, *Church Plantology: The Art and Science of Planting Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 358.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book* (Chicago: Tyndale, 2009), 14.

Sustainability success aligns with the desire of sending organizations to develop long-term partnerships and lasting gospel witnesses. The longer a church lasts within a community, the more opportunity a church has for gospel growth and kingdom expansion. Consequently, sustainability represents a viable alternative definition for church planter success and one that does not always align with the traditional measurements.<sup>37</sup>

### **Multiplication**

In addition to sustainability, the North American Mission Board advocates that church planters should lead churches to multiply themselves. Multiplication, then, is another level of success over and above sustainability. The vision is fully realized when churches multiply churches. Consequently, a church planter who leads a church to plant another church ought to be considered successful.<sup>38</sup> One potential argument against multiplication as a separate definition of success is that financial growth and membership growth are required for multiplication, which are already accounted for in the numerical measurements. If this were the case, multiplication would be a redundant definition. However, while a church planter who plants another church is likely to be classified as successful by many of the traditional measurements, this is not required to be the case. For example, a small church plant may give sacrificially in terms of people and financial resources for the sake of starting another gospel witness and never achieve significant numerical growth. As a result, it is possible to achieve multiplication success without obtaining numerical success, which adds justification for multiplication as an alternative definition.

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<sup>37</sup> One potential downside of defining success in terms of sustainability is the fact that church planters may be tempted to focus more on the affluent neighborhoods rather than the impoverished neighborhoods in an effort to increase giving so as to obtain financial independence more quickly.

<sup>38</sup> This definition was obtained from interviews with NAMB personnel.

While multiplication success may be evaluated based on whether another church was planted, multiplication success may also be defined as making disciples; after all, disciple making is at the very heart of fulfilling the Great Commission.<sup>39</sup> Church planters who are making disciples of Jesus Christ and who are teaching others to do the same could be considered successful regardless of how well they score on other numerical measurements. Accordingly, multiplication is a helpful construct when evaluating the success of church planters.

For the purpose of this research, the sustainability and multiplication criteria of success will receive considerable analytical attention given the fact that the stated purpose of this analysis is to statistically validate NAMB's church planter assessment instrument. Both criteria represent useful alternatives that have biblical merit and practical benefits. While there is some overlap with these two alternative definitions and some of the traditional measurements of success, there is enough distinction such that variance is expected in the data.

### **Faithfulness**

Perhaps the leading alternative to a numerical definition of success is the concept of faithfulness.<sup>40</sup> In terms of church planter success, faithfulness represents the obedience and persistence of a church planter to actively pursue a God-given calling to reach the lost, make disciples, and serve the local body through church planting.<sup>41</sup> The important distinction to be made between a numerical definition of success and a faithfulness definition of success is that the former is focused on results whereas the latter is focused on the work. In other words, faithfulness is not the means by which success is

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<sup>39</sup> Francis Chan, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 34.

<sup>40</sup> Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 8.

achieved. Instead, faithfulness is the definition of success itself.<sup>42</sup> One can be faithful in church planting with or without visible results. Under this paradigm, a church planter who diligently serves the body and faithfully proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ would be classified as a success regardless of whether or not he experiences significant numerical growth.<sup>43</sup>

A compelling biblical case can be made in support of this criterion of success. Consider, for example, Jesus' famous parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a departing master who entrusts his possessions to three different servants, each according to his ability. To one of the servants he gives five talents, to another two talents, and to the third one talent. The first two servants immediately start working diligently to multiply the master's treasure while the third servant digs a hole in the ground and buries what was given to him. Upon the master's return, he praises the two servants who actively stewarded the resources that were entrusted to them and were able to produce an additional five and two talents respectively. To both it is said, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and the master promises to give them more responsibility in the future because they were each "faithful with a few things (Matt 25:21)." However, the third servant is rebuked for his slothfulness as the master declares, "You wicked, lazy servant" and removes the given resources from the third servant's care. This language is perfectly maintained in the parallel Lukan passage (Luke 19).

While there are minor exegetical disagreements on the fringes of this parable, the broad meaning is widely accepted as being a clear reference to the church. For example, John Philips argues that "the period between the nobleman's departure and

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<sup>42</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Daman, "Defining Success in Pastoral Ministry Part 3," Wheaton College: Billy Graham Center, October 9, 2021, <https://wheatonbillygraham.com/defining-success-in-ministry-part-3-by-glenn-daman/>



return represents the period between the Lord's ascension and the rapture" and explains, therefore, that this parable is a parable for the church age.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, R. C. H. Lenski identifies the slothful servant as "a picture of all those in the church who for any reason refuse to use the gifts of Christ in his service."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, J. C. Ryle declares that "the story of the talents calls on the church to work" since "we are all God's servants" and "we all have talents entrusted to our charge."<sup>46</sup>

As for the general interpretation of the parable, the master is unquestionably a reference to Jesus. The timeframe between the master's departure and his return represents the time between Jesus' ascension and second coming.<sup>47</sup> The servants in the parable are assumed to be Jesus' followers who have been entrusted with his treasure, such as the glorious riches of the gospel, various spiritual gifts, and a portion of his resources.<sup>48</sup> The servants in the parable, and followers of Christ by association, are expected to steward the resources well for the advancement of the master's kingdom and the praise of the master's glory.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, those who are good and faithful stewards of God's resources will be praised, whereas poor and lazy stewards can expect a rebuke.

The master's deliberate response to his servants is of particular interest when considering the definition of success. The repeated praise of the faithful servants provides

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<sup>44</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 466.

<sup>45</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1964), 976.

<sup>46</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Matthew*, Crossway Classic Commentaries 1, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 242.

<sup>47</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 507.

<sup>48</sup> Disagreements exist among experts regarding the identity of the third servant as he was thrown into a place of darkness and gnashing of teeth. Given his destination, it is challenging to consider him a true follower of Jesus; however, some argue that he is only being cast aside to witness the torment of unbelievers while his personal salvation is sure. Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, 469. Either way, the primary principle and corresponding application for church planter success does not hinge on this nuance, so a more expanded treatment is unnecessary.

<sup>49</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary 22, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 374.

extraordinary insight regarding Jesus' criteria for a job well done. As a result, this passage offers a unique picture of Jesus' definition of success for those who have been entrusted with his treasures, including but certainly not limited to church planters. In this parable, the master continually equates success with faithful service.<sup>50</sup> The master not only calls the servants "good and faithful servants," but he also provides a specific reason for his praise, namely that they were "faithful." Conversely, the wicked servant was rebuked for his laziness. The faithfulness of the good stewards is sharply contrasted with the laziness of the wicked steward.<sup>51</sup> Given this passage, it can be concluded that Jesus' criteria for success is chiefly related to the faithfulness of those whom he has called to be his servants and not necessarily associated with the results that they are able to produce.<sup>52</sup>

The master treats both faithful servants equally even though one produced five talents and another produced two. It appears that the resulting production had little bearing on the ultimate classification of success. They were both applauded because they were faithful, not because they were productive. Additionally, the lazy servant was not condemned because of his lack of production. The master makes it clear that it would have been acceptable if the wicked servant had simply put the money in the bank and acquired interest. It was not a lack of production but a lack of faithful service that brought disapproval. In all cases, faithfulness was the standard for evaluation.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, Jesus' expectation for his servants today is biblically linked with faithful service, regardless of how much production is achieved. This criterion of faithfulness applies to all believers including pastors, church planters, deacons, missionaries, children's workers, among others.

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<sup>50</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 374.

<sup>51</sup> Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, 468.

<sup>52</sup> Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew*, 507.

<sup>53</sup> Daman, "Defining Success in Pastoral Ministry Part 3."

Additional passages of Scripture convey a similar message. After asserting that Christian ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that “it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”<sup>54</sup> The New American Standard translation renders the word “trustworthy,” yet it is none other than the Greek word πιστός, which is almost universally translated as “faithful” and is the same word used in Matthew 25 to describe the faithful servants. Paul’s choice of words is especially revealing. What is required of ministers? What is a quality measure of their performance? Scripture declares that it is their faithfulness. The point is that God is most interested in a steward’s faithfulness, not eloquence, wisdom, or numerical significance.<sup>55</sup> Faithfulness is also a distinguishing characteristic of leaders whom Paul commends. For example, Paul calls Timothy a “faithful child in the Lord (1 Cor 4:17),” Tychicus a “faithful minister in the Lord (Eph 6:21),” and Epaphras a “faithful servant of Christ (Col 1:7).”

Faithfulness as a criterion for success has a number of potential benefits. First, anyone can be faithful and, therefore, successful. In the parable of the talents, all three servants had the same opportunity to succeed in faithfulness even though they were given differing resources. Likewise, in church planting, faithfulness is equally possible for those placed in the most difficult situations.<sup>56</sup> Second, faithfulness reduces unhealthy comparisons and competition. In a numbers-based definition of success, it is particularly tempting to compare results and compete against other church planters. This is not only unhealthy but distracts from the things that matter most in ministry.<sup>57</sup> However, when faithfulness is the definition of success, the focus is on how persistently obedient one is to the unique calling that God has given. Third, when success is defined as being faithful,

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<sup>54</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 126.

<sup>56</sup> Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, 43.

<sup>57</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 15.

church planters are encouraged to continue rather than discouraged when numerical growth is not coming along as quickly as expected. Fourth, success is not bestowed upon church planters who draw a crowd while remaining unfaithful to the ministry of prayer and the Word. The concept of church planter faithfulness includes persisting in the proclamation of the truth even if the truth is unpopular. When faithfulness is valued over numerical growth, the temptation to pursue unhealthy growth is reduced. Fifth, when faithfulness is the criterion for success, success is not reserved for large congregations alone. Smaller churches, which comprise the vast majority of churches in North America, may be championed as examples of success as they remain faithful to the gospel ministry in a resistant culture.<sup>58</sup>

While there are many apparent benefits of defining success in terms of faithfulness, there are additional challenges. For example, measuring a church planter's faithfulness is not as obvious as measuring the number of members attending a church plant at a certain time. Beyond measurement, a definition of success that assumes faithfulness alone may promote mediocrity rather than excellence in ministry and in a church planting context.

### **Fruitfulness**

Apart from faithfulness, the next leading alternative to a numbers definition of success is fruitfulness.<sup>59</sup> For example, Timothy Keller argues, "Those who claim that faithfulness is required are largely right, but this mindset can take too much pressure off church leaders."<sup>60</sup> Keller's concern is that church planters may not be incentivized to work vigorously and skillfully if they are evaluated on faithfulness alone. Pastors and

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<sup>58</sup> Eighty-five percent of churches in North America never break the 200-attendance mark. Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, 110.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 14.

church planters ought to bear fruit.<sup>61</sup> In continuation of his argument, Keller suggests that “when fruitfulness is our criterion for evaluation as opposed to faithfulness, we are held accountable but not crushed by the expectation that a certain number of lives will be changed dramatically under our ministry.”<sup>62</sup>

Fruit bearing is, undoubtedly, a biblical concept. Perhaps the most famous passage regarding the bearing of fruit is John 15:1-16 where Jesus describes that he is the vine and his disciples are the branches, and “he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5).” The transparent purpose of these verses is to insist that those who have union with Christ produce fruit since “fruitfulness is an infallible mark of true Christianity.”<sup>63</sup> Church planters, therefore, ought to produce fruit in abundance such that success can be ascertained by measuring the amount of fruit that flows from a church planter’s ministry. As a result, fruitfulness represents a viable alternative for defining church planter success.

However, the challenge associated with defining church planter success in terms of fruitfulness is that there is ambiguity with respect to what it means to be fruitful in ministry. For example, when it comes to John 15, there is considerable dispute over the nature of the fruit that is envisaged. More specifically, there is disagreement regarding whether the fruit referenced is internal or external. R. C. Sproul suggests that “the central emphasis on fruit in the New Testament has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in the inner self.” He concludes that the fruit mentioned in John 15 is “the fruit of a changed life, a changed character, a character that is strengthened and nurtured by the source of holiness, Christ Himself.”<sup>64</sup> Conversely, Arthur Pink argues that the fruit of which Jesus

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<sup>61</sup> Vitarelli, *Small Church Big Deal*, 122.

<sup>62</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary 4, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 515.

<sup>64</sup> R. C. Sproul, *John: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2009),

speaks is the “organic product and evidence of the inner life.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, the fruit that is naturally produced from abiding in Christ is the outworking of an inward transformation and not the inward transformation itself. Alternatively, D. A. Carson argues that any attempt to classify the fruit as inward or outward only is overly “reductionistic” since “the fruit represents everything that is the product of effective prayer in Jesus’ name,” including both inward and outward forms of fruit.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the debate regarding the nature of the fruit in John 15, the Bible indicates that a person’s outward behavior flows out of a person’s inward character.<sup>67</sup> Even if the fruit mentioned in John 15 is a reference to inward fruit only, it is appropriate to expect that such inward fruit produces outward results. Consequently, a more comprehensive definition of fruitfulness would include both inward and outward fruit. With respect to inward fruit, a church planter ought to exhibit a growing personal holiness.<sup>68</sup> It is right to expect that the lives of church planters are growing in the grace of God, in the spiritual disciplines, and in personal piety.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, with respect to outward fruit, it is right to expect that the inward fruit of a church planter manifest itself in outward expressions such that external fruit in the lives of others is naturally produced.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, a holistic view of church planter fruitfulness ought to include both inward and outward fruit. When church planter success is defined in this way, success

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<sup>65</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 826.

