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LAUNCH STRATEGY AND CORE TEAM DEVELOPMENT  
DURING THE PRE-LAUNCH PHASE OF A CHURCH  
PLANT IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctorate of Educational Ministry

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by  
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May 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

LAUNCH STRATEGY AND CORE TEAM DEVELOPMENT  
DURING THE PRE-LAUNCH PHASE OF A CHURCH  
PLANT IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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Dedicated to my wife and kids for allowing me to pursue this endeavor  
and to the many “Pauls” who have invested in me. Thank you.

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## PREFACE

Vocational ministry was never even a consideration for me growing up—let alone the arduous task of church planting. Like our experience of slowly but surely being called into vocational ministry, so too the Lord had to gradually bring us to a conviction and calling toward the endeavor of church planting. Despite my previous reservations and at times even repulsion by the endeavor (at least toward domestic church plants), my wife and I have now moved our family to plant a church in San Diego, California.

After being radically converted at age 18, the Lord began to develop a heart in me to impact others with the gospel and disciple them in the truth. This led to starting the first ministry (a high school youth group) and eventually finding my way on staff at a church. After being ordained as a pastor, it got real. Even after being on staff in a director role for some time, I wasn't convinced I was fully called to ministry. But, when the elders of a local church initiated the process of affirming and ordaining me as an elder, the reality of a calling began to sink in.

What makes a calling from the Lord believable? For me, it's best summarized in three words: opportunity, affirmation, and desire. I believe that in most instances, if God is going to call someone to a particular ministry task, he won't do so against the common consensus of God's people. For me, discerning His will has always involved the wise counsel of elders and faithful church members who know me and are able to see the full scenario with objectivity. But affirmation is directionless without opportunity. In the two to three big decisions my wife and I have had to make, it's been an opportunity that has stirred the prayer and discussion, ultimately leading to us seeking counsel. The affirmation came in response to an opportunity. Then finally, there's personal desire. Do I want to do this? For me, it's hard to believe that God will call someone to do something

that the person absolutely hates. Rather, part of the call would seem to be the Spirit-infused passion to do the work to which he's being called. So, I believe it's the opportunity, affirmation, and desire that filled full a clear calling for us to come to San Diego to plant a church.

Having the sure conviction that we're supposed to plant, and a level of clarity that it was supposed to be in San Diego, a whole new set of problems were created. Amidst a thousand and one questions, perhaps the best summary is—*how exactly does one plant a church?* Questions of process, DNA, culture, organizational leadership, fundraising and finances, family care and much more can easily overwhelm any aspiring church planter. So, this began yet another journey for us in seeking both training and support in the process to plant.

Now 14-months into the process, we've completed a five-month residency for church planting at an established and fruitful local church. We've moved to San Diego and seen sufficient funding provided. My family is cared for and thriving in our new city. We've seen God assemble a Core Team that together launched a church on January 29, 2023. And though we are just getting started, God's grace and power have been on display in people's lives in a truly incredible way.

So, this project is some of what I know, some of what I've recently learned or had to figure out, and some of what still remains. Knowing the risk and reward, the faith and dependency, the challenges and the blessings of the hard, gut-wrenching work of church planting—there's part of me that would be hesitant to ever encourage a Christian to jump into planting. And yet, at the same time, it is the most rewarding, gospel-proclaiming, local-church-building, and kingdom-advancing work in the known universe. My conviction is that the kingdom advances through planting new churches, and that as it does, God's glory grows and spreads.

My heart then in pursuing this project is that it would be a helpful resource for any aspiring church planting in the future. That they would be helped in two challenging

areas of the planting process—selecting a method for planting and developing a plan that carries out that method and it’s critical factor for success. And finally, that they would be more in awe of what God is able to do, regardless of human leadership.

May God be glorified in the church forever. Amen.

Matt Thibault

San Diego, California

May 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The last forty years have seen a resurgence in church planting in the United States. “Between 1980 and 2000, more than fifty thousand churches were planted in North America.”<sup>1</sup> Since then, several new church planting networks have been formed and exploded in growth. SEND Network, a church planting arm of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), is now responsible for 4,400 church plants with 48,000 churches partnering in this effort.<sup>2</sup> Acts 29, another network of churches planting churches, reported in their 2021 annual report that they’ve now planted 741 total churches in 45 countries worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Harvest Bible Chapel, responsible for the Harvest Bible Fellowship based out of Chicago, reported that they planted 100 churches from 2000 to 2014.<sup>4</sup> These are just a few samples of the kind of explosive church planting growth that has taken place first in the United States and beyond over recent decades.

Amidst this explosive growth though, there have also been significant challenges facing the church planting endeavor. For one, the number of churches per

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 14.

<sup>2</sup> North American Mission Board, “Church Planting,” accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.namb.net/send-network/church-planting/>.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 29 was founded in 1998 by Mark Driscoll and David Nicholas. Driscoll resigned from the presidency and Matt Chandler was appointed in 2012. Acts 29, “Annual Report: 2021,” accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.acts29.com/ar21/>.

<sup>4</sup> Harvest Bible Chapel began planting churches in the year 2000 with the goal of planting 10 churches in 10 years. Harvest Bible Chapel, “Our Story,” accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.harvestbiblechapel.org/our-story/>.

capita in the United States has declined sharply over the past 100 years.<sup>5</sup> It's estimated that 4,500 Protestant churches folded in 2019 alone.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, ample challenges have been felt within the three organizations listed above. Three organization presidents who have either resigned or stepped away for a season with questions regarding their qualification for ministry leadership. Some of the larger churches involved in these networks have had involvement in scandals, misconduct, and litigation, throwing shade on the organization as a whole. This combination of disqualification at the top and organizational integrity within have caused many to be cautious, if not suspicious about church planting movements.

So, while there is excitement about the energy and quick fruit that is born out of domestic church planting, there's also an understandable reservation toward it by many. Speaking to this reservation, church planting expert Ed Stetzer cites five objections that many Americans have to domestic church planting: (1) a large-church mentality, (2) a parish-church mindset, (3) professional-church syndrome, (4) rescue-the-perishing syndrome, and (5) the already-reached myth.<sup>7</sup> Together then, these objections combined with the tarnished reputation of some of the major planting organizations and churches in America have created substantial hesitation toward planting.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stetzer cites a study done by the North American Mission Board that revealed the following statistics: "In 1900, there were 28 churches for every 10,000 Americans; In 1950, there were 17 churches for every 10,000 Americans; In 2000, there were 12 churches for every 10,000 Americans; In 2004 . . . there [were] 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans." Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Gabbatt, "Losing Their Religion: Why US Churches Are on the Decline," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/22/us-churches-closing-religion-covid-christianity>.

<sup>7</sup> For further explanation of each as well as a rebuttal and counter perspective, see Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 5-14.

<sup>8</sup> It's conceivable then that any stateside planter will encounter two increasing challenges. First, people's lack of trust toward planting has likely increased, meaning the planting strategy will need to be crisp—tried and true, proven to work and founded in Scripture. The second increasing challenge is the difficulty in getting people to fully "buy-in" and sacrificially commit to planting a church together. Admittedly, the challenge of seeing God's people commit to building God's spiritual kingdom is certainly not new—but the added challenge in domestic church planting is seemingly even more difficult. We've found that some may have the courage to join the plant—but committing with sacrificial giving of their time, talent, and treasure is another story.

It's in light of these fairly modern and contextual challenges that this project was aimed toward addressing the current headwinds for domestic church planting. Specifically, the project endeavored to answer three key questions related to our church plant in particular: (1) what is the best method for our church plant in this specific context, (2) what is the critical factor to successfully planting a church within our chosen model, and (3) what's our detailed plan to carry it out? In answering these, the goal was not only to remove fears and objections regarding domestic church planting, but to produce passionate involvement and true sacrificial commitment to God's kingdom building work in San Diego and beyond.

### **Context**

This project is being completed simultaneous to planting Doxa Church San Diego in San Diego, California. The historical context of how this church plant has come together are provided below.

### **Planter Background**

My personal background of arriving at a conviction to be trained for church planting is not a straight line and developed through phases. Grace Bible Church of Bozeman, Montana, was my wife and I's first home church. I served on staff in the college ministry for seven years before transitioning to another context. The time there developed excitement about frontlines ministry where students are saved, equipped, and sent out for the mission of Jesus Christ.

My wife and I transitioned to serve as the Pastor of Discipleship at Grace Church of the Valley in Kingsburg, California, in March 2020. I served there for nearly two years and was afforded the opportunity to build ministry in multiple areas working with the full demographic of the congregation. This time refined ministry competency and at the same time deepened my own conviction to lead.

While serving in Kingsburg, I began a doctoral program through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was here where I was first exposed to church planting done well. Not only was I intrigued by it, but the opportunity and affirmation for this direction with my own life began to develop. This was later confirmed by the pastoral teams of both our former churches. Given my personal calling and the simultaneous lack of experience in church planting by either of the churches, it became obvious to me that I would need to get the proper training and support needed to successfully do a church plant. This led me to Vintage Mission, the church planting ministry of Christ Church in Phoenix, Arizona.

### **Sending Church and Church Planting Organization**

Christ Church was launched in December of 2012 as a church plant of Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago. Since the launch in 2012, the church has grown from a few families to now having three congregations with a total of 3,500 people in attendance. The church is known for applicational Bible preaching, a warm and welcoming environment, and passionate worship. Its mission, pillars, rhythms, and culture code are both biblical and simple, making them easily accessible to the entirety of the church body. In addition, Christ Church is committed to being a church that supports and plants others churches, leading to the recent formation of an organization called Vintage Mission.

Vintage Mission is a partnership of like-minded churches committed to planting and supporting other churches. The organization began at the start of 2020 and to date has 22 churches who have partnered together to plant seven churches in the past two years. As of 2022, they've hired two full-time employees to facilitate the operation, support, and growth of Vintage Mission. In December 2021, our family transitioned to Phoenix, Arizona, for a five-month training program before being sent out to plant in June 2022.

## Why San Diego?

On June 1, 2022, we arrived in San Diego, California, to plant Doxa Church San Diego. The draw to San Diego, and in particular the South Bay of San Diego, was formed by three big realities. First, the South Bay is home to over a million people, and there aren't nearly enough healthy churches.<sup>9</sup> Our desire is to plant a church that's about these historic commitments while seeking to do so in a modern context.

The second compelling aspect of San Diego is the unique opportunity that it provides for multiplication and global impact. San Diego is home to a transient population consisting of 100,000 college students, 140,000 military,<sup>10</sup> and all-year tourism. Being both a port city and a border city, it also has an incredible diversity of nations represented.<sup>11</sup> What this means for the church is an opportunity to perpetually convert, disciple, equip, and send missionaries around the world.

Finally, the third draw to San Diego was the initial people who be committing to build their lives into the plant. Our family only knew five people upon deciding to move to San Diego, but those five were compelling enough to convince us that this is where we needed to be. Interestingly, the five (two couples and one single) each represented a demographic of the population we knew we'd be reaching, one that was compelling enough draw us to San Diego.