<sup>66</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 517.

<sup>67</sup> See the discussion in chapter 2 regarding Matt 12:34, Jas 3:11-12, and 1 Tim 4:11-16.

<sup>68</sup> For example, the Fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23 is about the characteristics that a believer ought to exhibit.

<sup>69</sup> Daman, “Defining Success in Pastoral Ministry Part 3.”

<sup>70</sup> Once again, this argument comes from the various biblical passages referenced in chapter 2 that demonstrate that a person’s behavior is linked to a person’s character.

includes a godly character, obedience to Christ, a faithful gospel witness, and spiritual growth in the lives of others.

While measuring the spiritual growth of a church planter and the associated church members is inherently challenging, the Bible teaches that there are outward indications of inward realities.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, there ought to be visible fruit that can be measured as an indication of spiritual growth for the purpose of evaluating church planter success and failure. When considering spiritual growth, the spiritual disciplines are a great place to start since they are “the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”<sup>72</sup> As a result, a church planter who is considered fruitful should be one who is personally growing in the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake, fervency in prayer, passion in worship, boldness in evangelism, and generosity in giving while also leading others to grow in the same.

### **Summary**

Defining church planter success is an important yet challenging endeavor. The accessibility and practicality of church related statistics has encouraged many to use a numbers-based definition of success for pastors and church planters alike. However, there are additional biblically supported alternatives such as sustainability, multiplication, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. Further research is necessary to settle the debate as there is a gap in the literature. It may be impossible to narrow down the definition to a single criterion, but an extensive biblical analysis would, at the very least, help provide a more thoughtful treatment of the subject. Finally, all church planters ought to find joy and

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<sup>71</sup> The idea that inward spiritual realities are measurable is discussed at length in chapter 2 when considering passages such as Matt 12:34, Jas 3:11-12, and 1 Tim 4:11-16.

<sup>72</sup> Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 17.

peace in the fact that their ultimate identity is not wrapped up in any measure of human success but rather in the perfect work of Jesus Christ.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Now that church planter success has been discussed, it is appropriate to move towards analyzing the data for the purpose of evaluating the statistical validity of the North American Mission Board's Church Planter Initial Assessment instrument. This chapter will describe the database and sources, discuss data limitations, explain statistical techniques utilized in the analysis, identify and define variables of interest, and provide summary statistics of key variables. The ultimate aim of the analysis is to assess the predictive nature of the CPIA instrument. This analysis is intended to evaluate whether the CPIA instrument is a statistically robust predictor of church planter success or failure. Of course, the analysis is limited to the available data that are described in more detail below.

#### **Data Source, Description, and Limitations**

All the data for the analysis were graciously provided by the North American Mission Board and gathered over a period of six months in 2020.<sup>1</sup> NAMB was willing to provide the data for analysis because NAMB leadership is keenly interested in the results. The analysis informs the development and improvement of the church planter selection procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> The data was gathered from NAMB between July and December of 2020.

## Church Planter Assessment Data

NAMB has evaluated thousands of church planters throughout its history and has utilized a church planter assessment instrument since the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup> The church planter assessment tool utilized by NAMB is called the Church Planter Initial Assessment instrument which asks hundreds of questions in order to evaluate potential church planters for the purpose of improved selection. Most of the questions are in a Likert type format<sup>3</sup> and are broken into four main categories under the headings of church planter character, leadership, multiplication, and vision. Scores associated with each of the four main categories are further sub-divided into additional categories one level down. From the bottom level up, the individual questions are used to create sub-scores which determine the ratings associated with the four main categories that form the basis of the overall CPIA score.

The CPIA also gathers detailed information from the church planter spouse and a number of close references to help confirm the church planter self-assessment scores.<sup>4</sup> Data are also collected regarding church planter personality, marriage health, blind spots, and untapped strengths. While the CPIA instrument was recently updated, the data provided by NAMB represents the original CPIA tool and is the basis for the analysis contained herein.<sup>5</sup> NAMB provided detailed data from 1,368 completed CPIA

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Miller, interview regarding the history of NAMB's church planter assessment instrument, July 30, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The Likert scale was devised by American social scientist Rensis Likert in 1932 and is a rating system often used in the social sciences to measure personal aptitudes. The typical method is to provide a question or statement and allow subjects to respond within a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with "neutral" as the middle option. Rensis Likert, *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes* (New York: Archives of Psychology, 1932), 29.

<sup>4</sup> The church planter spouse and references, called "observers," receive very similar questions to church planters.

<sup>5</sup> According to a discussion with NAMB leadership on July 30, 2020, the CPIA instrument was updated during 2019. The update was based on complaints from denominational leaders regarding the appropriateness of spouse and observer related questions. There is insufficient outcome data associated with the updated version for any robust analysis. Consequently, this analysis is based on the original CPIA version that was in circulation until Q4, 2019. It is important to note that the updated CPIA was not validated statistically and remains to be unproven in terms of predicting church planter success.

instruments.<sup>6</sup> While there are some gaps in the data, the data gathered are relatively clean.<sup>7</sup> The CPIA data provided by NAMB comes from assessments that were administered from January 2017 to December 2019. A description of the CPIA categories and an anonymized example outcome is listed below in figure 1 and figure 2 respectively.

### **Church Planter Outcome Data**

In addition to the CPIA instrument, which is administered during the church planter screening process, NAMB also collects data on church planter outcomes for church planters that are approved and are in the field. The outcome data are collected in the form of Quarterly Reports (QR) and are administered every quarter for the first three years of a church planter's ministry. While completing a QR is voluntary for church planters, it is strongly encouraged by those sponsored by NAMB. The QR questionnaire includes approximately ninety questions that are on rotation depending on the time period in question. The numerical information gathered in a QR includes data related to church membership, baptisms, Sunday School attendance, weekly worship attendance, small group attendance, discipleship statistics, giving to missions, and total financial receipts.

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<sup>6</sup> Initially, NAMB only provided access to PDF documents with pictures of the results. Significant effort was expended to develop a Python code that could automatically organize the pictures, process the images for data scraping, and pull out the desired data from the PDF documents. A program was created and administered on sample PDF documents. The program went through a dozen iterations in order to improve accuracy. This method was functional, but the resulting data was less than 60% accurate and, as a result, would not have proven reliable enough for statistical analysis. Thankfully, NAMB provided access to their own SQL databases which made the Python script unnecessary.

<sup>7</sup> NAMB connected me to a database contractor to work with the NAMB databases to obtain the data requested for the analysis. However, we were unable to obtain item level data, which hinders some of the potential analysis. Additionally, spouse level data was missing for all the CPIAs collected.

## CHARACTER

Seeking to determine what uniquely defines the candidate's personality and ethics.

- Ambiguity Handler** Is not paralyzed when circumstances or solutions are unclear.
- Care Giver** Acutely aware of the needs of others.
- Emotion Manager** Able to manage emotional stability in the face of adversity.
- Encourager** Readily looks for opportunities to build others up with words and actions.
- Finisher** Possessing the internal strength necessary to persevere to the completion of commitments.
- Learner** Exhibits a continual pursuit of personal development with a teachable spirit.
- Persistent Pursuer** More than willing to take the time and attention necessary to pursue ministry.
- Server** Demonstrates a heart and attitude of service toward those in the community.
- Unlikely Recharger** Reveals candidate's tendencies in prioritizing work and rest.

## CHARACTER (UNDERMINING ITEMS)

Lower scores simply provide an opportunity to discuss this topic further.

- Angers Easily** May indicate a lack of emotional control.
- Approval Seeker** May indicate an unhealthy attraction to approval.
- Poor Steward** May indicate a tendency to value financial status.
- Power Grabber** May indicate a tendency to manipulate circumstances to gain control.
- Uncoachable** May indicate a resistance to seeking or receiving help.
- Unguarded** May indicate naivety related to sexual temptation.

## LEADERSHIP

Appraising the candidate's ability to influence, develop and deploy others toward a common goal.

- Blueprinter** Seeks to build all the important elements in the plan before the work begins.
- Clarifier** Skillful and adept at bringing accuracy and simplicity to complex realities.
- Community Networker** Able to navigate available social networks to build relationships with non-believers and key leaders.
- Contented Steward** Remains content even during times of financial instability.
- Decision Maker** Adeptly analyzes possible options and commits to a course of action.
- Detailer** Capable of charting a long-range course with incremental and achievable goals.
- Influencer** Being a compelling force that raises expectations.
- Inspire** Easily attracts others toward common goals by appealing to shared aspirations.
- Navigator** Focused on developing and navigating a structured plan toward a common purpose.
- Self-Leader** Confidently leads oneself to accomplish much.

## MULTIPLICATION

Evaluating the candidate's commitment to shaping a kingdom movement.

- Adapler** Able to implement plans and execute what is necessary to move them to reality.
- Befriender** Easily establishes and maintains many healthy relationships across various spheres of life.
- Changer** Recognizes and responds appropriately when change is needed.
- Culture Crosser** Willing to cross cultures taking into account perspectives of the intended audience.
- Decider** Readily distinguishes significance of subtle differences among similar options.
- Diverse Evangelizer** Track record of personally leading different types of people to Christ.
- Gospel Enthusiast** Places a high value on the gospel message and is hopeful that others will be eager to accept it.
- Gospel Prayer Warrior** Invests regularly in prayer for non-believers.
- Gospel Presenter** Driven by a desire to share the gospel with unbelievers.
- Implementer** Able to implement plans and execute what is necessary to move them to reality.
- Multiplier** Reproduces disciples, leaders, teams and ministries with regularity and robust intent.
- Networker** Has an ability to develop large numbers of new relationships including influential thinkers.
- Proclaimer** Sacrificially allocates time and energy in proclaiming the gospel.
- Recruiter** Recognizes potential in people and places them in positions in which they can use their gifts.
- Relater** Skillfully creates connections among friends and acquaintances.

## VISION

Measuring the candidate's ability to see, share and realize a God-inspired vision.

- Dreamer** Confidently trusts God to bring dreams to reality when confirmed to be His dream.
- Public Speaker** At ease communicating ideas to large numbers of people.
- Protector** Remains calm when others question vision direction.
- Trend Setter** Not afraid to create innovative and unique opportunities that captivate allegiance in others.
- Vision Caster** Uses common and compelling language to paint a clear picture of the desired future.

Figure 1. Description of CPIA categories

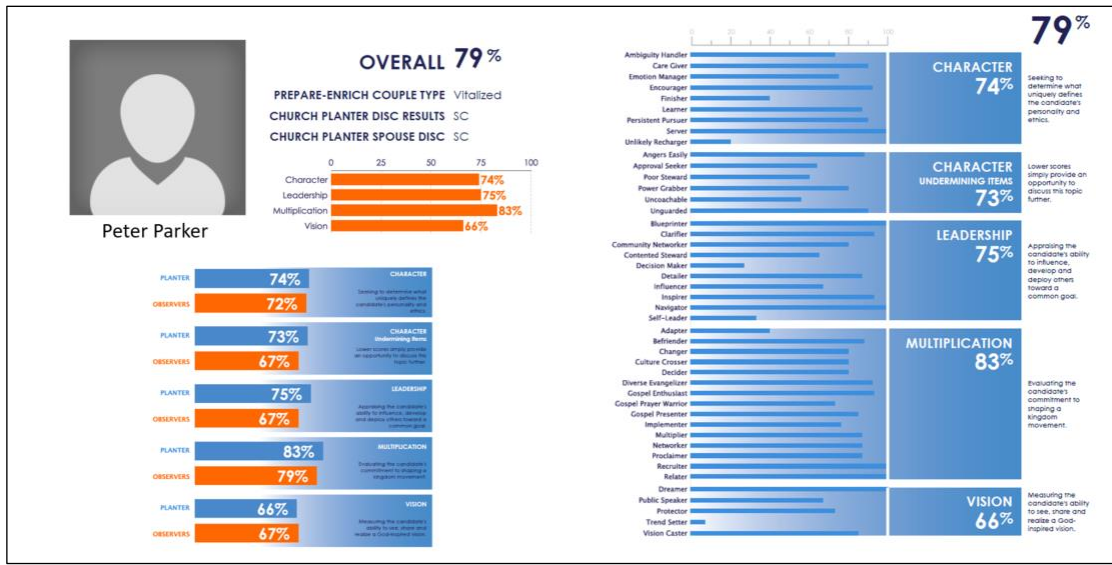


Figure 2. Anonymized example of CPIA outcomes

Additionally, the QR instrument asks open ended questions aimed at church plant sustainability, community engagement, church planter health, lessons learned, mentorship, and other pertinent topics. NAMB provided data from 5,192 Quarterly Reports representing a total of 988 church planters who turned in QR information from the first quarter of 2017 through the fourth quarter of 2020.<sup>8</sup> The QR data provided by NAMB had many irregularities that required significant cleaning.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the QR data provided for this analysis only included the numerical results and did not include any of the free form answers given by church planters.<sup>10</sup> The outcome measures available for

<sup>8</sup> While NAMB provided some QR data that was collected prior to 2017, this represents a small fraction of the sample as more than 99% of the sample was collected between Q1, 2017 and Q4, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> For example, there were many negative numbers when a negative number was not appropriate. Additionally, there were numerous examples of missing data, odd dates, duplicate records, etc. Cleaning this data for analysis took significant effort.

<sup>10</sup> After four hour-long sessions with a NAMB data specialist, it was concluded that the rest of the QR data was not readily available. The NAMB CPIA and QR databases and the administration thereof was not structured in an ideal way for retrieval and analysis. One of the recommendations to NAMB leadership is to improve internal competency with data architecture and update the data systems such that data can be accessed quickly and reliably.

analysis are listed below in table 1.

Table 1: Available metrics from the Quarterly Reports for analysis

Total members	Number of active small groups
Quarterly baptisms (total)	Number of people in small groups
Quarterly baptisms (ages 0-11)	Number of leaders making disciples
Quarterly baptisms (ages 12-17)	Number of members serving
Quarterly baptisms (ages 18-29)	Total receipts
Quarterly baptisms (ages 30 & up)	Undesignated gifts
Average weekly worship attendance	Giving to the Cooperative Program
Number of new believers serving	Annie Armstrong giving
Percentage of new believing members	Lottie Moon giving
Active disciple makers	Total mission expenditures

While the QR data represents 988 church planters, the data is spread across various quarters, and the data at any particular point in time may represent as little as 309 church planters. See table 2 for a breakdown of the QR data by quarter.

The sample of QR data that overlaps with the CPIA data is much more limited than the overall sample. For example, as figure 3 demonstrates, of the 988 church planters that returned at least one Quarterly Report, the sample contains data from only 187 church planters who also completed a CPIA. Since the objective of the analysis is to evaluate the validity of the CPIA instrument by assessing the predictive nature of the tool, the analysis is largely restricted to the overlapping sample of 187 church planters and the corresponding 895 Quarterly Reports. This may seem like a large sample, but the sample reduces quickly when restricting the analysis to a single quarter. Illustratively,

there are only eleven observations that contain CPIA data as well as QR data from the final quarter of the third year. As a result, the analysis will focus on years rather than specific quarters in order to increase sample size and increase statistical power. See table 3 for a breakdown of observations by year for the sample that has data from both CPIA results and QR surveys.

Table 2: Breakdown of QR data by quarter

Year	Quarter	Number of Observations	Percentage	Cumulative
1	1	334	6.43	6.43
	2	445	8.57	15.00
	3	420	8.09	23.09
	4	493	9.50	32.59
2	1	472	9.09	41.68
	2	494	9.51	51.19
	3	457	8.80	60.00
	4	526	10.13	70.13
3	1	451	8.69	78.81
	2	443	8.53	87.35
	3	348	6.70	94.05
	4	309	5.95	100.00

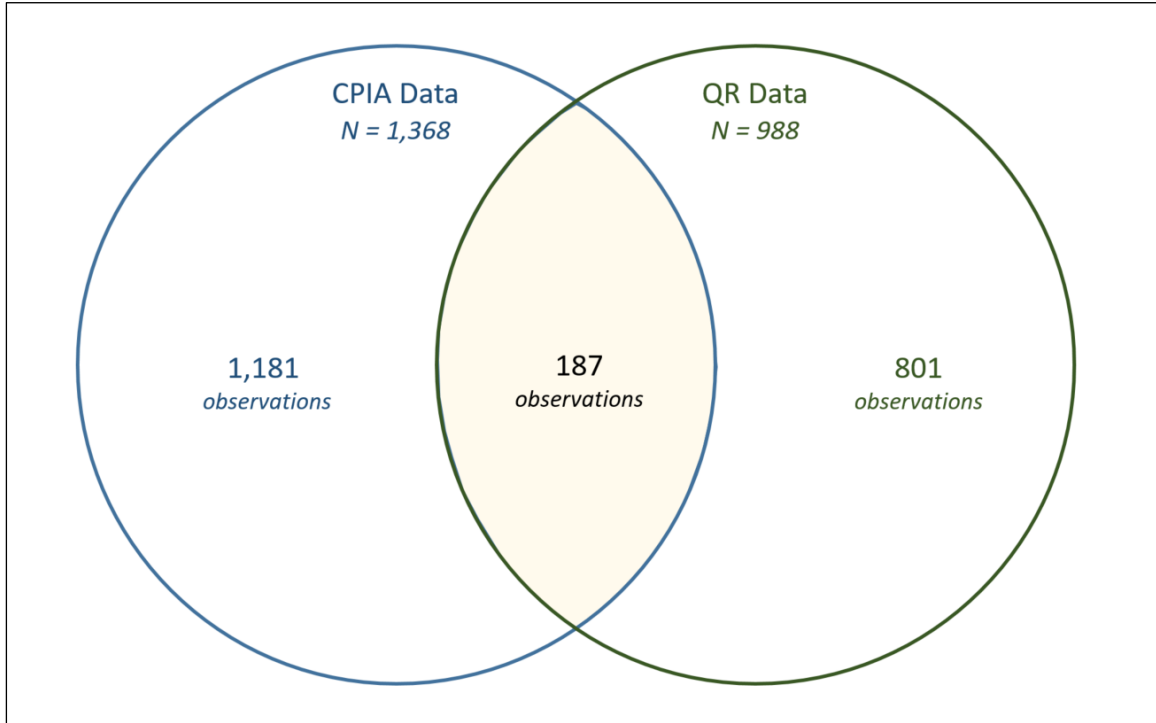


Figure 3. Overlap of CPIA data and QR data

Table 3. Sample by year for observations with both CPIA and QR data

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Observations</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
1	164	57.14	57.14
2	97	33.80	90.94
3	26	9.06	100.00

### **Ethical Use of Data**

The content of the data is highly sensitive as it contains personal information. As a result, careful precautions have been taken to ensure that the data were handled with care and personally identifiable information (PII) is secure. The analysis follows industry best practices when dealing with personal data such as masking names and personal



information, using unique identifiers, using secure data storage, and password protecting files. The data gathering and analysis of the data has been performed on a secure environment using a virtual machine set up by NAMB's Information Security department.<sup>11</sup> Access to the virtual machine is heavily restricted. Additionally, all PII that is unnecessary for the analysis has been destroyed. All other data is stored exclusively on NAMB hosted servers.

### **Data Limitations and Biases**

There are a few limitations and biases that require attention. Since NAMB was unable to provide item level data, it is impossible to evaluate the reliability of the questions themselves.<sup>12</sup> The categorical scores are calculated based on the assumption that certain questions accurately describe a particular construct. This assumption cannot be validated with the data available, and the analysis must be performed on the scores provided by NAMB under the assumption that the categories and sub-categories accurately measure the constructs in question. In terms of predictability, the analysis will test the predictive nature of the resulting CPIA scores rather than the individual questions themselves.

There are additional limitations pertaining to missing data and data accessibility. With respect to the independent variables,<sup>13</sup> it was not possible to evaluate the validity of the church planter spouse information as it was not provided. With respect to the dependent variables,<sup>14</sup> the analysis is limited to the QR metrics provided by

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<sup>11</sup> The Director of Solutions Support at NAMB helped set up the virtual environment with the necessary security and protocols.

<sup>12</sup> This would have been accomplished using common statistical techniques, such as Factor Analysis, to obtain Cronbach's Alpha coefficients which measures the internal consistency of items within a particular group. A. T. Basilevsky, *Statistical Factor Analysis and Related Methods: Theory and Applications* (New York: Wiley, 1994), 143.

<sup>13</sup> The independent variables in this analysis are the variables that come from the Church Planter Initial Assessment instruments.

<sup>14</sup> The dependent variables in the analysis are the variables that come from the Quarterly

NAMB, which is restricted almost exclusively to the traditional numerical measurements of church growth.

There is also a known selection bias in the data as the outcome measures come from reports gathered from church planters that were sponsored by NAMB while using the CPIA instrument to aid in church planter selection. By definition, the data does not include outcome data related to church planters that failed to pass the NAMB selection procedures. Since the CPIA instrument was used to select the church planters who reported QR statistics, there are very few examples in the data of church planters who had low CPIA scores and also reported QR results.<sup>15</sup> This is an understandable limitation of the data given the obvious dangers associated with sending unqualified church planters into the field, but it does create a bias that must be taken into consideration. Apart from the aforementioned limitations, the study database represents a nice cross section of church planters and is representative of church planters in North America within the Southern Baptist Convention.

### **Statistical Methods**

It is well known that human beings are exceptional at identifying patterns, perhaps too good, as people often see patterns in data when none actually exist.<sup>16</sup> The use of statistics helps provide objective measures in situations where humans can or cannot see patterns in data. While statistical techniques have advanced dramatically with the advent of computing power, statistics are only capable of identifying association as opposed to causation. Humans develop hypotheses regarding causation while statistics

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Reports.

<sup>15</sup> Out of the 187 church planters who were assessed using the CPIA and provided QR data, only 12 had a CPIA overall score in the bottom quartile, and 9 out of those 12 had CPIA overall scores on the upper end of the bottom quartile.

<sup>16</sup> Nate Silver, *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—but Some Don't* (New York: Publisher, 2012), 9.

provide associational evidence to help support or reject these hypotheses. The working hypothesis of this analysis is that church planters with better CPIA assessment scores have a higher probability of church planting success. If the hypothesis is confirmed using the appropriate statistical methods, the CPIA assessment instrument can be considered a statistically valid instrument to use in church planter selection. If the hypothesis is rejected, the CPIA may still be a useful tool for church planter selection even though it cannot be described as a mathematically proven predictor of success.

The analysis will use summary statistics such as means, medians, percentiles, and standard deviations to describe variables of interest. However, when evaluating the relationship between two or more variables, such as the relationship between the CPIA results and church planter outcomes, the analysis will employ additional statistical tests such as t-tests, linear regression, logistic regression, and Chi Square depending on the nature and distribution of the data.<sup>17</sup> These methods are well proven and represent the industry standard for measuring statistical significance.<sup>18</sup>

A “statistically significant” relationship is simply one that is unlikely to have occurred by chance. For the sake of this analysis, statistical significance will be measured using the conventional cutoff of 0.05 (5 percent).<sup>19</sup> As a result, any relationship that is reported herein as “statistically significant” will have a 5 percent or less probability of occurring at random.

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<sup>17</sup> Linear regression analysis will be used for continued variables that exhibit normality. Logistic regression will be used for binary dependent variables. A t-test will be used when comparing a particular variable across two groups. A chi-square test will be used when evaluating a categorical variable.

<sup>18</sup> James H. Stock and Mark W. Watson, *Introduction to Econometrics*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2020), 28.

<sup>19</sup> Michael T. Longnecker and R. Lyman Ott, *An Introduction to Statistical Methods and Data Analysis* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015), 246.

## **Description of Variables of Interest**

### **CPIA Variables**

One of the most critical variables in the analysis is the overall CPIA score since it is the main outcome of the NAMB assessment instrument and is used for church planter selection. The overall CPIA score has a theoretical range of 0 to 100 with higher scores representing the more qualified candidates. The sample of 1,368 CPIA scores provided by NAMB has a range of 23 to 88 with a mean and median of 66.8 and 68 respectively. The subset of 187 observations that also have QR data have a mean overall CPIA score of 71.6, which is a statistically significant difference.<sup>20</sup> This confirms that there is a selection bias in the data since the church planters who reported QR data have a systematically higher CPIA score than those who did not report QR data. The distribution of the overall CPIA score for the entire sample and the distribution for the limited sample of observations with outcome data are shown in figure 4.

The overall CPIA score is a composite score that is generated from the four main categories of character, leadership, multiplication, and vision. The four main categories have similar ranges and central tendencies as the overall CPIA score and are also composite scores made up of various sub-categories all normalized to a 0 to 100 scale. The distribution of scores for the four main categories and the mean of the subset of observations with QR data are shown in figure 5.

### **Quarterly Report Variables**

The QR variables represents the outcome data that will be used to test the predictive nature of the CPIA instrument. The QR data are captured at different points in time throughout the first three years of a church planter's ministry, making it is necessary to control for time when comparing church planter results. Missing data prohibits the

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<sup>20</sup> Pr. < 0.0001 using a two-tailed t-test.

detailed analysis for many of the metrics. Additionally, there are a few metrics that are not captured every year. In order to provide a sense of the available data, the sample size from each QR variable associated with church planters with CPIA data is listed by year in table 4.