The combination of these three draws produced in us a calling to move to plant a church with that would impact the greater community in the South Bay of San Diego.

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<sup>9</sup> For the purposes here, a healthy church is being defined as a church committed to Bible-exposition, to gospel-centrality for daily life, and to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. For a more in-depth look at what constitutes a healthy church, see Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> San Diego Military Advisory Council, "San Diego Military Economic Impact Study 2019," accessed February 10, 2023, [https://www.sdmac.org/media/uploads/Meis/2019\\_meis\\_trifold.pdf](https://www.sdmac.org/media/uploads/Meis/2019_meis_trifold.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: San Diego City, California," accessed February 11, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sandiegocitycalifornia/PST045221>.



## City Context

San Diego county is home to nearly 3.3 million people.<sup>12</sup> Our target area of the South Bay consists of the cities of Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, Coronado, National City, and Bonita and has an estimated population of 1.2-1.5 million people. The ethnic demographic of the South Bay ranges based on region. Just across the bridge in National City, the only public high school, Sweetwater Union High School has 3,000 students with 96 percent minority enrollment.<sup>13</sup> The religious demographic has majority representation in 32 percent of San Diego County identifying as Roman Catholic and 30 percent as Protestant.<sup>14</sup>

## Rationale

Success rates of church plants in the United States are debated, but range optimistically from 34 percent failure rate to 90 percent fail rate within a 3-5 year time-frame.<sup>15</sup> Considering the potential of failure juxtaposed with the time invested, the amount of financial resources needed, the anxiety, fears, and tears that are shed—church planting can seem daunting, and likely not worth the risk. Even still though, the Great Commission given by Jesus reveals God’s heart to continually press forward in the mission to make disciples, train leaders, and establish new churches—and this calling produces church planters.

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<sup>12</sup> United States Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: San Diego County, California,” accessed February 11, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sandiegocountycalifornia/PST045221>.

<sup>13</sup> *U.S. News and World Report*, “Sweetwater High School,” accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/california/districts/sweetwater-union-high-school-district/sweetwater-high-school-3531>.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research Center, “Religious Composition of Adults in the San Diego Metro Area,” accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/metro-area/san-diego-metro-area/>.

<sup>15</sup> Intrepid Missions, “Almost All Church Plants Fail for the Same Reason . . . and It’s Not a Spiritual One,” accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.intrepidmissions.com/articles/2022/5/9/almost-all-church-plants-fail-for-the-same-reason-and-its-not-a-spiritual-one>.

While moving forward with faith to plant a new church, and given the challenge in the United States that have developed due to a decrease in church attendance (demonstrated by number of folding church) and the marred reputation of church planting in general, there's great need for careful selection of a church planting process. If a plant is going to be received and adopted in this cultural context, the planting process must be clear and believable. In addition, a plan in and of itself will not launch a church. Secondly, there's also need for focus on what's most important, giving the planter and developing Core Team the ability to say no to other pursuits in order to focus on the critical factor(s). Finally, even with clarity on a process and its critical factor(s), church plants may lack pragmatic excellence and therefore deter people from joining. The final reason for this project is the need to develop a training strategy to bring a Core Team along in the process of development within the selected method of planting.

The rationale for the project then was the need to find the launch strategy that is best for church planting at this time, to know its critical factor of success, and develop a training plan to accomplish it with the ultimate goal of seeing a healthy church launched and bear fruit.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to launch a healthy and sustained church. To do so, the project focused on the prelaunch phase of the plant, seeking to determine the best process for planting a church in our context, the critical factor(s) of success within the chosen model, and to develop a training plan to implement this strategy in real time.

### **Goals**

The purpose of this project leads to the development of specific goals. These goals frame the research methodology that will follow, eventually yielding conclusions and a process.

1. The first goal was to develop a church planting strategy that takes into account both the biblical record and the modern context in which we're planting.
2. The second goal was to determine the critical factor(s) to establish a successful plant within the chosen strategy.
3. The third goal was to develop a training plan that implements the chosen strategy and maintains focus on the critical factor(s) in preparation for launch.

In order to pursue fulfillment of these goals, a specific research methodology has been created that will provide the template to success.<sup>16</sup> The research methodology in the next section will give both the pathway to achieving the intended goals and the measurement of success of each goal.

### **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of this project depends upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to develop a church planting strategy that takes into account both the biblical record and the modern context in which we're planting. The success of this goal was measured by articulating a planting methodology that is faithful to Scripture and rooted in best practices based on modern context.

The second goal was to determine the critical factor(s) for a successful plant within the chosen strategy. The success of this goal was measured by a clear articulation of the critical factor(s).

The third goal was to develop a training plan that will help implement the chosen strategy and maintains focus on the critical factors in preparation for launch. This goal was considered successfully met when the training plan was evaluated and affirmed by an expert panel according to the rubric provided.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

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<sup>16</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

*Core Team.* The Core Team refers to the group of committed individuals who are willing to submit to the leadership and vision of the planting elders and who are bought into the vision, purpose, and strategy of the church prior to launch. The Core Team is used as a designated of those committed to the plant prior to the Launch and the Launch Team.

*Launch Team.* Launch Team is used to refer to the Core Team once certain Key Performance Indicators have been met and the launch of the church is imminent. The Launch Team will be a temporary team for 3-6 weeks that is focused on fulfilling the needed roles on our Teams in order to successfully launch the church.

*Vision meeting.* A meeting designed to inform attenders of the who, what, when, where, and why of the church plant. No commitment is necessary to attend the meeting, but opportunity to join the Core Team is given coming out of it.

*Core Team meeting.* A meeting designed to instill DNA beliefs into the Core Team with the ultimate goal of seeing commitment increase. It is also designed to produce cohesion among the core, emphasizing relationship.

*Assimilation.* The process of adding new Core Team members who join after the initial Core Team has met. This involves catching them up on essential components of the training that have already taken place, as well as building them into the Core Team relationally.

*Church DNA.* The set of mission, values, and rhythms that define a church's purpose and identity. While it's recognized that a church's stated DNA and actual DNA can be different, they will be the same for this project's purposes since the church does not exist yet and will not have had time for discrepancy to occur.

*Launch strategy.* Used synonymously with a launch "model" and "methodology"; refers to the process of moving from the concept of a church to the actual fruition of one.

*Church.* In this project, “church” is being defined as a people who gather around preaching and practice the ordinances. It’s “a gospel word and a gospel society,”<sup>17</sup> where the gospel society is affirmed and joined by the practice of two ordinances: baptism and communion.<sup>18</sup> Defining church in this way is important because some may argue that the initial Core Team gathering is “the church.” While there is room for further theological discussion that may validate differing perspectives, for this project the title “church” was reserved for the time period around launch when the church officially constituted around the ordinances and the implementation of a membership.

Three limitations applied to this project. First, limitation existed in exhaustively assessing contemporary and historical church planting strategies. This limitation was overcome by limiting the comparison to a few sources that cite several contemporary strategies.

The second limitation occurred in the training received from the planting organization for this specific plant. Vintage Mission is the training agency and Christ Church is the sending church. The training received by them was geared toward a specific model and strategy of church planting. So, while our church plant in San Diego will be an independent plant over time, we’re currently under outside accountability and oversight which is committed to a certain methodology of planting. To address this limitation, the project attempted to compare strategies from an optimistic perspective rather than pessimistic. It sought to address the good found in various models rather than to criticize them. This allowed the selected model to be seen as a good option among many others. It also allowed for the possibility of syncretism from the best that each model has to offer where appropriate.

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<sup>17</sup> This understanding of “church” is in line with thoughts about what’s essential to constituting a church. For more on this, see Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 20-26.

<sup>18</sup> Hansen and Leeman, *Rediscover Church*, 73-75.

A final limitation was in narrowing in on the critical factor(s) of the selected model of planting. There could be endless numbers of factors that make a plant successful or not, ranging from geopolitical factors to the planter becoming ill amidst planting. For this project, we contend that generally speaking, the critical factor within our chosen model is whether or not there's an increasing commitment to the plant from people over time. We did not attempt to substantiate this claim by research data, but inferred it based on the chosen methodology and its application being worked out into a strategy.

Three delimitations applied to this project. First, a delimitation of four churches involved in church planting composed the expert panel. These three churches were The Austin Stone (Austin, TX), Village Church (Denton, TX), and Christ Church (Phoenix, AZ).

A second delimitation was seen in the determination of the critical factor for our model. It's our contention that the critical factor is to see an increasing commitment from people over time, and that shared DNA is a key part of what increases commitment. There are likely other factors that can lead to increasing commitment—whether virtuous or not—that were not dealt with in this project. This project's delimitation is to state that shared DNA is merely one invaluable piece of what produces commitment.

A third delimitation of the project was seen in the factors needed for a successful launch. We included two of the key factors in this project, but in reality, there are three. In addition to a clear and compelling process, and clarity on the type of church being planted, the church planting pastor is the third critical component. While the project could have sought outside affirmation of the planter's character and competency, this critical factor was left out of the project for two reasons. First, the obvious bias and conflict of interest was likely too great to objectively overcome. Even outside affirmation can be selectively chosen and manipulated to cast the planter in a certain light. The second was the inability to objectively identify where planter weakness is the

contributing factor for a particular failure. There are an infinite number of circumstances, events, and contributing factors within a particular planting context. To be sure, there are plenty of human limitations in any church planter, but the inclusion of this element in the project at hand went beyond the scope of the necessary to accomplish the stated goal. This delimitation allowed greater emphasis to be placed on the planting strategy and the specific type of church being planted.

### **Conclusion**

The project's goal of selecting and defending a biblical launch strategy or model, determining the critical factor(s) of success within the model, and then developing a training plan was critical in our pre-launch stage of planting a church. If we failed in these goals, the plant also would have been likely to fail. The chosen strategy of planting must be clear, compelling, biblical, and believable if people are to consider joining it. Determining and focusing on the critical factor was a necessity, as was developing a practical plan of implementation for carrying out the findings of this project in real time and space. Therefore, this project and its findings were critical—both for this plant, and for future endeavors.

The end result of this project is a rich resource for any church or pastor considering the endeavor of church planting. The combination of elite training and coaching, live reflection amidst the planting process, and cross-referencing with an expert panel of established and successful plants produces a resource worth having. Our narrow focus on the pre-launch phase of a domestic (Western) plant in the year 2022-23, the critical factor within our model, and a practical implementation plan makes this work a valuable contribution to the contemporary church planting world.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PLANTING A CHURCH

Before discussing the nuts and bolts of church planting, it's important first to consider if churches should in fact be planted. Is church planting an ancient endeavor for the first century, but not for today? Or, perhaps it's a recent fad, and one that's void of biblical conviction. The theological basis for planting a church must be established prior to assessing and choosing a church planting methodology.

To establish this theology, the first consideration will be rooted in the intent of God and his kingdom program seen primarily in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Then, the connection between God's kingdom advancement in the Old Testament and church planting will be explored from the Great Commission, select New Testament churches, and the continual progress of the kingdom through planting more churches.