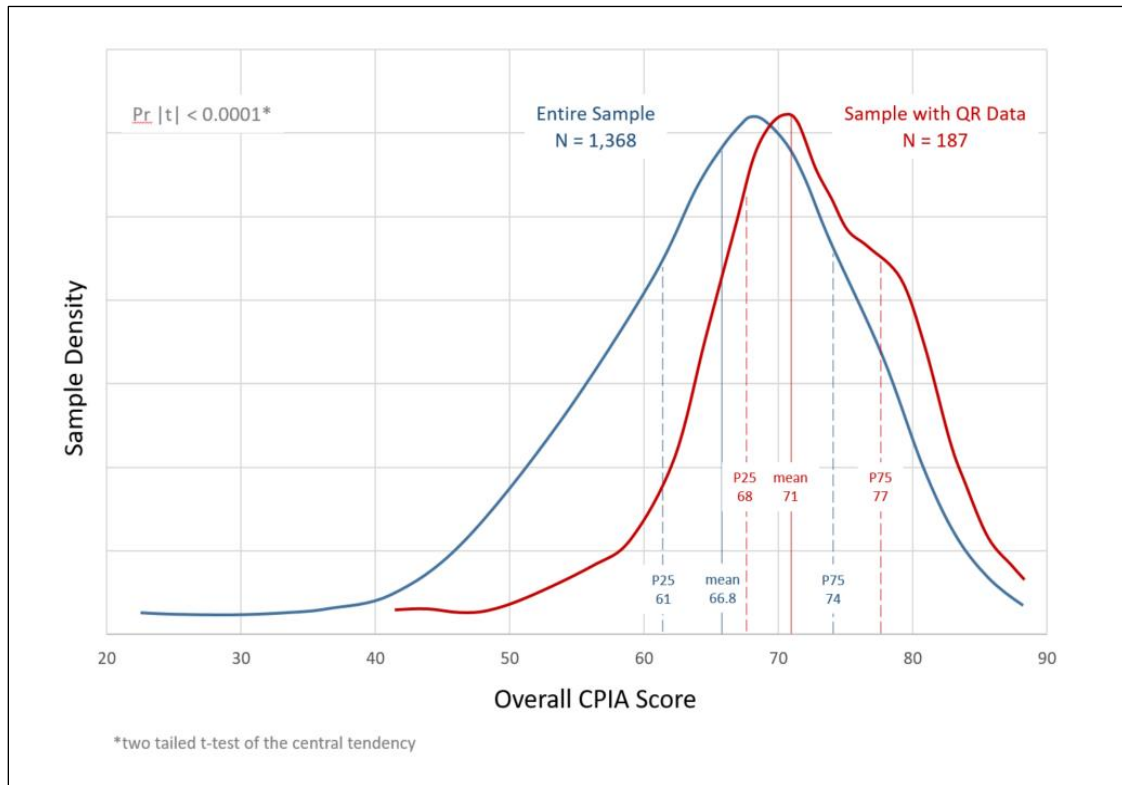


Figure 4. Distribution of overall CPIA scores

Table 4 demonstrates how thin the QR data gets, especially in year 3, for church planters with corresponding CPIA data. Ideally, the analysis would focus on year 3 data when comparing church planter performance based on the assumption that ministry results often take time to materialize. However, given the lack of year 3 QR data that overlaps with CPIA data, quantitative analysis associated with year 3 is limited.

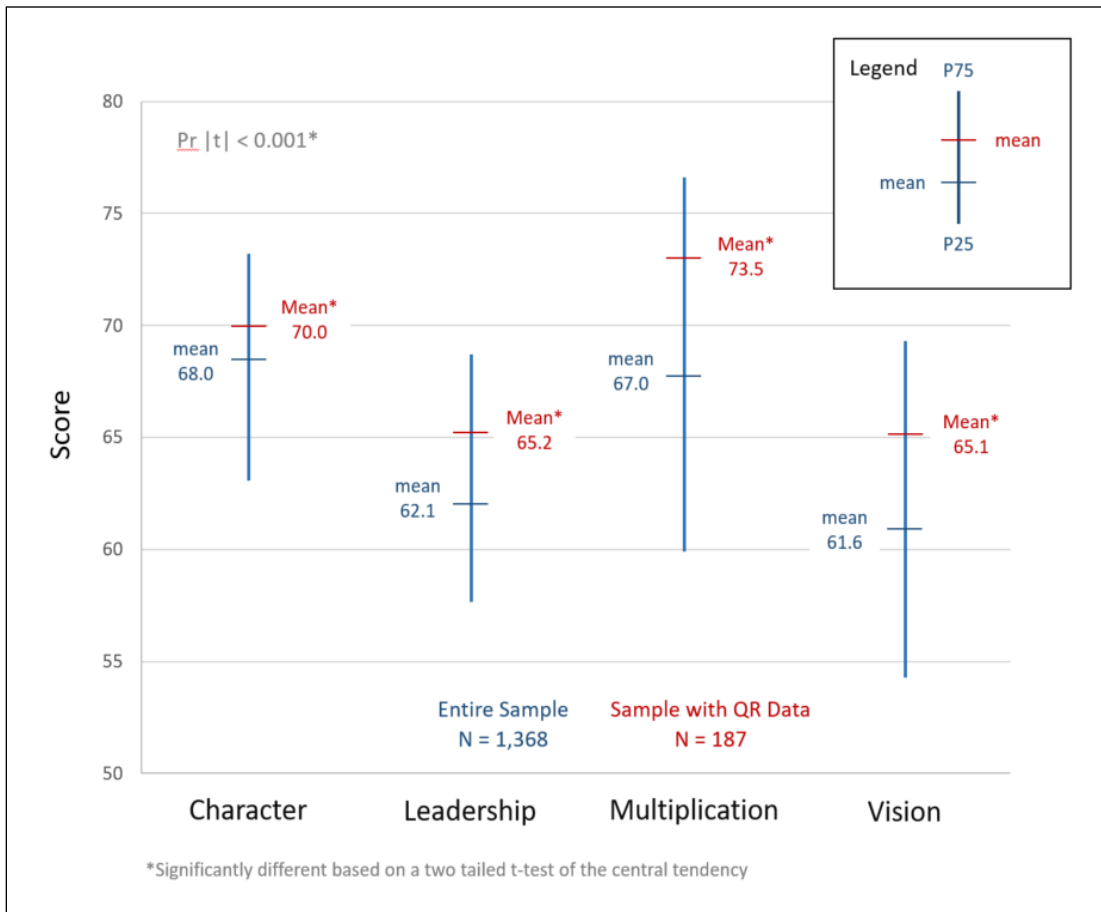


Figure 5. Distribution of scores associated with the four main categories

The lack of data in year 3 would be concerning except for the fact that year 2 functions as a reliable proxy for year 3 performance. When comparing the results by year, there is minimal growth in church plants between year 2 and year 3 in almost every variable of interest. After normalizing the QR variables by dividing year 2 and year 3 by year 1 values, there appears to be a plateau that occurs in the data at the end of year 2. Church plants tend to experience dramatic growth between year 1 and year 2 and then minimal growth between year 2 and year 3. Figure 6 helps demonstrate this phenomenon by comparing a number of the key metrics by year.

Table 4. Sample size by year for church planters with corresponding CPIA data

<b>QR Variable</b>	<b>N in Year 1</b>	<b>N in Year 2</b>	<b>N in Year 3</b>
Total members	70	52	12
Quarterly baptisms (total)	114	97	26
Quarterly baptisms (ages 0-11)	15	21	3
Quarterly baptisms (ages 12-17)	21	18	1
Quarterly baptisms (ages 18-29)	27	31	4
Quarterly baptisms (ages 30 & up)	29	35	8
Average weekly worship attendance	136	92	25
Number of new believers serving	145	0	0
Percentage of new believing members	135	79	20
Active disciple makers	0	97	23
Number of active small groups	154	81	21
Number of people in small groups	150	83	20
Number of leaders making disciples	0	59	13
Number of members serving	150	91	23
Total receipts	111	76	22
Undesignated gifts	106	77	22
Giving to the Cooperative Program	122	85	25
Annie Armstrong giving	31	27	8
Lottie Moon giving	20	21	5
Total mission expenditures	87	74	21

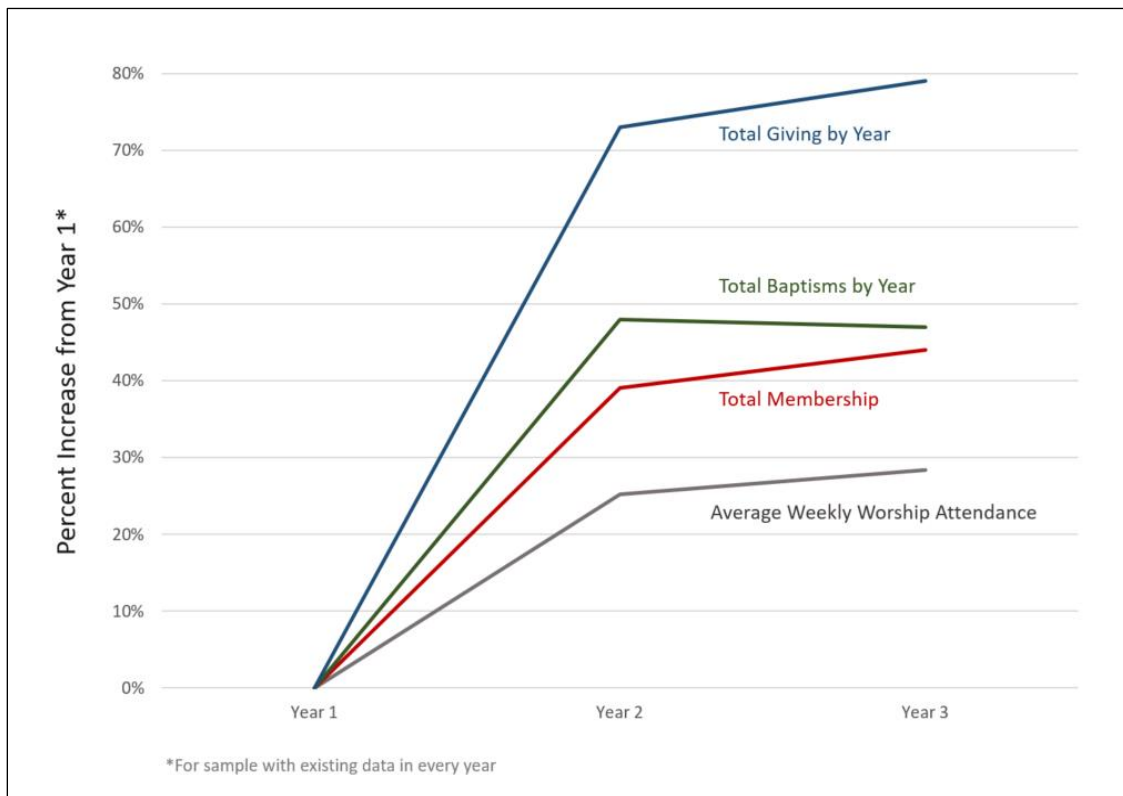


Figure 6. Percent change of key QR variables by year

There is much more research that needs to be done in order to understand the rationale for the plateau that occurs in church plants between year 2 and year 3; however, such further analysis is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the fact that the year 2 and year 3 metrics are equally descriptive of church plant performance is of particular consequence for this study. Since the data demonstrates that there are minimal differences between year 2 and year 3 metrics, the analysis can focus on year 2 data as an appropriate proxy of church planter performance in year 3. It would be interesting to study those church planters that continue to experience dramatic growth in year 3, but the current sample is thin such that quantitative analysis of the data involving year 3 is unlikely to produce meaningful results. Given the state of the existing data, the analysis will focus primarily on data in year 2.

In addition to limited data in year 3, many of the QR variables are highly



correlated, making them redundant in the analysis. For example, membership is correlated with weekly worship attendance, number of active disciple makers, the number of people in small groups, and the number of members serving. Similarly, total receipts is highly correlated with all of the other giving categories, and total baptisms is highly correlated with the other baptism categories.<sup>21</sup> After considering the correlation of these variables, the QR data provided by NAMB can be effectively reduced to three unique variables, namely average weekly attendance, quarterly baptisms, and yearly cooperative program giving.<sup>22</sup> The percentage change of these variables from year 1 and year 2 represent additional metrics that are available for analysis.

### **Variables Measuring Success**

Unfortunately, NAMB was unable to provide the metrics and free form responses that would have provided insight into church planter faithfulness. Given the available data, church planter faithfulness cannot be measured or compared against the CPIA metrics. As a result, the focus of the analysis will be on the traditional numerical success measures and NAMB's definition of success involving multiplication and sustainability. The variable that most closely aligns with NAMB's objective of multiplication is the number of active disciple makers. While this variable is highly correlated with the average weekly attendance,<sup>23</sup> it is worth considering as an additional dependent variable in light of NAMB's focus on multiplication. A binary can also be created for further statistical analysis. Given the distribution of the data, success could be defined as having at least five active disciple makers by year 2.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> These metrics are correlated with a correlation coefficient greater than 0.5. A correlation matrix is provided in appendix 1.

<sup>22</sup> These three metrics were prioritized based on the fact that they sufficiently represent all of the other variables, have minimal correlation with each other, and have more available data than the alternatives.

<sup>23</sup> Correlation coefficient of 0.6733.

<sup>24</sup> This is the 25th percentile. In other words, 25% of the church plants in the sample had less

The available metrics do not directly address church plant sustainability. However, it is possible to create a proxy variable. For a church plant to be self-sustaining, it must receive enough tithes to be able to provide adequately for the church planter. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median weekly income for a worker in the United States during the period represented in the QR data was \$925 per week.<sup>25</sup> This equates to approximately \$48,000 per year. Less than half of the church plants in the sample had a total giving equal to or greater than \$48,000 by year 2, so this may be an overly ambitious target. Considering the data and the fact that there is typically marginal growth between year 2 and year 3, a more conservative definition of church plant sustainability could be classified as having total receipts greater than or equal to \$30,000 by year 2. This definition would classify a modest 62% of the church planters in the database as successful. Financial independence does not equate to sustainability, but it is one of the necessary components.

Using the success criteria defined above and the numerical metrics available for analysis, the six primary dependent variables are described in more detail in table 5 below.

### **Summary**

The data supplied by NAMB contains a robust sample of church planters, church planter assessment results, and church planter outcomes. The sample is sufficiently large and descriptive of church planters in North America such that it is representative of the church planting community.

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than five active disciple makers by year 2.

<sup>25</sup> “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 8, 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/earnings.htm>.

Table 5. Summary statistics of dependent variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N (full sample)</b>	<b>Mean (full sample)</b>	<b>Std. Dev. (full sample)</b>
Average Weekly Attendance in Year 2	92 (566)	52.3 (59.3)	38.5 (53.1)
Average Quarterly Baptisms in Year 2	97 (341)	4.5 (5.4)	3.1 (4.1)
Cooperative Program (CP) Giving in Year 2	85 (564)	\$2,900 (\$2,200)	\$4,500 (\$3,400)
Number of Active Disciple Makers in Year 2	97 (551)	12.5 (12.2)	17.8 (13.9)
Multiplication Success <sup>26</sup>	97 (551)	71% (75%)	N/A
Sustainability Success <sup>27</sup>	76 (358)	61% (62%)	N/A

While there is a noticeable selection bias towards those who were approved using the CPIA instrument as a selection tool, there is enough variance in the CPIA variables and the corresponding outcome measures to enable statistical analysis and the validation of the CPIA instrument using the proper statistical techniques. Given the lack of data in year 3, the analysis focuses on church plant results in year 2, which has been shown to closely resemble the outcomes of a church plant in year 3 for the majority of church plants.

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<sup>26</sup> Multiplication success is defined as having at least five active disciple makers by year 2.

<sup>27</sup> Sustainability success is defined as having at least \$30,000 in yearly receipts by year 2.

## CHAPTER 5 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

### **Validity of the Overall CPIA Score**

The objective of this chapter is to apply robust statistical techniques in order to assess the validity of NAMB's CPIA instrument. The statistical validity of the CPIA instrument depends on how well the assessment tool predicts the future performance of church planters. Consequently, the first set of statistical tests are focused on evaluating the predictive nature of the overall CPIA score with respect to the various performance measures listed in table 5. These dependent variables represent the most robust indicators of church planter performance and success given the available data and can be separated into two categories. The first category of metrics consists of the traditional numerical performance measures such as attendance, baptisms, and giving. The second category of metrics was selected based on the success criteria as defined by NAMB and includes the active number of disciple makers, multiplication success, and sustainability success defined above. As mentioned previously, the analysis will consider performance in year 2 of the life of the church plant in lieu of sufficient data in the subsequent years.

### **Traditional Performance Measures**

While there are a number of alternative definitions of success, the traditional performance measures of church planter success still merit analytical attention so as to provide a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the CPIA. The three measures of attendance, baptisms, and giving are continuous variables, as is the CPIA score. Consequently, simple linear regression was used to test how well the CPIA score predicts the traditional performance measures. One of the assumptions of simple linear regression

is that dependent variables are normally distributed.<sup>1</sup> When the data are not normally distributed, normality is generally obtained through some form of data transformation. In each case, a series of transformations was applied to the dependent variable in order to identify the transformation that most closely resembles a normal distribution prior to performing the statistical test.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 7 demonstrates the relationship between the overall CPIA score obtained by church planters and the average weekly attendance of a worship service in year 2 of the corresponding church plants. The average weekly worship attendance is displayed in natural log space as this transformation was required to obtain data normality and ensures statistical robustness. As figure 7 indicates, there is not a statistically significant relationship between the average weekly worship attendance in year 2 of a church plant and the overall CPIA score. In fact, the statistics indicate that there is a 90% chance that the linear relationship is random, and the Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) suggests that the overall CPIA score explains less than 1% of the variance in church attendance. The conclusion from the statistical analysis could hardly be clearer. There is no difference in weekly worship attendance for those church planters that had high CPIA scores and those that had low CPIA scores. The overall CPIA score has little to no value as a predictor of worship attendance.

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Stock and Mark W. Watson, *Introduction to Econometrics*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2020), 159.

<sup>2</sup> The most common transformations include the cubic root, square root, natural log, inverse square root, inverse cubic root, or applying an exponential factor in order to achieve normality.

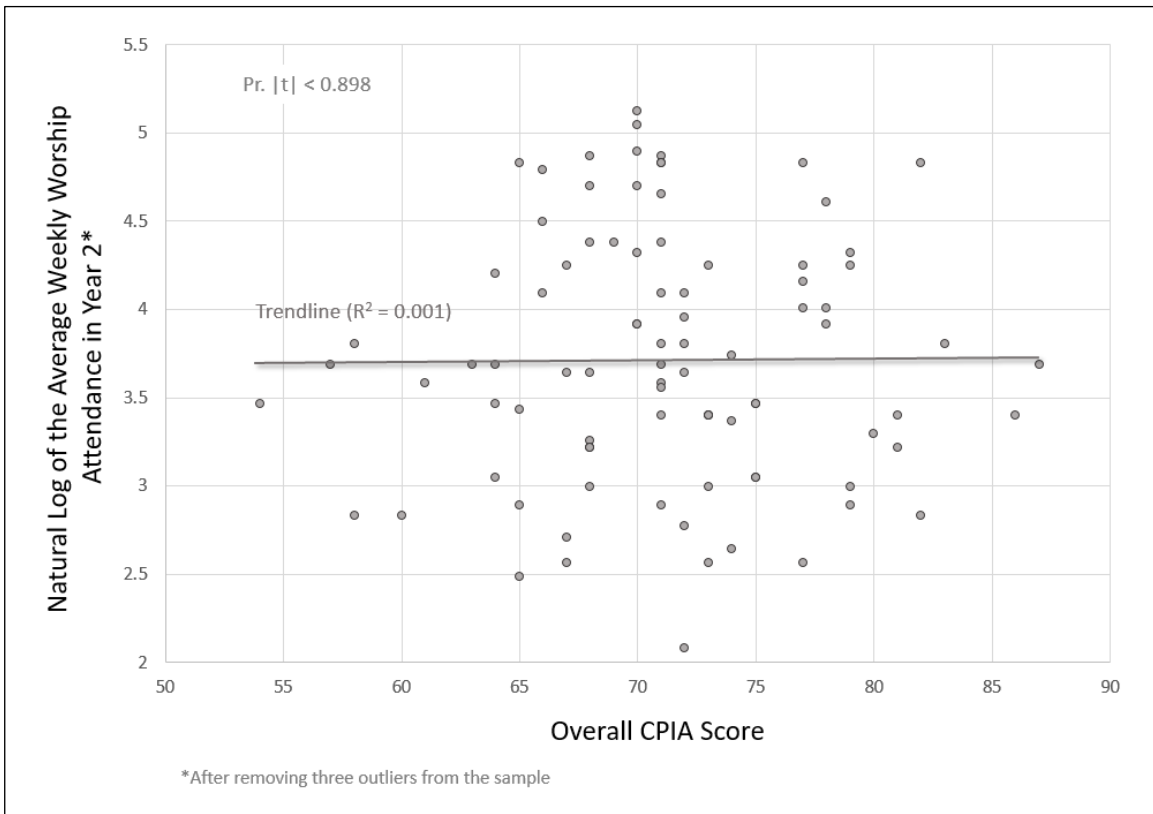


Figure 7. Average weekly worship attendance versus overall CPIA score

Figure 8 shows the relationship between the overall CPIA score and the average number of quarterly baptisms in a church plant during year 2. As with worship attendance, there is not a statistically significant relationship between the overall CPIA score and baptisms.<sup>3</sup> The linear relationship is actually in the wrong direction. As a result, the hypothesis that the overall CPIA score is a predictor of the number of baptisms in year 2 must be rejected. Church planters with low overall CPIA scores achieved the same level of baptisms in year 2 as did those with the highest overall CPIA scores.

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<sup>3</sup> Simple linear regression is not the ideal statistical test for this relationship because number of baptisms are count data, the data are not normally distributed, and the data have a significant number of zero values. Various transformations were applied, but none effectively approximated normality. As a result, alternative statistical tests were used, such as negative binomial regression, and the resulting relationships were extremely similar, and the statistics were practically unchanged. The data are presented in normal space for ease of interpretation and do not impact statistical relevance.

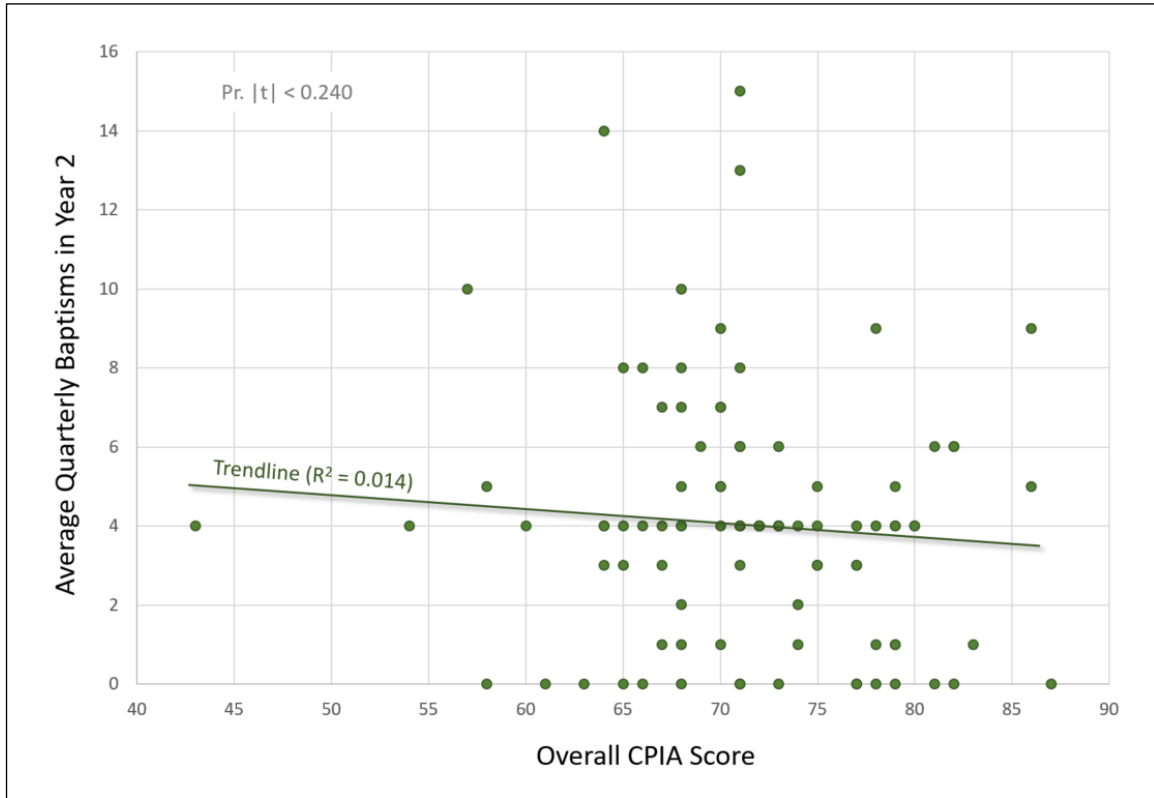


Figure 8. Average quarterly baptisms versus overall CPIA score

Similarly, figure 9 shows that there is not a statistically significant relationship between Cooperative Program giving in year 2 and the overall CPIA score. As with weekly worship attendance, the data for Cooperative Program giving was transformed into natural log space in order to improve normality and align with the requirements of simple linear regression. Once again, the relationship is in the wrong direction even after a few potentially leveraging outliers are removed.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion from the simple linear regression analysis is that the overall CPIA score is a poor predictor of Cooperative Program giving. In other words, the CPIA score has no bearing on the propensity of a

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<sup>4</sup> The Pr. Value of 0.167 applies to the *negative* relationship and suggests that there is an 84% chance that the negative relationship between Cooperative Program (CP) giving and the overall CPIA score is not random. In other words, there is virtually no chance that the positive relationship that was expected exists in the data.

church plant to give more towards the missionary efforts of the Cooperative Program. If anything, church planters with higher CPIA scores tend to give *less* to the Cooperative Program, not more.