#### **The Starting Point for a Kingdom-Building Mission**

The starting point of all theology is one's conception of God.<sup>1</sup> This sentiment holds true within the study missiology as well. God's deliberate act of sending of His Son communicates something about the very heart of God. The "*missio Dei*—the mission of God—on which the Son was sent by the Father and which was accomplished by the Son through obedience to the will of the Father,"<sup>2</sup> serves as the starting point for developing the church's kingdom-building mission as it relates to church planting. For a kingdom to

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 141.



exist, there must be a ruler, a people, and a place.<sup>3</sup> In line with this, Jesus is the forever King who is gathering for himself a people to rule on the earth. What follows is a description of how God's missional heart for the nations advances the kingdom from the throughout Scripture.

### **God's Missional Heart in the Old Testament**

Following Creation and the Fall, God promises Eve that her offspring would be successful in crushing the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). Though Eve likely thought that this promise would be fulfilled in her son (Gen 4:1), Cain's murder of Abel made clear this was not the case (4:8). This set the stage for God to speak about how he would bring about the fulfillment of delivering his people from the curse of sin through a Messiah.

#### *Abraham, the Conduit of God's Covenant*

The Abrahamic covenant is the unique and special promise that God made to Abraham regarding his involvement in God's kingdom-building plan. "The promises made to Abraham were the means by which God would undo the devastation wrought by Adam and would bring in his kingdom."<sup>4</sup> The promises, though progressively unveiled over several chapters, involve multiple blessings and recipients. The blessings promised were land, seed, and blessing. In the near sense, "the land was Canaan, the offspring Isaac, and the blessing universal so that it encompassed all the peoples of the world (Gen 12:3)."<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the multidimensional blessings of the covenant, God also had a broader audience in mind than Abraham alone. The Abrahamic covenant transcends the

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<sup>3</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 89-97.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 17.

time and place of Abraham to reach the world. “Though the Lord began with one man, the blessing promised was intended for all peoples everywhere.”<sup>6</sup> “Just as God offers spiritual and physical blessings to Israel, so too will He give spiritual and physical blessings to other people groups.”<sup>7</sup> The scope of the promise found fulfillment individually in Abraham, nationally in Israel, and universally in the nations. “Abraham and the nation Israel are not an end in themselves but channels for blessings.”<sup>8</sup> The promise of the Abrahamic covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in the distant son of Abraham. Yet, even Solomon fell short of fully realizing the promises. “All that the covenant to Abraham had promised was under Solomon both realized and lost. To say this is to say that the realization of the promises must be qualified by all the deficiencies due to human sinfulness. In whatever sense the Kingdom of God is fulfilled in Solomon’s reign, something is yet lacking.”<sup>9</sup> The Abrahamic covenant was the next step in God’s plan of advancing his kingdom though, one that was necessary prior to the rise of a nation.

### *Israel, the Kingdom of Priests*

God’s heart for the mission is further revealed in the new role for His people, the nation of Israel. As stated in the Abrahamic covenant, not only would he bless them and set them apart to be his people, but he would also convey his grace through them to the nations as “a kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6).<sup>10</sup> “The promise of a nation given to

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<sup>6</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1981), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

Abraham is also picked up here.”<sup>11</sup> That promise is the promise to be the conduit of blessing to other nations.

The exact nature of what God intended in this priestly role is debated—whether his intent was for them to be missional or merely attractational.<sup>12</sup> However, regardless of which is the case, what’s clear from this is God’s heart to reach the nations. As a people growing in number, Israel was being set apart in order to be witnesses of God’s holiness, greatness, and grace to the surrounding pagan nations. “Their role thenceforth would be to mediate or intercede as priests between the holy God and the wayward nations of the world, with the end in view not only of declaring his salvation but also providing the human channel in and through whom this salvation would be effected.”<sup>13</sup>

Israel’s history doesn’t exactly match up to this high calling though. Following the giving of this declaration in Exodus 19, Israel would find themselves wandering in the wilderness for forty years, entering the Promised Land with sin in the camp (Josh 6), then entering into a downward-spiraling time period known as the Judges. By the end of Judges, things were so bad that “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). Though there would be glimmers of light and hope (i.e., Solomon in 1 Kgs 10), and implied expectation of reaching the nations (Amos 9:11-12), the periods of the kings and prophets did not fulfill God’s heart toward the nations either.<sup>14</sup>

What results from Israel’s long and disappointing history recorded in the Old Testament is the expectation for something more. “Israel’s history is not hap-hazard, nor

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<sup>11</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 98.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner writes, “Yahweh speaks of ‘all the nations who are called by my name’ (9:12), suggesting that they belong to him because of their identification with his name. The coming Davidic king will save not only Israel, but also Gentiles.” Schreiner, *The King and His Beauty*, 411.

a series of random incidents, but, as in all history, it is governed by the purposes of God.”<sup>15</sup> This purpose was to progress God’s kingdom-building plan to reach the nations to the next phase.

### **The Kingdom Is the Mission**

As progressive revelation turns to the New Testament, God’s missional-heart for the world takes new shape. Precluded by the angel’s announcement to Mary, Jesus will be the one whose kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:33). This kingdom wouldn’t merely be a future event, but one that would begin with Jesus’s demonstration of lordship in his First Advent as well. “The kingdom of God could be said to have arrived in the ministry of Jesus, so that the exaltation was the open recognition of One who had already acted in his earthly life with kingly power as the representative of God.”<sup>16</sup> The coming of Jesus brought with it the long-awaited coming of God’s kingdom on earth.

The inauguration of the kingdom is seen in Jesus opening words, proclaiming that “the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). From this point forward, Jesus’s message centered around the growth and advancement of the kingdom. Amidst fifty-six uses of the term “kingdom,” Matthew records Jesus’s Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13), indicating God’s plan to grow the kingdom through the gospel.

Here then, in the person and work of Jesus, the missional heart of God advancing his kingdom for the nations is clearly seen. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, he is sent by the Father to accomplish a purpose. “He made him who knew no sin to be sin” (2 Cor 5:21) so that “whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Upon the culmination of this gospel promise that included the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom takes another huge leap forward. “The

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<sup>15</sup> Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1978), 68.

unavoidable conclusion from the New Testament evidence is that the gospel fulfils the Old Testament hope of the coming of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup> The kingdom, now inaugurated in Christ, would be both an already and not-yet reality.

Following the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom takes new shape. Beginning in Acts 1, Luke notes in the introduction that Jesus appeared and spoke to them a few final words before ascending into heaven. “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The emphasis on kingdom comes through the pen of Luke from this point forward. In just a few verses, he would again record the disciples asking Jesus, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Here, rather than a rebuke, Jesus responds by stating that the kingdom’s arrival was not for them to know, but that in the meantime they themselves will receive power (Acts 1:8). “Through the witness of Jesus’ apostles, ‘the kingdom’ would be restored to Israel, but not in nationalistic or political terms, nor immediately in the full and final sense outlined in biblical prophecy.”<sup>18</sup> This response suggests that the kingdom should no longer be thought of as a place for a nation, but as empowerment for a mission that would result in worldwide witness.

The expansion of the kingdom continues as a predominant theme throughout Acts. Philip preached good news about the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12). Paul was “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Later in his ministry, Paul is again said to be “reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). The proclamation of God’s kingdom arriving and being offered continues to the end of the book of Acts. In final scene recorded, from house

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<sup>17</sup> Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 110.

arrest, Paul is still seen “testifying to them about the kingdom” (Acts 28:23), and again “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). “No distinction should be made here between preaching (*kēryssōn*) and teaching (*didaskōn*), since the kingdom of God and the messiahship of Jesus are not two separate agendas but one.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the book ends with the continual proclamation of the gospel resulting in the advancement in God’s kingdom.

What becomes clear, especially in the book of Acts, is that the kingdom will advance through the growth and multiplication of the new people of God, the church.

### **Church Planting Is the Vehicle for Advancing the Mission**

God’s heart for reaching the nations was seen in his intentions for his Old Testament people Israel to be a “kingdom of priests.” As the script flips to the New Testament era, God’s people become the gathering of those who personally place faith in Jesus called the church. The plan then pivots from Israel as a kingdom of priests to the church as a self-multiplying and global entity.

Implied here then is that church planting is God’s New Testament plan for expanding his kingdom, a plan that continues today and until Jesus returns. Such a claim requires further justification if commitment and sacrifice are to be seen toward the effort of planting churches. In fact, it will take great conviction from the Word of God that this is in fact the will of God for the kind of sacrifice to occur that is needed to plant a church. As one planter stated, “I am struck by how selfless a church must be to plant another.”<sup>20</sup> It’s the contention here that God’s heart for mission is expressed in the advancement of his kingdom which is carried out through the planting of new churches—and that this endeavor is worthy of sacrifice.

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<sup>19</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 722.

<sup>20</sup> Mike McKinley, *Church Planting Is for Wimps: How God Uses Messed-Up People to Plant Ordinary Churches That Do Extraordinary Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 29.

## The Great Commission

The Great Commission texts provide the framework for New Testament kingdom expansion. Spoken by Jesus in all four gospels, but most notoriously in Matthew 28:18-20, God's plan for reaching the nations is through the evangelization and discipleship of the world through just a few. "The future of Christianity, humanly speaking, rose or fell on the ministry of these men."<sup>21</sup> Simply put, "men were to be his method of winning the world to God."<sup>22</sup> The Christian's personal mission is to attach themselves to the Great Commission by helping others to follow Jesus better.

But does the Great Commission necessarily imply that churches need to be planted? Ed Stetzer argues "yes" for three reasons. First, discipleship should occur inside the church, not outside. "Discipleship is the task of the New Testament church. Discipleship is not working when Christians must find their opportunities for spiritual growth outside the church."<sup>23</sup> Second, church planting is implied in the Great Commission because of the command to baptize. Baptism is a significant public act that should not be taken lightly, and it is the church's responsibility to oversee this ordinance, "ensuring that proper instruction about baptism has been provided, that the candidate(s) has/have articulated a credible profession of faith, that one performing the baptism is prepared to do so in the proper manner."<sup>24</sup> Third, the Great Commission calls for teaching, which is primarily to be facilitated through the church. The church is called the "pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15) and elders are those who "instruct in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Thus, Stetzer doesn't hesitate to say, "the Great Commission is church planting." He continues, "It's obvious by their

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<sup>21</sup> LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1993), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 40.

<sup>24</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 363.

actions that the first hearers of the Great Commission assumed its fulfillment required multiplying disciples and forming new congregations. The first believers heard the Commission, left their homes, and went out to plant.”<sup>25</sup>

The Great Commission is the God intended means of advancing the kingdom with the ultimate end of planting churches. “Planting new churches was not a novel or unique concept for zealous believers. Rather, church starting was the normal expression of New Testament missiology. Intentional church planting, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was the method of the early churches.”<sup>26</sup> This objective is as needed today as it was in biblical times, both for the sake of the mission and for the vitality of the sending churches. “Any church wishing to rediscover the dynamic nature of the early church should consider planting new churches.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Missional Nature of the New Testament Churches**

For every church found in the New Testament, there’s a story of how it came to be. The gospel was preached and met with faith. Believers in this gospel began to gather, and a church was formed. Within the New Testament there are several examples of churches that were planted, grew, and moved toward their own missional engagement. What follows is a brief survey of select New Testament churches, their origins, and their missional engagement after being established.