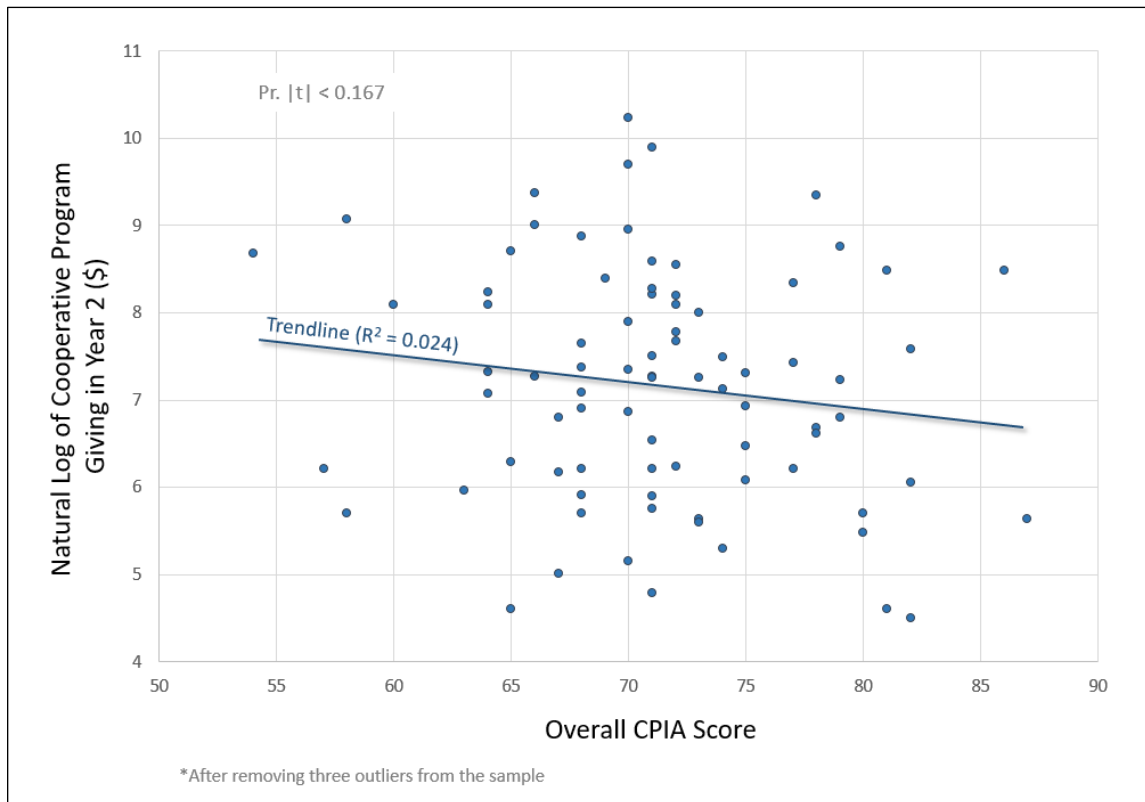


Figure 9. Cooperative Program giving versus overall CPIA score

In all three of the traditional performance measures, the data demonstrate that the overall CPIA score has absolutely no predictive power. There are no measurable differences between church planters with low CPIA scores and high CPIA scores when it comes to worship attendance, baptisms, and giving in the second year of a church plant. In other words, the church planters with the highest level of worship attendance, baptisms, and Cooperative Program giving in the second year were not accurately predicted using the overall CPIA score. A church planter with an overall CPIA score in



the bottom quartile has the same probability of high performance when it comes to the traditional performance measures as does a church planter with an overall CPIA score in the top quartile. As a result, it can be concluded that the overall CPIA score is not a valid predictor of numerical performance and should not be used in the selection of church planters if worship attendance, baptisms, and giving are the preferred outcome measures of success.

### **Measures Associated with NAMB's Definition of Success**

The three available variables associated with NAMB's definition of success include the average number of active disciple makers, a binary variable approximating multiplication success, and a binary variable approximating sustainability success. Simple linear regression was used to evaluate the relationship between the average number of active disciple makers and the overall CPIA score because the data associated with this dependent variable are continuous.<sup>5</sup> Logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship between the two additional success measures and the overall CPIA score. Logistic regression is a nonlinear regression model specifically designed for binary dependent variables.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 10 shows the relationship between the average number of active disciple makers in year 2 of a church plant and the overall CPIA score. The relationship is in the right direction, but it is not a statistically significant relationship. There is a 24% chance that the relationship is random, and the overall CPIA score explains less than 2 percent of the variance in the number of active disciple makers in year 2. As a result, the overall CPIA score cannot be considered a reliable predictor of the number of disciple

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<sup>5</sup> A transformation of the average number of active disciple makers is necessary to obtain normality. The statistics suggested that a natural log transformation was best, so a natural log plus one transformation was used so as to maintain the zero values.

<sup>6</sup> Stock and Watson, *Introduction to Econometrics*, 397.

makers in a church plant; nevertheless, this is an encouraging result that should be further explored when more data are available considering the positive statistics.

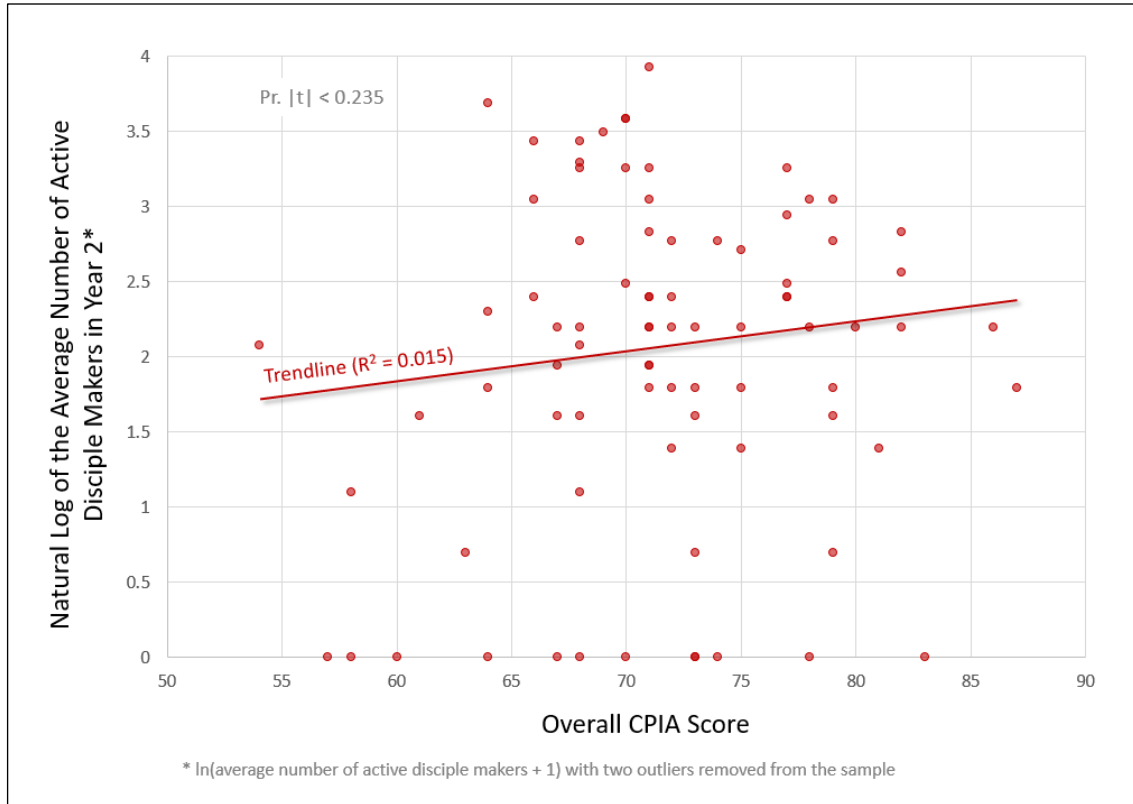


Figure 10. Number of active disciple makers versus the overall CPIA score

While there is not a statistically robust continuous relationship between the number of active disciple makers and the overall CPIA score, there is a statistically significant relationship that can be observed in the data for church planters with five or more active disciple makers in their congregation. For example, church planters that have five or more active disciple makers by year 2 have an average overall CPIA score of 72.6 compared to an average overall CPIA score of 68.8 for those that do not. The resulting

difference is statistically significant and has a 98% chance of being nonrandom.<sup>7</sup> The corresponding logistic regression demonstrates that the overall CPIA score is a reliable predictor of multiplication success as shown in figure 11.

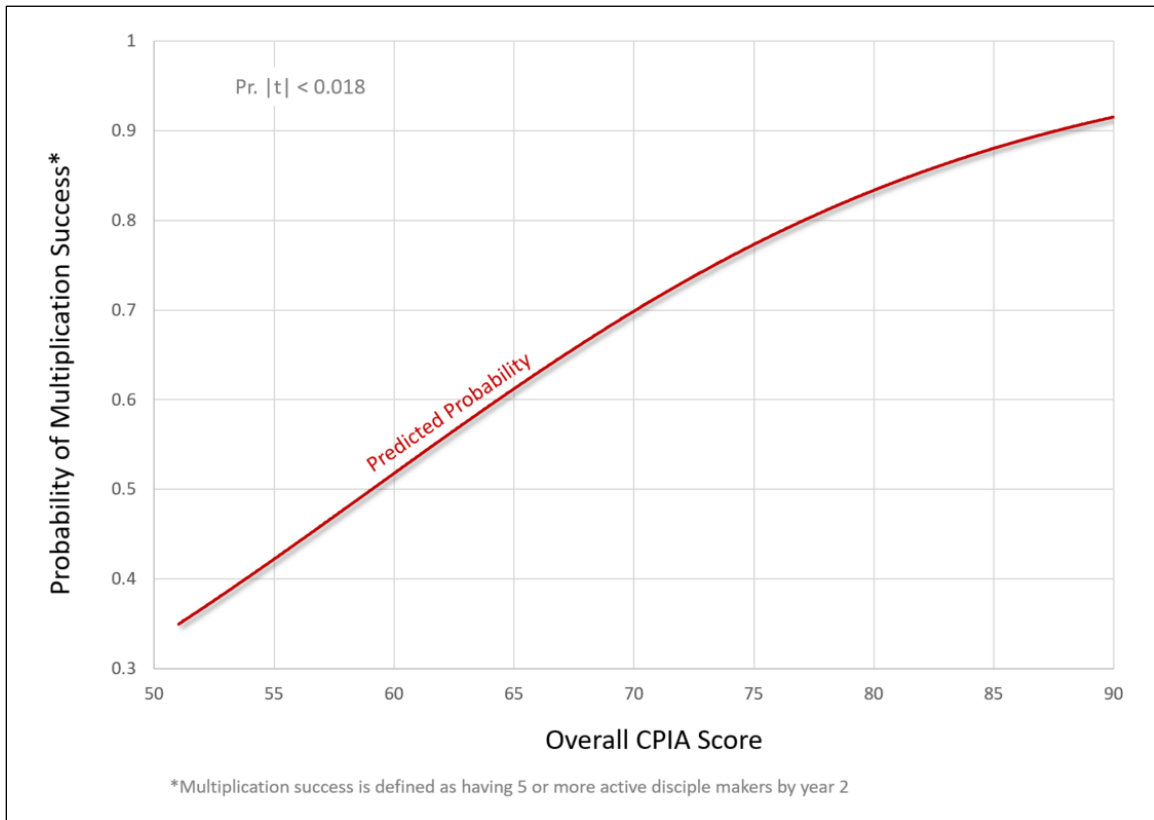


Figure 11. Probability of multiplication success versus overall CPIA score

The data indicate that church planters with an average overall CPIA score of 70 have an approximately 70% chance of multiplication success when multiplication success is defined as having five or more active disciple makers in the church by year 2 of the church's life. The probability of multiplication success drops considerably for

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<sup>7</sup> Pr.  $|t| < 0.018$  using a two-tailed t-test.

church planters with lower overall CPIA scores and increases in like manner for church planters with higher overall CPIA scores. For example, a church planter with one of the highest overall CPIA score in the sample would have a roughly 90% chance of multiplication success compared to an approximately 30% chance for a planter with one of the lowest scores. The statistics confirm that, while it is possible to achieve multiplication success for church planters with lower overall CPIA scores, it is significantly less likely.

Conversely, there does not appear to be any statistically significant relationship between the probability of achieving sustainability success and the overall CPIA score. Church planters that achieve sustainability success have an average overall CPIA score of 71.0 compared to an average of 70.8 for those that do not achieve sustainability success, which is not a statistically significant difference.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, as figure 12 demonstrates, the statistics advocate strongly that the very weak relationship between sustainability success and the overall CPIA score is entirely random and non-meaningful.

In summary, the overall CPIA score is a reliable predictor of multiplication success but is not a valid predictor of any of the other success measures, either traditional measurements or measurements associated with NAMB's definition of success. As a result, the overall CPIA score should be used to facilitate church planter selection only if the desired outcome is multiplication success, and it is further acknowledged that higher scores do not dictate success but rather increase the probability thereof. The overall CPIA score is statistically linked with the probability of multiplication success, but the data also include numerous examples of church planters with low overall CPIA scores who achieved multiplication success.

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<sup>8</sup> Pr.  $|t| < 0.915$  using a two tailed t-test.