#### *Jerusalem*

The church in Jerusalem was born through the preaching of the gospel by Peter in Acts 2. This first expression of a local church, according to the plan of Jesus (Acts 1:8), would be uniquely positioned to have global impact. “Jesus echoes the words and

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<sup>25</sup> Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 52.



concepts of Isaiah 49:6, especially with the phrase to the ends of the earth. ‘Rather than sinking roots in Jerusalem and waiting for the world to flood in, Jesus’ followers are to move out from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, and ultimately “to the ends of the earth.”’<sup>28</sup> This would be fulfilled, first, in thousands being saved (Acts 2:41), many of whom were in Jerusalem from other nations due to Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Then secondly, many were saved in the sending out of others for strategic church planting work.

The church in Jerusalem, along with Antioch, would become one of two catalytic church planting centers in the New Testament era. Paul frequently returned to Jerusalem, and was both supported and a supporter of their ministry (1 Cor 16:3). Following the discussion about circumcision at the Jerusalem Council, the church leaders turned a corner in their partnering in the mission. With new understanding that they were now on equal spiritual standing with the Gentiles (Acts 15:10), there was consensus that not only should they not require circumcision (Acts 15:19), but they also to strategically seek to impact them spiritually. “God guided the debate and the decision-making process, protecting the church from error and division, and allowing the respective missions to Jews and Gentiles to flourish separately, but in harmony together.”<sup>29</sup> The church in Jerusalem is not only the home of the prolific and widely impactful ministries of Peter and James, but is also credited with commissioning Paul and others in a historic missionary journey. Its church planting legacy continues to bear fruit today.

### *Antioch*

The church in Antioch was ignited by the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). “New churches were planted in significant parts of the Gentile world by those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed.”<sup>30</sup> When one

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<sup>28</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 442.

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 351.

of Stephen’s affiliates arrived in Antioch and began “preaching the Lord Jesus,” “a great number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21).<sup>31</sup> When this unique act of God was told to the Jerusalem Church, “they sent Barnabas to Antioch” (Acts 11:22). Barnabas poured into the people, “exhort[ing] them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (Acts 11:23). Following this, “a great many people were added to the Lord.” In response to yet another movement of God in Antioch, “Barnabas recognized the rich potentialities of the situation for further advance, and saw the need of additional help in evangelism and teaching. He therefore hunted out his old friend Paul who was at work in *Tarsus* and persuaded him to join in the work at Antioch.”<sup>32</sup> Finding him and bringing him to Antioch, “for a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26).

From being a brand-new church, it didn’t take long for the church of Antioch to develop a missional mindset. Upon hearing a prophecy detailing the need for support for the church in Jerusalem, “they determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). For them, “it was unthinkable that one part of the Church should be in trouble and that another should do nothing about it.”<sup>33</sup> Not only did they send a gift, but per the Holy Spirit’s prompting, they sent off their two beloved teachers, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2-3)—although they soon would return to continue “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35). Though difficult to say with certainty, it’s conceivable that Paul then launched his second missionary journey from Antioch because of the financial support they were willing to render (Acts 36-41).

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<sup>31</sup> William Barclay states, “Here we have a truly amazing thing. The Church has taken the most epoch-making of all steps; and we do not even know the names of the people who took that step. All we know is that they came from Cyprus and Cyrene. They go down in history as nameless pioneers of Christ.” William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 103.

<sup>32</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 214.

<sup>33</sup> Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 107.

“Paul revisited Antioch when this campaign was over (18:22-23), demonstrating a continuing relationship of mutual care and support between them.”<sup>34</sup> The Antioch church’s legacy is found in it serving as hub for one of the greatest catalysts of church planters this world has ever seen, the apostle Paul.

### *Rome*

The church in Rome has an unknown origin, yet there are at least three Christian connections that perhaps together, established the church in Rome. First, there’s the Jews who gathered on Pentecost. “The most likely scenario is that Roman Jews, who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (see Acts 23:10), brought their faith in Jesus as the Messiah back with them to their home synagogues. In this way the Christian movement in Rome was initiated.”<sup>35</sup> Then, there’s the first known converts of Rome, Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2). Finally, Paul’s heart had been uniquely set upon Rome, perhaps as a final destination (Acts 19:21), a desire which was finally granted (Acts 28:14). Together, these three entities established a new church in Rome which by AD 250, was estimated to consist of 30,000 Christians.<sup>36</sup>

The church in Rome soon became a catalyst for global missions work, one that undoubtably involved church planting. “From its beginnings this church in the capital, with its claim to the ministry of the apostles Peter and Paul, gained the respect and admiration of Christians throughout the empire . . . once a church took root in the capital it naturally assumed leadership in Christian affairs.”<sup>37</sup> The church in Rome was used by

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<sup>34</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 449.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Word, 1995), 31.

<sup>37</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 31.

God for a period of time to bring about the universality of the Christian faith, and the means of doing so was planting new churches.

### *Philippi*

Moving to smaller and more localized churches, the start of the church in Philippi was a direct product of the apostle Paul's ministry through the Holy Spirit—and yet unique to his custom. Though Paul's typical pattern was to enter the synagogue to proclaim Christ to the Jews, “apparently Philippi did not have a quorum of ten Jewish men necessary for the establishment of a synagogue.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, he had three women. Lydia, the first convert, opened her home for the church to be housed there (Acts 16:15). Euodia and Syntyche apparently were prominent enough to be called out in front of the entire church (Phil 4:2). “If their dispute was only a private matter between themselves, Paul's public appeal would have been unnecessarily embarrassing and inexplicable.”<sup>39</sup> Instead, Paul's public appeal indicates their influence and his willingness to leave them in leadership while mediating the conflict. “Rather than rejecting their position as leaders, Paul encouraged these women to be reconciled to each other in their devotion to the Lord so that they would lead in a way that unified the church.”<sup>40</sup>

Despite being a developing church, the church at Philippi had a focus on mission, being generous toward Paul's global church planting ministry. “The Philippian church made regular contributions to Paul's mission even after he left Philippi (Phil 4:15-18).”<sup>41</sup> These contributions likely went to supporting the establishment of other churches

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<sup>38</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 6.

with less resources. Thus, the church of Philippi was both a planted church and engaging in the work of church planting.

### *Colossae*

Prior to the New Testament era, Colossae was a booming epicenter of commerce and tourism.<sup>42</sup> The church was apparently established by Epaphras (Col 1:7), a native of Colossae (Phil 4:12) who may have been saved by Paul's ministry while visiting Ephesus. This made it "natural that it should be Epaphras who assumed the responsibility for spreading the gospel among his own people, that is, presumably, with Paul's full support and commissioning."<sup>43</sup> Epaphras was acquainted with Paul and would later wind up in prison with him (Phlm 23).

For the church in Colossae, there are a few indicators that they were in process of moving toward being a multiplying church. First, Paul wants them to have a global awareness of the spread of Christianity, one that they were a part of (Col 1:6). Second, he sends greeting to them from three men at the end of the letter who are said to be "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Col 4:11). It would seem that this is also directional discipleship toward kingdom-building work. Finally, their pastor, Epaphras, was well acquainted with Paul's missiology. The fact that the two spent time together is confirmed by their shared prison cell (Col 4:12) and the nature of Epaphras's prayer for the Colossians. "Epaphras's concern for the Colossians echoes that of Paul, the sentiments, indeed, almost a patchwork of Paul's earlier affirmation on his own behalf."<sup>44</sup> The conclusion is that the church in Colossians was likewise a plant that was being encouraged toward the kingdom work of planting.

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<sup>42</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 20.

<sup>43</sup> Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 280.

## *Thessalonica*

During Paul’s second missionary journey, one of the places he and Silas stopped was Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). For three straight Sabbaths he preached the gospel and reasoned with them, and they saw a great number of new converts to Christ (Acts 17:4). However, some who were not persuaded forced Paul out of the city, leaving the Christians “without leadership and without having received all the instruction they needed.”<sup>45</sup> For a pagan-centered city, “This was clearly a danger that a missionary like Paul who propagated an alien religion like Christianity needed to guard against in the Greek cities of the Roman Empire.”<sup>46</sup> In Paul’s absence, “These new believers suffered much at the hands of their contemporaries.”<sup>47</sup>

What came from this persecution was a testimony for the Thessalonian church that was unparalleled. Paul says that the Word had sounded from them not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but “everywhere” (1 Thess 1:8). “The reference to *everywhere* is a hyperbole, but this should not diminish our understanding of the way this church spread the gospel over a vast area and even beyond Macedonia and Achaia.”<sup>48</sup> Paul’s response was that there was no need to say anything more to the surrounding regions—whether “anything more” referred to the Thessalonian church,<sup>49</sup> or the gospel itself due to faithful proclamation by the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:8).<sup>50</sup> In either case, the Thessalonians were an outward facing church with a missional focus that was extending out with an extraordinary reach.

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<sup>45</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Concerning the term “anything” in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Green states that “the reference here is to the gospel itself that went out of the city.” Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 104.

Together, these New Testament churches provide a picture of how God used church planting to establish new churches who would in turn join the mission by planting new churches.

### **The Kingdom Advances as the Church Grows and Multiplies**

Returning to the book of Acts, the progress of the kingdom and the development of the church are recorded to occur simultaneously to one another. Though the first occurrence of “church” (*ekklesia*) doesn’t occur until Acts 5:11, many believe that Acts 2 at Pentecost was the start of the Christian church as the Spirit came upon the people with power.<sup>51</sup> Jesus said, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Implied here is a global scope that reflects a God with a missional heart. “This is the goal of the church in terms of its extension: complete universality.”<sup>52</sup> “Christians today have the responsibility to take the gospel around the world. That responsibility lies not just with individual Christians but with congregation.”<sup>53</sup> The gospel then is seen in relation both to the kingdom and the church, seemingly furthering both in the New Testament.

As the book of Acts progress, the reader gains more and more confidence in the sure progress of God’s kingdom through the church being established through the gospel, yet with the responsibility to carry it forward. “Acts provides only selected illustrations of the way God’s purpose was advanced in the first few decades, and the

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<sup>51</sup> According to Richard Longenecker, “Rather, by paralleling Jesus’ baptism with the experience of Jesus’ early followers at Pentecost, Luke is showing that the mission of the Christian church, as was the ministry of Jesus, is dependent upon the coming of the Holy Spirit. And by his stress on Pentecost as the day when the miracle took place, he is also suggesting (1) that the Spirit’s coming is in continuity with God’s purposes in giving the law and yet (2) that the Spirit’s coming signals the essential difference between the Jewish faith and commitment to Jesus.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *John-Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 269.