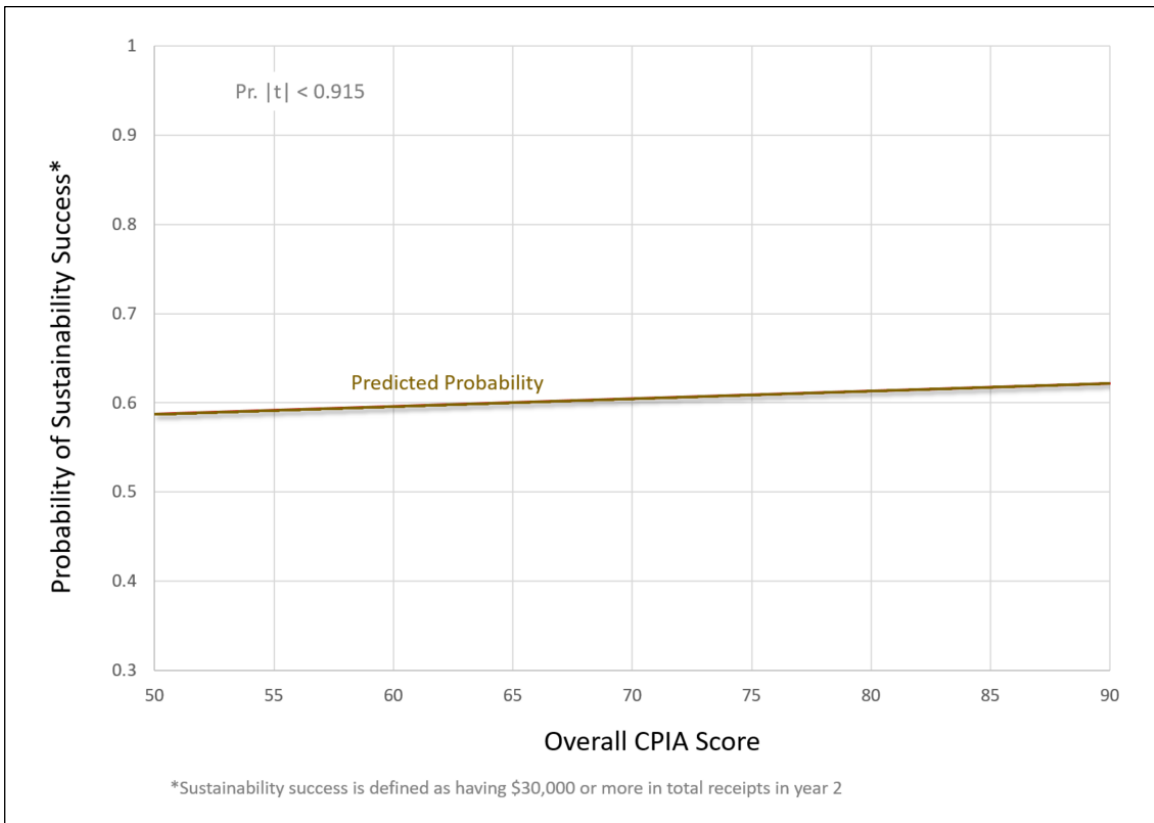


Figure 12. Probability of sustainability success versus overall CPIA score

### Most Predictive Church Planter Characteristics

In addition to the overall CPIA score, there are a number of related CPIA scores that warrant further investigation. As mentioned, the overall CPIA score is comprised of four main categories. The main categories measured in the CPIA instrument are character, leadership, multiplication, and vision. Furthermore, each of the main categories have sub-elements that underpin the various ratings and can be examined in more detail. Are any of the main categories predictive? Which church planter characteristics are most important when it comes to church planting success? Are there certain characteristics and personality traits that matter more for church planters when it comes to multiplication success?

In order to answer the questions above, each of the scores associated with the

four main categories were tested against the six primary dependent variables.<sup>9</sup> The resulting statistics are listed in table 6 which displays the probability of randomness of each relationship. The hypothesis is that there is a positive relationship between the CPIA score and the dependent variable in question. Consequently, all negative relationships are given a Pr. Value of 0.999 so as to avoid any confusion.<sup>10</sup> Relationships with a Pr. Value less than 0.050 are considered to be statistically significant and are highlighted in green. Relationships with a Pr. Value less than 0.100 and greater than 0.050 are relationships considered to be marginally significant and are highlighted in yellow.

Table 6. Statistics associated with the main CPIA categories and key success measures

<b>Dependent Variable<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Character Pr. Value</b>	<b>Leadership Pr. Value</b>	<b>Multiplication Pr. Value</b>	<b>Vision Pr. Value</b>
Worship Attendance	0.809	0.965	0.922	0.026
Quarterly Baptisms	0.999	0.999	0.576	0.452
CP Giving	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.314
Active Disciple Makers	0.179	0.638	0.328	0.618
Multiplication Success	0.120	0.138	0.073	0.099
Sustainability Success	0.999	0.635	0.999	0.114

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<sup>9</sup> As with the overall CPIA score, the statistical tests that were used to evaluate the four main categories depended upon the distribution of the data. For example, simple linear regression was used for continuous variables, and logistic regression was used for binary dependent variables. Transformations of the data were applied as necessary to ensure robustness of the statistical techniques employed.

<sup>10</sup> Relationships that are negative have Pr. Values indicating the level of significance associated with the negative relationships rather than the positive relationships that are hypothesized. Since negative relationships are in the wrong direction, it can be concluded that there is no statistical significance of the positive relationship in question.

<sup>11</sup> The names of the dependent variables are slightly abbreviated here but represent the same variables that are more precisely defined in table 5.

As table 6 demonstrates, there is a statistically significant relationship between the average weekly worship attendance in year 2 and the vision CPIA score. This is a particularly interesting result considering the fact that all the other scores, including the overall CPIA score, have almost no predictive power when it comes to weekly worship attendance. The relationship between the weekly worship attendance and the vision CPIA score is shown in figure 13 and has a 97% chance of being real. Additionally, the vision CPIA score explains approximately 8% of the variance in weekly worship attendance.

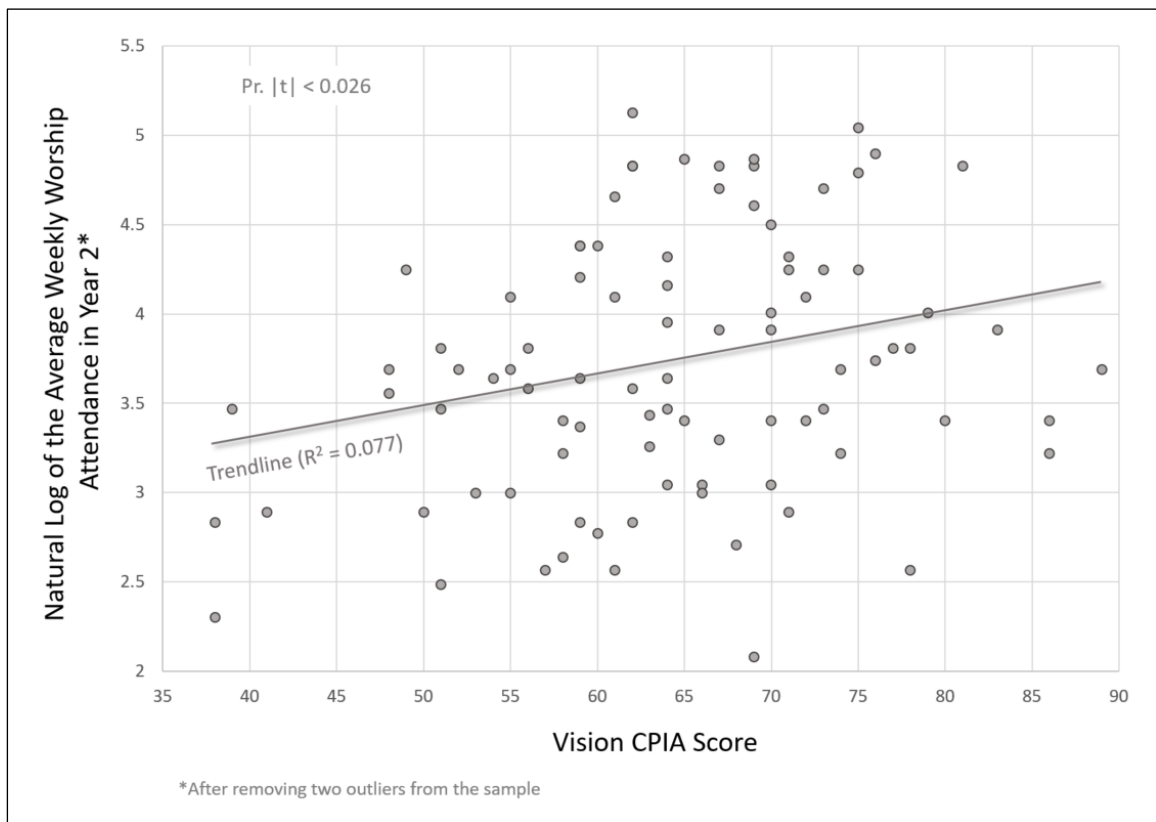


Figure 13. Average weekly worship attendance versus vision CPIA score

According to the CPIA definitions, there are five sub-elements associated with the vision CPIA score, namely the categories of dreamer, public speaker, protector, trend

setter, and vision caster. Of these sub-elements, the most leveraging factor related to weekly worship attendance is the category of trend setter. The statistical details for each sub-element are presented in table 7 below.

Table 7. Statistics associated with the vision sub-elements and worship attendance

Vision Sub-Elements	Strength of Worship Attendance Relationship Pr. Value
Dreamer	0.051
Public Speaker	0.339
Protector	0.728
Trend Setter	0.004
Vision Caster	0.090

The CPIA instrument defines a trend setter as a church planter who is “not afraid to create innovative and unique opportunities that captivate allegiance in others.”<sup>12</sup> The statistics suggest that church planters who are classified as trend setters tend to have higher levels of weekly worship attendance in the second year of their church plants than those who are not classified as such.

Table 6 also highlights that the CPIA scores associated with both multiplication and vision are marginally significant predictors of multiplication success. Figure 14 shows both relationships and demonstrates how the multiplication and vision CPIA scores are reasonable predictors of multiplication success. However, it is worth noting that the overall CPIA score remains the best predictor of multiplication success.

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<sup>12</sup> See figure 1 for the CPIA definitions of each sub-element.



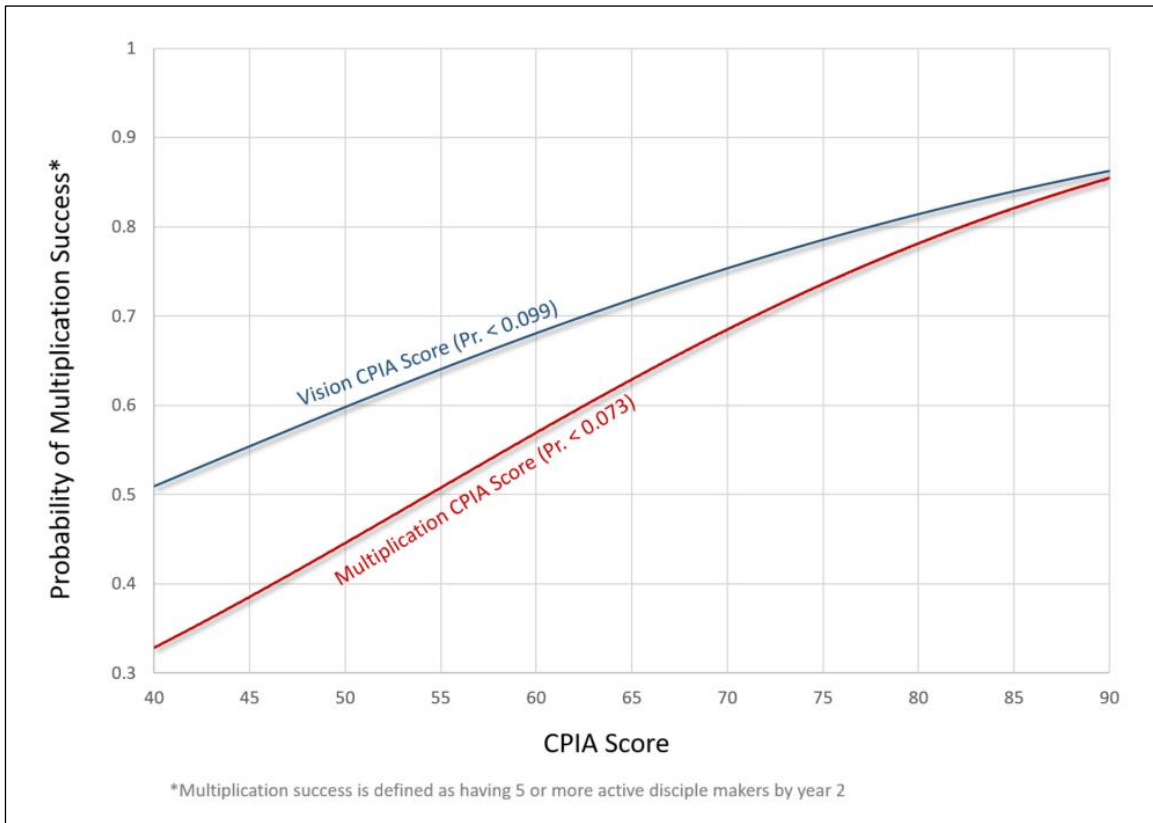


Figure 14. Probability of multiplication success versus multiplication and vision scores

The various sub-elements contributing to the multiplication and vision CPIA scores are listed in table 8 along with the strength of the relationships between the sub-elements and multiplication success. The multiplication sub-elements of changer and implementer are the most leveraging factors when it comes to multiplication success followed by the vision sub-elements of vision caster and trend setter. A changer is defined as a church planter who “recognizes and responds appropriately when change is needed,” whereas an implementer is one who “is able to implement plans and execute what is necessary to move them to reality.” A vision caster is a church planter who “uses

common and compelling language to paint a clear picture of the desired future.”<sup>13</sup> These characteristics, along with being a trend setter, appear to be good predictors of multiplication success. However, church planters that were classified as changer had the highest probability of multiplication success when compared to all the other sub-elements.

Based on the statistics, there are a few church planter characteristics that are particularly important for church planter success. If weekly worship attendance is a criterion for success, it is helpful for church planters to be visionaries and to have the ability to create innovative opportunities that resonate with others. If multiplication success is preferred, church planters tend to perform better according to the statistics if they have higher multiplication and vision CPIA scores. More specifically, those who are able to recognize and respond to change effectively have the highest probability of achieving multiplication success. Implementers, vision casters, and trend setters are also more prone to multiplication success, but changers tend to achieve success at a higher rate than others.

### **Summary of Analysis**

After evaluating the CPIA instrument using numerous statistical techniques and performing hundreds of statistical tests, the CPIA instrument has been verified as a statistically valid church planter assessment tool that can be used to aid in the selection of church planters. The overall CPIA score is a reliable predictor of multiplication success and the vision CPIA score is a reliable predictor of worship attendance.

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<sup>13</sup> See figure 1 for the CPIA definitions of each sub-element.

Table 8. Selected sub-elements and multiplication success relationships

<b>Sub-Elements</b>	<b>Relationship with Multiplication Success Pr. Value</b>
Multiplication: Adapter	0.542
Multiplication: Befriender	0.291
Multiplication: Changer	0.009
Multiplication: Culture Crosser	0.514
Multiplication: Decider	0.978
Multiplication: Diverse Evangelizer	0.089
Multiplication: Gospel Enthusiast	0.141
Multiplication: Gospel Prayer Warrior	0.123
Multiplication: Gospel Presenter	0.518
Multiplication: Implementer	0.040
Multiplication: Multiplier	0.229
Multiplication: Networker	0.396
Multiplication: Proclaimer	0.465
Multiplication: Recruiter	0.213
Multiplication: Relater	0.377
Vision: Dreamer	0.391
Vision: Public Speaker	0.669
Vision: Protector	0.875
Vision: Trend Setter	0.066
Vision: Vision Caster	0.044

However, the analysis has identified that the vast majority of the CPIA scores are simply not predictive of any particular outcome measure, and caution is warranted

when comparing potential church planters across the CPIA elements that have not been statistically proven to predict success of any kind. For example, the data suggest that the overall CPIA score should not be used as an indicator of future worship attendance, baptisms, cooperative program giving, or sustainability success. Moreover, the main categories of character and leadership have essentially no predictive value across any of the defined success criteria. While the CPIA instrument is a statistically valid assessment tool for church planter selection, this analysis has shown that it has particular strengths and weaknesses and should only be used with those in view.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **General Summary**

Church planting is a fundamental activity for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ in North America and around the globe. Churches and sending organizations are tasked with the difficult responsibility of utilizing limited resources well and supporting only the most qualified church planters. As a result, it is theologically appropriate and financially prudent for those responsible for selecting church planters to use the tools and aids that God has provided to help improve the selection of qualified candidates, including church planter assessment instruments. However, church planter assessment instruments must be statistically validated if they are to be used properly and effectively in the church planter selection process, and many of the church planter assessments instruments currently in circulation have not been sufficiently validated. To that end, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has provided data for analysis in order to evaluate the validity of their church planter assessment instrument known as the Church Planter Initial Assessment.

The first step in validating a church planter assessment instrument is to develop a clear and measurable definition of church planter success since assessment tools are intended to predict a desired outcome. Unfortunately, a consensus regarding the definition of church planter success has not been reached, and there is a significant gap in the existing literature such that an opportunity for more research exists to provide a biblically robust definition. Even though the traditional numerical measurements of attendance, baptism, and giving are easy to evaluate, there are varying alternative definitions with ample biblical merit. For example, the North American Mission Board

prioritizes sustainability and multiplication while the concepts of faithfulness and fruitfulness represent additional alternatives.

The analysis of the data provided by NAMB was performed using the appropriate statistical techniques and provided evidence that the CPIA tool is a valid assessment instrument for use in the selection of church planters as long as the various strengths and limitations of the instrument are taken into consideration. The overall CPIA score is not predictive of any of the traditional success measurements and should not be viewed as a reliable forecasting tool if the desired outcomes include attendance, baptisms, or giving. In fact, the vast majority of the scores produced by the CPIA instrument have no predictive power and should not be used in the ranking and selection process of church planters. However, the overall CPIA score is a reliable predictor of multiplication success when multiplication success is defined as having at least five active disciple makers by year 2 of the church plant's life. The relationship between the multiplication success and the overall CPIA score appears to be driven by the vision and multiplication CPIA sub-scores. Additionally, the vision CPIA sub-score is a reliable predictor of future church plant weekly worship attendance, specifically for those church planters who were classified as "trend setters." All other scores generated by the CPIA instrument are inconsequential as predictive measurements and should not be used in the ranking or selecting of potential church planters.

### **Recommendations for the North American Mission Board**

Considering the analytical results, it is recommended that the North American Mission Board continue to use the Church Planter Initial Assessment instrument as a statistically validated and theologically appropriate aid in the selection process of qualified church planters. However, the CPIA instrument should be used with much care and with the understanding that most of the resulting scores have little to no predictive power on church planter success, regardless of how success is defined. Consequently,

there is an opportunity to dramatically reduce the number of questions. Alternatively, assessors should only consider the questions that have predictive power when evaluating church planters. Furthermore, the few scores that are reliable predictors of success simply increase the probability of success and are not guarantees thereof. For example, church planters with higher overall CPIA scores are statistically proven to have a higher chance of multiplication success than those with lower overall CPIA scores, but there are numerous examples of church planters with low overall CPIA scores that achieve high levels of success. Consequently, the CPIA instrument should be viewed as a helpful aid but not as a final judgement on the qualifications of a church planter.

It is also highly recommended that the North American Mission Board improve internal systems and expertise with respect to data management. Gathering the requested data for this research required significantly more time and effort than originally anticipated. Furthermore, a large portion of the requested data were simply inaccessible because of a lack of knowledge and limited expertise within NAMB and the corresponding contractors. As an example, NAMB was unable to provide item level data, most of the data associated with the quarterly reports, and spouse related CPIA data. There were also many erroneous values provided by NAMB that required substantial effort to correct or remove from the analysis. The data gathering phase of this project demonstrated that the QR data and the CPIA data are not stored or structured in a way that allows for quick and reliable data analysis. As a result, it is recommended that NAMB evaluate the entire data pipeline to look for areas of improvement.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, NAMB should consider increasing internal competencies with respect to data management and statistical analysis. The data that NAMB collects are enormously valuable and can be used to help improve church planting effectiveness if organized and

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<sup>1</sup> The data pipeline represents the flow of data from beginning to end, including data architecture, data gathering from CPIA evaluations and quarterly reports, data storage, data querying, data extraction, and data analysis.

evaluated appropriately.

NAMB might also consider developing clear and measurable definitions of church planter success. While discussions with NAMB revealed the primary themes of multiplication and sustainability, these represent broad constructs that could be further expanded and defined. More specifically, NAMB should consider developing definitions of church planter success that can be consistently communicated, measured, evaluated, and analyzed. For example, the analysis suggests that multiplication success could be defined as having five or more disciple makers by the end of year 2. Developing concrete definitions of success accordingly and communicating them with prospective church planters will help remove ambiguity and foster more consistent and transparent church planter evaluations.

Another recommendation is that NAMB consider alternative definitions of success that have biblical merit and are worthy of consideration such as the concepts of faithfulness and fruitfulness. Suggestions for measuring the level of faithfulness include the number of times a church planter shares the gospel outside of corporate worship per quarter, how many hours per week a church planter spends in prayer and in the Word, whether a church planter is still faithfully preaching the Word of God at a church plant in year 5 when financial support is no longer provided, or how often a church planter meets with members for pastoral care and discipleship. These measurements focus less on the numerical results of ministry and more on the faithfulness of the church planter to actively engage in the gospel ministry.

With respect to fruitfulness, it is possible to develop reliable measurements by measuring the growth in the spiritual disciplines of the church planter and the church members. One suggestion for measuring the fruitfulness of a church planter would be to evaluate the level of Bible intake, prayer, gospel witness, and financial stewardship of a church planter and church members in year 1 of a church plant's life and compare it to year 3. The level of increase associated with these spiritual disciplines, among others,



may be a good indication of the fruitfulness of a church planter. Once the definitions of success are thoroughly demarcated, the quarterly reports should be updated to reflect these definitions and ensure that the appropriate data are gathered for further analysis.

There is also an opportunity for continuous testing and improvement of the CPIA instrument. The validity of an assessment instrument may change over time, and it is necessary to frequently validate any assessment instrument.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, as more data becomes available, NAMB should consider how additional variables influence the validity of the CPIA instrument. Factors such as the culture of the church plant location, urbanization of the city, level of support from local churches, size of the initial core group, and the number of pastors in the church planting team are likely to change how the CPIA results relate to the success measures. Additionally, item level data should be evaluated for reliability to ensure that the individual questions accurately measure the appropriate constructs. The individual questions should be updated periodically to ensure robustness. Questions that have little variation or have no predictive power should be considered for replacement or outright removal. In summary, the analysis provided herein is a first step towards a more comprehensive program of research aimed at the improvement of church planter evaluation and selection.

### **Broader Implications and Path Forward**

For the boarder church planting community, this analysis has demonstrated that it is critical to validate any church planter assessment instrument before it is used for selection purposes. It is unfortunate whenever church planter assessment tools are implemented without any statistical evidence of predicting success. It is inappropriate to assume that a church planter who achieves a high score on an assessment instrument that has not been validated is more qualified than another church planter who achieves a

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Sackett and Nancy Tippins, *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Bowling Green, OH: Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, 2018), 39.

lower score. Furthermore, assessment instruments that have been statistically validated have strengths and weaknesses that must be understood before implementation. In fact, as the analysis of the CPIA instrument reveals, most of the church planter assessment scores have absolutely no predictive power and should not be used for comparing church planters. The measurements that are correlated to success are correlated to a particular definition of success that may or may not be desired by a sending agency, which highlights the need for more transparency regarding the statistical validation of church planter assessment instruments. As a result, sending agencies should demand to see the evidence of church planter assessment instruments that claim to be statistically validated. Rather than a sign of distrust, the request for evidence of statistical validity comes out of a need to understand the limitations of the assessment tool such that it can be properly interpreted and used for selection.

There is also a gap in the literature when it comes to the biblical definition of church planter success. Consequently, the church planting community would benefit greatly from a comprehensive analysis of Scripture in an effort to develop a more robust definition of church planter success. While a number of options are discussed herein such as multiplication, sustainability, faithfulness, and fruitfulness, further research is required to expand on these, among others, in light of the biblical evidence. If a definition of church planter success existed that was thoroughly defended from a biblical perspective, it would help bring alignment to the various sending agencies, clarify expectations among church planters, and lead to more accurate church planter evaluations. More importantly, a biblical definition of church planter success would help the entire church planting community pursue an objective in church planting that is more closely aligned with the Word of God.

Finally, further research is required to understand the effect of additional variables on church planter success and the validity of church planter assessment instruments. Church planter qualifications are important, but success is not deterministic

as it also depends on the church planting team, the church planting context, the level of family and church support, among other considerations.<sup>3</sup> As more and more data becomes available, church planter assessment instruments should be evaluated further and updated as necessary. Further analysis is also necessary to evaluate the most predictive church planter characteristics. For example, this analysis has demonstrated that church planters who are classified as trend setters, vision casters, changers, and implementers have the highest probability of success. A more focused analysis of these characteristics will not only improve the selection of qualified church planters, but it will also aid in the training of future church planters.

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 14.

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APPENDIX 1  
CORRELATION MATRIX OF QR VARIABLES

	Total Members	Quarterly Baptisms	Weekly Worship Attendance	New Believers Serving	% of New Believers	Active Disciple Makers	# of Small Groups	People in Small Groups	Total Receipts	Undesignated Gifts	Cooperative Program Giving	Aunie Armstrong Giving	Lottie Moon Giving	Mission Expenditures
Total Members	1													
Quarterly Baptisms	0.4967	1												
Weekly Worship Attendance	0.8571	0.3743	1											
New Believers Serving	-0.1556	0.0851	-0.2207	1										
% of New Believers	0.3295	0.2199	0.3324	-0.0502	1									
Active Disciple Makers	0.6571	0.2005	0.6496	-0.1599	0.2318	1								
# of Small Groups	0.4995	0.2714	0.5581	-0.1565	-0.0739	0.3313	1							
People in Small Groups	0.6908	0.2759	0.8541	-0.2691	0.0193	0.6009	0.7263	1						
Total Receipts	0.2203	0.1812	0.322	-0.2739	0.0052	0.4037	0.131	0.2915	1					
Undesignated Gifts	0.3632	0.2558	0.3752	-0.3093	0.0313	0.5329	0.1375	0.356	0.8237	1				
Cooperative Program Giving	0.3178	0.2162	0.4983	-0.1925	0.0128	0.4972	0.2864	0.4411	0.5357	0.706	1			
Aunie Armstrong Giving	0.0747	0.2225	0.0908	-0.2394	-0.0634	0.0566	0.0232	0.1189	0.5055	0.4951	0.345	1		
Lottie Moon Giving	0.0921	0.0953	0.1628	-0.1372	-0.0735	0.023	0.0166	0.1265	0.5955	0.5326	0.3029	0.6303	1	
Mission Expenditures	0.5096	0.2925	0.508	-0.1569	0.0987	0.3785	0.1398	0.3568	0.7771	0.7917	0.5561	0.5006	0.7143	1

## ABSTRACT

### STATISTICAL EVALUATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD'S CHURCH PLANTER INITIAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER CHURCH PLANTING COMMUNITY

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Church planter assessment instruments have been used to improve the selection and development of church planters for decades; however, the vast majority of church planter assessments in operation have never been statistically validated. Additionally, no evidence has been published that proves church planter assessment results are correlated with church planter success. The objective of this Thesis is to improve the selection and development of church planters by performing a robust statistical evaluation of the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Church Planter Initial Assessment (CPIA) instrument. The initial portion of the research will involve a comprehensive review of the literature regarding church planter assessments and an evaluation of the biblical justification for using assessments. The core methodology will focus on a rigorous statistical analysis of NAMB's CPIA instrument using proper statistical techniques and will highlight the most leveraging characteristics of a successful church planter based on data.

## VITA

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### EDUCATION

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