<sup>52</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 145.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 76.

narrative concludes with the task uncompleted. Readers are left with an implied challenge to continue the work of worldwide testimony to Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> This work begins in one’s own community and branches out from there. “The church lives the reality of the inaugurated kingdom by seeking to advance that kingdom wherever the church’s members—the citizens of the kingdom—live, work, and play: in neighborhoods, workplaces, governmental agencies, financial establishments, sports programs, and other institutions and structures.”<sup>55</sup> Then, by the end of Acts, the drive to continue to advance the kingdom by planting and establishing new churches compels the people of God to the rest of the world. “The ‘unfinished’ ending of the book of Acts itself propels all churches—including the contemporary church—toward finishing ‘the Acts of the Apostles’ through expansive efforts . . . . This expansion of the missional church extends to church planting endeavors around the globe today.”<sup>56</sup> God’s kingdom agenda, pronounced in the Great Commission and lived out in church, incites passion in the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth for the glory of God.

Finally, there’s an important implication to be drawn from these concluding thoughts on the relationship between kingdom and the church. From the book of Acts and the rest of the biblical record one concludes that the advancement of God’s kingdom in the New Testament happens as new churches are planted and established with an eye toward multiplication. History appears to confirm this. In fact, based on the historical record, no single local church has endured from the time of Acts to today. Instead, it would seem that churches have a lifecycle of being planted, growing, multiplying, maturing, declining, and then dying (Eccl 3:1-11).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 113.

<sup>55</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 98.

<sup>56</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 143-44.

<sup>57</sup> Alban, “From Birth to Death: Exploring the Lifecycle of the Church,” Alban at Duke University, August 11, 2006, <https://alban.org/archive/from-birth-to-death-exploring-the-life-cycle-of-the-church/>.



Grappling with the reality of the overall temporary nature of local churches is helped by a basic ecclesiology that reconciles the tension that is felt. While Jesus promised to build His church, and stated that nothing would stop it, he never promised to build a single expression of that church (Matt 18:15). Rather, his promise referred to the universal church, or, “the company of all Christians stretching from its inception (accomplished by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and created by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost) to Christ’s second coming at the end of this present age.”<sup>58</sup> Practically speaking, this fits well with what can be seen in reality—churches have a lifecycle.<sup>59</sup> In fact, very few churches have endured more than a couple hundred years.

A church lifecycle should be expected based on scriptural warnings. The warning given in Revelation 2:5 that the Lord would “remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” is intended for “all who have an ear, let him hear” (Rev 2:7). “If the church does not heed the injunction Christ will remove its lampstand, which appears to signify the total destruction of the church. A church can continue only for so long on a loveless course. Without love it ceases to be a church. Its lampstand is removed.”<sup>60</sup> This indictment to Ephesus should serve as sufficient warning for the church age to follow that God is willing to take a church out—and history confirms that he often does. Rather than putting hope in an individual church then, it would seem that God’s plan always included the planting and replanting of new churches.

Together, both the empirical data and the stern warning in Revelation 2 reveal something—that God is about building new things. Specifically, God’s kingdom advances by raising up new local assemblies of Christians, proclaiming the gospel

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<sup>58</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 143-44.

<sup>59</sup> Alban, “From Birth to Death.”

<sup>60</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 65.

through them for a season, then allowing them to decline and be replaced by a new fresh work of the Spirit. One effect of this is that no church or church leaders are able to take credit for what God has done. He is the original missionary, and he is the one advancing his kingdom for his glory. It's because of this that church planting is not only acceptable, but it is the necessary God-intended means for the continuation of the mission and the advancement of the kingdom until Jesus returns.

### **Conclusion: Church Planting Is Biblical and to Be Continued Today**

Church planting is the vehicle for God's mission. The Great Commission is to be carried out in and through the local church with the end goal being the establishment of new churches. The New Testament books that follow the Great Commission demonstrate that first century churches understood and obeyed this command from the Lord. Every New Testament church was planted and either engaged in planting of their own or was being poised for it. As new churches are planted, God's will is accomplished as his kingdom advances, and then, he allows that individual church to die. Yet, in the process of planting something new around the mission, there is glory given to God as the ultimate missionary and kingdom builder.

Having established a theological framework for church planting, the question of church planting is settled. However, the best strategy for accomplishing the task of church planting in the modern context remains to be determined. The next chapter will examine various planting models and then defend our chosen model.

## CHAPTER 3

### OUR CHOSEN METHODOLOGY FOR PLANTING A CHURCH

Any church plant must have a plan. Even if the plan is to have no plan—this is a plan pray and to see where God may lead. While Bible-believing Christians are careful to note, “man plans his ways, but God directs His steps” (Prov 16:9), the Proverbs also say “commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Prov 16:3). So, planning—or as we’re calling it, a methodology—is necessary in the process of planting a church.

#### **Arriving at a Model for Planting Our Church**

For this project, the term *methodology* has intentionally been used to describe the process or model of church planting. It’s the contention here that theology begets philosophy which begets methodology.<sup>1</sup> This distinction matters because when comparing approaches to church planting, the ecclesiology is often the same, or at least similar. In the case of our plant, we’ve sought to align ourselves as best as we can with the same theology as the New Testament apostles and the first century church. Further, varied approaches to church planting are not always philosophical. “Philosophy in its technical sense might best be thought of in three aspects: an activity, a set of attitudes, and a body of content.”<sup>2</sup> Again, for our plant, our philosophy is rooted in Scripture and committed to doing ministry the way that God has said as best as we know how.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the relationship between philosophy and methodology within education, see George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 169-202.

<sup>2</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 169-202.

However, more significant divergence is seen in the methodological decisions that are made, especially when planting domestically in the twenty-first century. It's the ambition here then to show both the cultural reasons for our methodology (or model), as well as the scriptural support for our chosen model.

### **Cultural Considerations in Church Planting Methodology**

Within any chosen model, cultural considerations must be taken into account. It's at least conceivable that not every model will work everywhere—and that perhaps some models won't work in certain cultures. According to Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, “There are key factors in successful church planting, such as appropriate funding and an adequate core group; organizational simplicity and an effective evangelism strategy. However, there's no single model that works in every context. But there are principles that are useful, applicable and transferable.”<sup>3</sup> The cultural considerations in choosing a planting methodology can be simplified down to three key considerations. First, there is the religious cultural context. Are the people of a particular community familiar with Christianity or not? If not, is there another religion with a stronghold in this area? The religious context may influence which methodology is chosen for planting in a particular region.

Second, there's the societal cultural context. When people gather in a particular culture, what are the expectations? Is relational warmth and connection expected? Or is a well-organized and excellent program expected? How does the society typically think of

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 19, no. 2 (2008): 34. Elsewhere, Stetzer and Bird state, “Several denominations stated that their most effective and successful church plants are among ethnic groups, with a large number mentioning Hispanic church planting as both highly effective and prevalent. Most obvious are the church planting efforts among immigrants. Sixty-three percent of regions report a modified process for ethnic church planters to develop their strategies in a more contextually appropriate manner” (22).

gatherings in public spaces compared to gatherings in homes? These societal factors impact how a church plant will be received in a certain context.

Third, there's the financial cultural context. There are objective fiscal realities that limit certain models and encourage others from a feasibility standpoint. What is the average quality of life for the people in this community? How much money do they make, and how much are they willing to give? Are public spaces available for rent or purchase? Can enough support be garnered to support the pastor full-time, or will he need to be bi-vocational or even fully volunteer. These factors also influence the planting methodology chosen.

Regardless of which approach is taken in the church planting process, cultural considerations should be taken into account and may even influence which strategy is a best fit in order to maximize effectiveness.

### **A Brief Survey of Select Church Planting Models**

The number of methodologies for planting a church—especially when counting nuances within methodologies—is far too broad to survey here. Instead, what is surveyed here are six different models for planting a church that have been recognized by the North American Mission Board.<sup>4</sup> These models are The Program-Based Model, The Seeker-Based Model, The Purpose-Based Model, The Ministry-Based Model, The Relational Model, and The House Church. The following provides a brief description of each model.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Joel Owens Rainey, “A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Selected Church Planting Models Measured by conversion Growth and New Church Starts” (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 34.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the six models of planting a church, there are, according to Ed Stetzer, three frameworks. For our purposes here, we're understanding a “model” as a specific strategy of planting and establishing a church, whereas a “framework” for planting has a broader scope and is primarily distinguished by differing end goals. It should be noted that Stetzer refers to these three as “models,” but to avoid confusion with the six models given by NAMB, we have relabeled them here as “frameworks.”

The first framework is The Apostolic Harvest Church Planter. In this framework, a planter starts a church, raises up local/native leaders, then moves on and does it again. It's estimated that the

### *The Program-Based Model*

The Program-Based Model is based on being able to offer a full-service church at the start with many programs offered outside of the Sunday service. “These programmes will consist of some combination of evangelism; discipleship; youth, children’s, men’s, women’s and music ministries; missions; and social ministries.”<sup>6</sup> This model emphasizes organization, discipleship through learning, and programs to address needs in the church and society.

### *The Seeker-Based Model*

The Seeker-Based Model focuses on reaching the unreached, or unchurched. With this goal at the center, the church service is designed to feel comfortable to the unbelieving visitor and is evangelistic by design. This model is the most adaptive to cultural norms and brings less biblical ecclesiology and liturgy to the service order and feel.<sup>7</sup> In recent history, the model was utilized by Robert Schuller and Bill Hybels, the latter of which went door-to-door asking people why they didn’t attend church, then

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typical time from arrival to departure for the planter in recent history was eighty-two weeks. This was used by the circuit riders of the Methodist church, as well as by the Apostle Paul. This model is responsible for much of the denominational spread in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The second framework for planting is The Founding Pastor. Here, a pastor plants a church with the intentions of pastoring it for the long haul. This model describes Peter’s relationship with the church in Jerusalem. In more contemporary times, it was utilized by Charles Spurgeon and Rick Warren. In today’s world, the planter utilizing this model will likely need some entrepreneurial giftings, as well as the gifts necessary for pastoral ministry.

The third framework for planting is Team Planting. In this approach, a team moves to an area with the intent of planting a church together. They may be led by a Senior Pastor, but strength lies in the team when compared to a parachute approach taken by a solo planter. The team approach has strengths in that there’s an initial core team of mature Christian who have a variety of gifts from the very beginning of the plant. This framework is seen in the Antioch Church sending out Paul and Barnabas on the second missionary journey, as well as several other missionary works in Acts. This approach is becoming more common in contemporary planting within the United States as well, often manifest by having more than one staff pastor from the start. One survey showed that “attendance was higher (almost double) in plants with more than one church planting pastor on staff.” As noted at the beginning, the three frameworks given are based on a broader scope than the six models of planting. Consequently, the frameworks here can be combined with a number of the six models provided above in the process of planting a church. Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 53-75.

<sup>6</sup> A. O. Alawode, “Paul’s Biblical Patterns of Church Planting: An Effective Method to Achieve the Great Commission,” *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020): 3.

<sup>7</sup> Rainey, “Effectiveness of Selected Church Planting Models,” 42-48.

tailor-making a service to meet those desires.<sup>8</sup> The Seeker-Based Model has seen numerical success in twenty-first-century America, resulting in many megachurches.

### *The Purpose-Based Model*

In the Purpose-Based Model, the church orients itself around five purposes. These purposes are worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism. In this model, the start of everything is “why?” Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*, heavily contributed to this model of church planting.<sup>9</sup> While not directed toward seekers, this model is also sensitive to their presence in the service.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Ministry-Based Model*

The Ministry-Based Model centers on meeting real, or tangible needs of people in the community. “Ministry-based church planting is the planting of a church that will go into a community, impact people’s lives and draw them towards the gospel.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, they strive to show God’s love first, then talk about it later. This method is most often used in denser urban areas with lower economic classes and higher diversity.<sup>12</sup> It may include working with underprivileged kids within the schools, lower-income demographics, and the homeless.

### *The Relational Model*

This Relational Model (sometimes called “cell group model”) is most often seen in small churches with less emphasis on structure and organization and more emphasis on fostering organic relationships. Both evangelism and the body life

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<sup>8</sup> Elmer L. Towns, “The Rise and Decline of the Church Growth Movement,” *Great Commission Research Journal* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 169.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Rainey, “Effectiveness of Selected Church Planting Models,” 49-51.

<sup>11</sup> Alawode, “Paul’s Biblical Patterns of Church Planting,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rainey, “Effectiveness of Selected Church Planting Models,” 51-55.

community that form are relational, not structured. This model can be seen in the Anabaptist pockets throughout church history. “It will most likely work better in urban settings than rural in that the social structure of those living in the cities tends to fit the cell group model better.”<sup>13</sup> By comparison, the Relational Model tends to be a slower process compared to others.<sup>14</sup>

### *The House Church*

Closely related to the Relational Model, the House Church approach to planting has biblical foundations and sound theological reasoning behind the approach.<sup>15</sup> Often due to persecution or needing to go underground, the House Church has significant representation in countries closed to the gospel. Most recently, Francis Chan, after leaving his church in Southern California, established a network of house churches that utilized this model.<sup>16</sup>

Upon investigation of each of these predetermined models, it seems that our chosen planting methodology (or model) is unique among this array of options.<sup>17</sup> Ours is certainly not original, but neither does it fit cleanly within NAMB’s recognized methods. If there could perhaps be a seventh model, ours would be “The High-Impact Service Plus Depth of Discipleship Model.” We believe that Sunday mornings should be excellent and

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<sup>13</sup> Tom A. Steffen, “Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works,” *Missiology: An International Review* 22, no. 3 (July 1994): 365.

<sup>14</sup> Rainey, “Effectiveness of Selected Church Planting Models,” 55-60.

<sup>15</sup> For a list of theological reasons for choosing this model, see Del Birkey, “The House Church: A Missiological Model,” *Missiology: An International Review* 19, no. 1 (January 1991): 69-80.

<sup>16</sup> We Are Church, “Home,” accessed February 5, 2023, <https://www.wearechurch.com>.

<sup>17</sup> Our model shares some elements of the Purpose-Based Model, seeking to orient all ministry around a few purposeful principles. It also has some elements of the Relational-Based Model, emphasizing organic relationships in homes throughout the week. But neither of these models fully capture what we’re trying to do. There’s even less congruency with the other four models given. Our model does not integrate well with a Program Model, as we’re focused on an excellent high-impact service at first, not programs. The House-Church Model is also significantly different and seemingly the opposite of a single large-gathering for worship. The Seeker-Based Model differs in that we’re instead trying to establish philosophy based on biblical principle, not seeker desires. Finally, our model doesn’t pair well with a Ministry-Based Model that focuses on meeting social needs in the community as a primary emphasis.



high-impact because the body of Christ is gathered to meet with Almighty God, but also that rest of the life of the church should flow out of the Sunday gathering, resulting in genuine community, a depth of discipleship, and fervent evangelism.

Working toward this goal then, our chosen model of church planting consists of building a Core Team that will together launch a church to impact our community. The pre-launch phase of the plant comes to be extremely significant compared to other models, interspersing Vision Meetings with Core Team Meetings until a certain set of objectives are achieved. Then, and only then, the Core Team pivots to being a Launch Team and spends a season of intense preparation heading into a public launch. Just prior to Launch, membership interviews are performed and the first membership of the new church is established. This leads into a public launch where the established church invites the community to come and experience God together with them in a high-impact, vertically engaging service that is all about God and His glory. Within the first year, further points of engagement are established in order to deepen discipleship and build community around God's Word.

While it's true that we're committed to our particular model because of our training and affiliation with Vintage Mission, it was also the clarity, conviction, and biblical nature of their methodology that drew us to this training in the first place.

Having briefly described our model, what follows is an explanation of its critical factor(s) for success.

### **Our Model's Critical Factor**

One of the goals of this project was to determine the critical factor within our chosen launch strategy. We believe the critical factor in our model is the need for a high level of commitment from the people joining together to launch the church. Further, we believe that for commitment of this kind to occur, the group to gain a shared mission, values, and rhythms that are compelling enough to incite high commitment from people.

In order to see commitment increase though, there's a prerequisite of knowledge. If people are going to sacrifice time, energy, opportunity, and resources, answering questions like, "What it is?," "Why does it matter?," and "How will it be accomplished?" are critical to seeing commitment happen. Some call this a plan, others a vision. In a church plant context, people are hearing about something that can't be seen and that as of now, doesn't exist. And yet, not only are they being called to join it, but they're being asked to commit to it and sacrifice for it. Why? Because of the belief that God is in it and is going to do something for His glory and for people's good through it.

It's recognized that this kind of commitment is altogether different than how most twenty-first-century American evangelicals think about church. Table 1 below illustrates this.

Table 1. Church-going vs. Core Team commitment

<b>Church-Going</b>	<b>Core Team Commitment</b>
Church is something I attend	Church is something I build into
Church is about me and God	Church is about God and reaching others
My attendance doesn't really matter	My attendance is critical to the church's survival
I give when I think of it or when I want to	I must give regularly and sacrificially to keep the mission of the church sustained
I don't need to serve, I'll just attend	I'm expected to use my gifts in serving the body

These are just a few snapshots at the kind of commitment needed among the Core Team as launch approaches.

Commitment is a complex subject with many factors. Especially when discussing shared commitment among a group of people, the dynamics only further

complicate.<sup>18</sup> The intent of this project is not to comprehensively evaluate the factors that lead to commitment. Instead, what's being argued here is that shared commitment must at least include having a shared value system (DNA) consisting of mission, pillar commitments, and discipleship rhythms.

Maybe this kind of commitment seems ideal and far-fetched though. How can a new church that has no infrastructure, no amenities, and oftentimes, very little credibility possibly hope to achieve a level of commitment that churches with multi-million-dollar budgets seldom see from their people? The Scriptures show us that it's possible though, specifically in the example of the church at Philippi.

At the very beginning of the church in Philippi, the believers showed unusual commitment to support Paul in his mission to proclaim the gospel. Paul goes back to the beginning of his partnership with the Christians in Philippi to commend them for their generosity from the "first day" (1:5) and "the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel" (4:15).<sup>19</sup>

This is the kind of commitment that establishes and multiplies churches and that we believe is still possible today.

What is it that produces this kind of commitment? Our answer is found in a compelling DNA that's worth giving oneself to because it was originate on earth but in heaven. "Mission does not originate with the church but is derived from the very nature of God."<sup>20</sup> In our plant, we've sought to cast vision of a mission statement and related DNA that is compelling because it originates its mission, commitments, and rhythms of life in the Word and from God.

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<sup>18</sup> One example of shared commitment is the connection people feel when experienced shared tragedy, trauma, or trials. According to Annie Tanasugarn, "A 'trauma bond' is an attachment formed between two people who unconsciously bond to each other based on shared trauma." Annie Tanasugarn, "Understanding the Impact of Trauma Bonds in Our Lives," *Psychology Today*, May 28, 2022, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-ptsd/202205/understanding-the-impact-trauma-bonds-in-our-lives>. In a church plant, the ideal to aim for is that people feel a similarly strong bond with one another because of not a shared traumatic experience, but a shared convictional DNA.

<sup>19</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 6.

<sup>20</sup> J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 27.

## A Compelling Mission

A church’s mission should be the guiding compass for all else that it does. “I believe that a major reason why 80 to 85 percent of churches in America are in trouble is because they don’t have a clear compelling mission.”<sup>21</sup> A mission statement can include both the reason the church exists and what it’s trying to accomplish. At Doxa Church, our mission statement is *We exist to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission in the Spirit of the Great Commandment*. The three major components of this mission are worth further examination.

### *To Glorify Him*

Glory is the most captivating concept in all the universe.<sup>22</sup> God’s glory is the single highest aim for man because it deals with “the highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God”— namely, God.<sup>23</sup> “Man’s chief end is to glory God, and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>24</sup> In recent decades, prolific writers such as John Piper,<sup>25</sup> Michael Reeves,<sup>26</sup> and R. C.

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<sup>21</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Dynamic Mission for Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 14.

<sup>22</sup> As Jonathan Edwards states, “Nothing can be more evident, than that a saving belief of the gospel is here spoken of, by the apostle, as arising from the mind’s being enlightened to behold the diving glory of the things it exhibits. This view or sense of the divine glory, and unparalleled beauty of the things exhibited to us in the gospel, has a tendency to convince the mind of their divinity . . . He that truly sees the divine transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are divine, does as it were know their divinity intuitively: he not only argues that they are divine, but he sees that they are divine; he sees that in them wherein divinity chiefly consists, for in this glory which is so vastly and inexpressibly distinguished from the glory of artificial tings, and all other glory, does mainly consist the true notion of divinity.” Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections: In Three Parts*, pt. III, sect. V, Christian Classic Ethereal Library, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/affections/affections>.

<sup>23</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, q. 1, Ligonier, last modified December 21, 2009, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-shorter-catechism>.

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

Sproul<sup>27</sup> have written on the concept of God's holiness resulting in glory. God is called "the king of glory" (Ps 24:8), and all glory belongs to Him (Ps 29:1-2). Mankind's created purpose as image bearers is to glorify Him by multiplying, subduing, and having dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26-31; 2 Cor 3:18).

The pursuit of God's glory is both an individual and a corporate responsibility. For the individual, 1 Corinthians 10:31 instructs, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God." Implied here is the reality that glory can be given to God in even the everyday lifestyle and behavior of the individual believer. "The point is that when the Corinthians think about issues related to food and drink (or any other issue), their overriding concern should not be with the exercise of their own rights and freedom or desires but with the potential implications for God's honor and glory."<sup>28</sup> Though man falls short of God's glory (Rom 3:23), through the gospel those who "hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12). The Christian has the personal responsibility to honor God with his body and overall lifestyle by seeking to glorify God.

The pursuit of God's glory is also of utmost importance for the gathered church. When Ephesians 3:21 states, "to him be glory in the church," it implies that there's additional glory given to God beyond the individual.

"The heavens declare the glory of God" but even greater glory is shown by his handiwork in the community of reconciliation. This community, moreover, consists of human beings who are united in Christ, members of his body, in whom Christ dwells: the glory of God "in the church" cannot be divorced from his glory "in Christ Jesus."<sup>29</sup>

The church is likened unto a temple or house with "living stone who are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God"

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<sup>27</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 496.

<sup>29</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 331.

(1 Pet 2:5). “Because it has been established as a temple in which the fullness of Christ the Lord dwells through the Holy Spirit, the church is to be oriented toward the glory of God.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the church’s existence is to be centered on the pursuit of God’s glory being manifest among them and through them.

The glory of God is the church’s purpose—but purpose needs a mission.

### *Fulfilling the Great Commission*

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 is perhaps one of, if not the most, missional passages for the church in all the Scripture. “The Great Commissions, therefore, whether at the close or the outset of the narrative, are more than random parting words from Jesus. They actually shape the whole story, either as the climax to which everything points or as the fountain from which everything flows.”<sup>31</sup> The survey data agrees with this, showing that 85 percent of all pastors believe that the Great Commission was intended for the participation of all Christians.<sup>32</sup>

The Great Commission is a compelling piece of any church’s mission for at least three reasons. First, the mission is one that transforms lives by spiritual renewal. While many people have the desire to help others, and there are endless ways to do that, the Great Commission brings transformation in a way that no other social act of kindness, mercy, or compassion does.<sup>33</sup> The Great Commission is uniquely focused on discipling rather than social justice or reform. “If our mission is discipleship, this will set us on a different trajectory than if our mission is to make earth more like

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<sup>30</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 107.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 45.

<sup>32</sup> Barna surveyed 507 Protestant senior pastors for this survey in October 2021. Barna Group, “Pastors See Missions as a Mandate, But Christians Aren’t So Sure,” April 20, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/missions-mandate/>.

<sup>33</sup> For a balanced and biblical perspective on the church’s relationship with acts of social justice, see DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 173-93.

heaven.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus commissions his followers to be “the aroma of life” (2 Cor 2:16) that brings about regeneration and life change (2 Cor 5:17). As ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), the Great Commission is a compelling mission wherein we partner with God to change the world.

Second, the mission is compelling because it’s intended to progressively go global. If it were a mission that had limitations, it may excite for a while—but it would eventually lose its luster. But, “the divine goal for the church in terms of extension is that one day it will exist among all people groups throughout the entire world.”<sup>35</sup> This universal scope of the mission of the church is made possible by the atonement of Christ being intended not just for a nation or region—but the whole world (1 John 2:2). The fact that the Great Commission had from the beginning a global outlook is captivating to the inner longing of man’s heart (Eccl 3:11).

Third, the mission is given, empowered, and ultimately accomplished by Jesus himself. Beginning in the Old Testament, God’s plan was to expand His kingdom through his people Israel, calling them “a kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). Likewise, the Great Commission begins with the command to “go,” implying that His plan is still to use men to accomplish his work.<sup>36</sup> But changing hearts en route to multiplying followers of Jesus is not within the capability of mere man (1 Cor 3:5-9). This is the very thing that makes the Great Commission so compelling. While God has given man the wonderous, yet impossible task of multiplying Christ-followers for His glory, He has also given the provision to accomplish it. When speaking to the first disciples in Matthew 28:18, Jesus stated that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” In this way, “the

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<sup>34</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 241-42.

<sup>35</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 145.

<sup>36</sup> The term *πορευθέντες* (“go”) is a participle and should be understood as deriving some imperatival force from the command “make disciples.” For a fuller defense of this, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 595.

mission Jesus is about to give is based exclusively and entirely on his authority.”<sup>37</sup> It’s for this reason that he tells them to wait until they receive divine power for the accomplishment of the mission (Luke 24:49). This power came when the Spirit came at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) and has indwelt and empowered all true Christians since (2 Tim 1:7).

The purpose of the church is to glorify God and its mission is to multiply followers of Christ. Specifically, to multiply followers of Jesus resulting in life change, global progress, and sure success because of its source of authority and power. This mission is what Doxa Church will proclaim, live by, and call others to join as long as God allows it to be a church.

Finally, the purpose and mission are further directed by addressing motives.

#### *The Spirit of the Great Commandment*

The final segment of the church’s compelling mission is found in the Great Commandment. If the purpose is glory, and the mission is multiplication, the motive is love. The command to love is emphasized in many places throughout the pages of Scripture, including “love one another” (John 13:34). But it’s Jesus’s response in Mark 12:31 that is most striking. Jesus is asked, “What the greatest commandment?” He responds by stating, “the greatest commandment is this: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Here, Jesus illuminates the truth that above everything else, loving God and neighbor is what is most important. The inspiration for exercising this kind of love originates in God Himself. Since God is love (1 John 4:8), and that love overflows to us (John 3:16), there should be a tangible love among one another. Similarly, the simplicity and unity of this summarization of all the Old Testament law also reflects the

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<sup>37</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 45.



character of God. “Moreover, because God is one and his truth and law is one, that one law has an inner coherence. God’s unity speaks both to the ultimacy, singleness, and coherence of all that he commands.”<sup>38</sup>

In one statement, Jesus’s response has not only dumbfounded his critics, but has also given the church clarification on the motive intended to drive the mission. Though there are many things that the church could do, Jesus’s emphasis of this being the “greatest” of all commands is enough to put it front and center for the church. Love is to be the engine that drives the mission of multiplication, lest the church be “a noisy gong or clanging symbol” (1 Cor 13:1). One might even say that it’s both the vertical love for God and the horizontal love for man that actually allows the mission to succeed.

Together then, these components make a mission statement that is compelling. It’s intentionally biblical and yet relevant with the basic components of pursuing God’s glory, striving toward the goal of multiplication, and operating out of a heart of love. In seeking to call people to a high level of commitment in a church plant context, it’s being argued here that achieving a shared DNA is a critical piece. But shared DNA in and of itself is not enough to draw out commit and sacrifice. The DNA must also be compelling. What’s been demonstrated here is a mission that is compelling, not because of cleverness or ingenuity, but by linking with the historic faith recorded in God’s Word. It’s the contention here that people will be compelled by a mission found in the living and active Word of God, and this will result in greater commitment to the church plant that’s heralding that message.

### **Biblically Grounded Pillars**

As compelling as the mission is, it’s not sufficient on its own to bring about a practical ecclesiology that compels people toward greater commitment. In fact, left

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<sup>38</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 144.

without structure and order, the Great Commission may wander and suffer, if not be altogether left out. What it needs are an additional set of corporate commitments to serve as guardrails in order to keep the mission before the people. If high-level commitment is to be achieved, the mission must be supported by a set of shared values or commitments—we call them Pillars.

Pillars on a building structure do primarily two things—they support, and they ground. Pillars uphold a structure so that it can be what it's designed to be, and at the same time they ground the structure to the foundation. In a church context, they are the commitments that ground the mission from wandering of and at the same time support it in achieving its intended goal. More specifically, the pillars function to support and anchor the mission to a practical ecclesiology that displays itself in both liturgy (i.e., preaching, singing, corporate prayer, baptisms) and church culture (how people behave instinctively). For our church plant, there are four of these pillar commitments.

*Unapologetic Preaching: Preaching  
the Authority of God's Word  
without Apology*

In order for the mission to advance and people to remain compelled and committed, the church must be unapologetic about preaching God's Word. In stating this, what's not being suggested is rude, insensitive, or culturally irrelevant proclamation of God's Word. Neither is the term being used in a technical sense in line with the defense of the faith (1 Pet 3:15). But what is being affirmed here is the essential role of the bold proclamation of God's Word in order for the mission of the church to advance and commitment from true followers of Jesus to deepen. Without God's people proclaiming his word as true, the mission cannot move forward in actually accomplishing the Great Commission mandate to "make disciples." Just as men of old "did not announce their own particular opinions, which might be a matter of private interpretation or doubtful disposition, but taking their stand on Scripture, drove home their message with irresistible

effect with ‘Thus saith the Lord,’”<sup>39</sup> we too must preach the word. “Our identity must be defined by the Word of Christ, not by the liberal desire to adapt our Gospel to the modern worldview or by the evangelical yearning for cultural respectability.”<sup>40</sup> So, part of the pillar system that upholds the mission is simply following Paul’s instructions to Timothy: “Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort” (2 Tim 4:2).

In order to have a missional church that trends up in commitment, unapologetic preaching and proclamation of God’s Word should be a preliminary commitment of the church.

*Unashamed Worship: Lifting High the Name of Jesus through Worship*

The second Pillar to uphold the mission is Unashamed Worship. The famous Reformer, Martin Luther, said, “Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus told the woman at the well that “God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). In order to maintain focus on the mission, the church must avoid the two extremes of truth worship without the spirit, and emotional (spirit) worship without truth. The stern indictment from God speaks to our context as well when it says, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isa 29:13). And yet at the same time, when emotion becomes the engine leading our worship instead of the caboose following biblical truth, things are quickly derailed. “God intends for us to remember that neither biblical truth nor deep emotion is

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<sup>39</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 30.

<sup>40</sup> Dale R. Stoffer, “Church Planting: An Anabaptist Model,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 39 (Summer 1994): 218.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Colin Holman, “Luther: The Musician,” *Christianity Today*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2018/march/martin-luther-musician.html>.

out of place when we worship God; they're meant to go together."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Jesus said it best when he said that true worship involves both spirit and truth.

By committing to an Unashamed Worship, we're committing to lead the church toward a genuine and real expression of worship. Focusing more on the vertical and less on the horizontal, we believe people will meet with God, and that meeting will be impactful. As the church pursues the mission together, the combination of Unapologetic Preaching and Unashamed Worship will continue to grip hearts and bring forth commitment because these are both things God has given the church to do.

*Unceasing Prayer: Believing Firmly  
in the Power of Prayer*

The third Pillar that upholds the mission is Unceasing Prayer. Despite living a life of constant activity, excitement, and adversity, Jesus was a man of constant prayer. He prayed in public and he prayed in private. He prayed when it was calm and he prayed in the storm (Mark 14:22, 32). He prayed in the morning and he prayed during the day. At least twice he fasted and prayed all night (Mark 1:35). Jesus prayed more than any spiritual leader prays today, and all while being the Son of God. If the Son of God who came from the glories of heaven and always walked in the power of the Holy Spirit prayed to the extend with that he did, then how much more should we, his church, also pray.

The commitment to Unceasing Prayer is firmly rooted in the belief that for spiritual things to happen, God must be the one to do them. God is the one who saves souls. God alone is able to makes believers more and more like Jesus. And He is the one who builds His church. At the same time, prayer is part of spiritual worship. "If all we

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<sup>42</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 168.

ever do is seek God’s hand, we may miss His face; but if we seek his face, He will be glad to open His hand and satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts.”<sup>43</sup>

As a new church plant then, prayer can’t be something that’s done on occasion, but it must be part of the very DNA of the body. Ephesians 6:18 calls Christians to be “praying at all times in the Spirit.” It can be deduced that since God has called the church to pray, prayerlessness is active and ongoing disobedience. One can only imagine that prolonged disobedience of this kind will result in the very thing that Jesus warned about in Revelation 2:5 when he says, “I will remove your lampstand from you.”

A major component of seeing commitment levels increase throughout the planting process is the recognition that this is by nature a spiritual endeavor—and as such it should be immersed in prayer.

*Unafraid Witness: Sharing the Good News of Jesus with Boldness*

The fourth Pillar that upholds the mission is Unafraid Witness. Christians are called in the Scriptures “ambassadors,” “fishers of men,” and “stewards of the mysteries of God.” It would appear that every follower of Jesus has the responsibility and privilege to herald the good news of the gospel. Christians are to be ready at any time to give a defense for the hope that we possess, whether in season or out of season (1 Pet 3:15; 2 Tim 4:2-3). They are those who “proclaim the mystery of the gospel,” and that we should “declare it boldly” as we ought to speak (Eph 6:19-20). Resting in the sovereignty of God, we “have every reason to be bold, and free, and natural, and hopeful of success. For God can give his truth an effectiveness that you and I cannot give it.”<sup>44</sup> Living then with

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel Henderson, *Transforming Prayer: How Everything Changes When You Seek God’s Face* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2011), 27.

<sup>44</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 116.

this confidence and a singular devotion to the King of heaven ought to embolden us to “not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matt 10:28).

The church gathered is likewise meant to be a community that portrays a public witness. In the case given in 1 Corinthians, when unbelievers come among them in the public gathering, the church’s witness should not confuse or turn away, but instead, cause them to experience God and worship (1 Cor 14:24-25). “Paul’s expectation that the prophetic ministry of the gathered community will lead to the conversion of visiting outsiders who will respond by bowing down and worshiping God and declaring ‘God is really here in your midst!’ echoes Isaiah 45:14 and Zechariah 8:23.”<sup>45</sup> This kind of widespread communal impact is not just for college ministries and youth camps, but for the church as a whole to live out with the same level of intentionality and zeal. This pillar then anchors back to the mission by setting before the body the mandate of the Great Commission to “baptize,” necessitating a bold and unafraid witness to see that accomplished.

In summary, the four pillars of detailed here function to support and anchor the mission to a practical ecclesiology that displays itself in both liturgical components and church culture. Together with the mission, they continue to build a case for a church that’s worth the commitment and sacrifice.

### **Discipleship-Oriented Rhythms**

As the church pursues the God-given mission, grounded on biblical commitments, there’s need for still one more layer of DNA implementation of a practical ecclesiology that will compel people to commit. This third layer of DNA is the functional programming that actually accomplishes the mission through the pillars. It is the

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<sup>45</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 706.

proverbial roof over the head that provides the ultimate end that the foundation (mission) and pillars (walls) were intended for.

In our planting context, we're contending that the mission and pillars need expression in more than just the weekend gathering. To be sure, the weekend gathering is important—but it's not sufficient on its own. As such, we've sought to call the final layer of DNA implementation Rhythms of Life. These Rhythms are where people will actually experience what it is that the church is about, how seriously the pillars actually influence ministry, and whether or not the mission is actually being accomplished. For Doxa Church, the four Rhythms are Worship in Services, Learn in Groups, Serve on Teams, and Learn in Studies.

### *Worship in Services*

The first Rhythm of Life is Worship in Services. God expects Christians to regularly gather to worship Him. The New Testament indicates that the early church gathered together on a weekly basis for worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2). Some were neglecting this meeting time, and the Holy Spirit saw fit to warn them “not to forsake the assembly together” (Heb 10:24). The Old Testament also is replete with examples and prescriptions of Israel's gathering at the temple for worship. God's will for the local body of Christ to meet together in order to bring him glory by singing (Col 3:16), preaching the Word (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2), corporate prayer (1 Tim 2:8), and meaningful interactions among believers.<sup>46</sup> This basic truth has been challenged—especially in a post-COVID world. But, in the forsaking of the assembly in exchange for that which is lesser, something is lost. “The push toward the virtual church . . . is a push to individualize Christianity.”<sup>47</sup> God never intended Christianity to be done alone. Church provides the

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<sup>46</sup> There are thirty-two unique “one another” commands.

<sup>47</sup> Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 53.

relationships, encouragement, exposure, and accountability need to maintain vitality in our Christian walks.

The gathered worship service also brings with it another, greater blessing—a meeting with God. When the church gathers, it should be impactful because God is there in a unique way (Matt 18:20). When the church gathers, the biblical Pillars can begin to take shape. When the church gathers, the mission takes another large stride forward. When the church gathers, God draws on people’s hearts to commit to investing in something that is spiritual and transformative, bearing eternal dividends and producing fullness of joy. So, we believe the church should regularly gather for worship.

### *Live in Groups*

While Services are high impact gatherings for the whole body of Christ, Groups are where real life on life relationships and accountability develop. The reality of our need for community begins with the very essence of who our God is. “In God there is the identity of the One, and yet there are Three in One. There is distinctive individuality. God exists in community. This picture of the oneness of God shatters our independence.”<sup>48</sup> The Christian life is meant to be lived together, in meaningful relationships that exhibit the kind of unit reflected in the Triune Godhead. While this may happen to some extent on a weekend gathering, it can also be argued that more time, and perhaps privacy, is needed to achieve deeper and more vulnerable relationships. Groups provide this context for discipleship to deepen.

Groups ought to have four targets. First, that true relational connections are formed within the body of Christ. These connections form a discipleship group that helps one another to follow Jesus better. Second, that life-changing transformation is the goal. Most Groups will follow a sermon-application model of small group study that seeks to

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<sup>48</sup> Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 23.



apply the principles from the weekend’s message. Third, that fervent and expectant prayer would mark our groups. God’s will is for the church to be a praying people—and while there will be a prayer team and other prayer outlets, small groups are the primary context to pray for one another in an ongoing rhythm. Finally, Groups will be a strategic opportunity for service—both serving the needs of those within the group and having the opportunity to serve each group’s specific neighborhoods and community.

In this way, Groups are an opportunity to foster greater connection, prayer, and depth of discipleship, resulting in greater commitment to the kingdom building work within the church plant.

### *Serve on Teams*

The third Rhythm of Life will be to Serve on Teams. Serving is both for the believer’s spiritual growth and is essential for the church’s mission to continue to advance. Serving in the local church ought to bring joy as believers express their God-given gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pet 4:10-11). At the same time, serving is an essential to personal spiritual growth. “We will never be Christlike if we do not love and serve Christ’s church.”<sup>49</sup> Because of this, getting people plugged in to serving on a Team is one of our first steps of engagement with those who express interest in being part of the church. It would seem that as each one begins to utilize their gifting for the building up of the church, both the individual and the whole body will continue to grow in maturity to be more like Christ (Eph 4:7, 11-16).

The way that Teams operate matters though. If they are merely executional Teams, people may feel used and abused, leading to them not growing and not increasing in commitment. But, if Teams can be a life-giving experience of jumping into serve the one and only bride of Christ in relationship with others, the result will be different. “If

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Reeves, *Authentic Ministry: Serving from the Heart* (Bridgend, UK: Union, 2022), 81.

you long to share the most beautiful, the most significant, the most delightful passion there is, share this: the church holding out the glory of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> If the church can gain this shared vision for serving, not only will there likely be an increase in commitment level, but a greater depth of discipleship formed as well.

### *Learn in Studies*

Finally, Studies are the fourth Rhythm of Life. While the church should want to emphasize community through Groups, we also should be weary of skipping out on Bible education, theological training, and practical instruction for daily life. Studies will be the opportunity to teach God’s word with an aim toward renewing the mind, cultivating greater obedience, and formulating a biblical world view in the people of the church. Studies will be another outlet for the Unapologetic Preaching of God’s Word and will help achieve the mission by “teaching them to observe all that I’ve commanded you” (Matt 28:20).

Together, the four Rhythms of Services, Groups, Teams, and Studies compose Doxa Church’s rhythms of life whereby we worship, live, serve, and learn together as a church family. Further, it’s these four rhythms that will help foster a deeper discipleship and therefore a greater commitment to the planting process.

### **Our Process within the Chosen Model**

The process for planting our church followed more closely Paul’s plant in Philippi than in Ephesus. We chose to develop a strong Core Team of compelled and committed individuals who together would launch a church with momentum. With this process, there are several phases that were mapped out for us to progress toward.

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<sup>50</sup> Reeves, *Authentic Ministry*, 92.

## **Core Team**

During this stage we will build the Core Team, from which we will pray, share vision, build cohesion, identify a ministry leadership team, and set-up finances. The primary needs during this phase are prayer, people, encouragement, preparation, patience, finances.

The purpose of a Core Team phase is to gather a group of people who are committed to planting this type of church this way. That means that are excited about the product and the process and are willing to commit themselves in a meaningful way to building it. This commitment needs to be at an all-time high as launch approaches. The timeframe for this phase should be between four and six months.

## **Launch Team**

During this stage, the Core Team will gather and meet together on a weekly basis (Saturday evening or Sunday evening, not Sunday morning) for study of the Word, prayer, worship and planning. A launch date is set and the Coe Team now becomes a Launch Team. A location will be secured, a worship leader selected, and ministry teams formed. Members of the Core Team will be assigned to areas of service based on gifting and need. The greatest focus will be on the primary ministries of worship, connections, kids, small groups, administration/finances, facilities, technology, and promotion. The primary needs during this phase are prayer, people, finances, worship leader, participation, sacrifice, networking, promotion, location. The timeframe should be between one and two months.

Once the six indicators of readiness are met, the Core Team will roll into a Launch Team whose sole purpose is to prepare to launch a church. The Launch Team phase of the pre-launch was intentionally much shorter than Core Team phase. While the Core Team phase was focused on cohesion and alignment, the Launch Team is focused on equipping the saints to serve on various Teams.

There are several keys to a successful Launch Team phase, the first of which was identity. If the Launch Team fails to embrace their new identity as a Launch Team and instead, would rather stay as a Core Team, the church will fail to be a fruitful and multiplying church. A key reason for changing the name is to help the group make a transition from being a Core Team to being something new. The sweetness of being small and intimate will be lost for some. The relationships (or as some would say, “clicks”) that formed during Core Team phase need to be broken up. Why? In order to accomplish the greater mission. So, the first key to a successful Launch Team phase for us was embracing the new identity.

The second key for the Launch Team phase is focus. To be clear, a Launch Team exists to do one thing—successfully launch a church. This means that all efforts and energies will be directed to the which makes a church a church—the gathering of the saints for worship. Focus is honed in on this one ministry, putting off other pursuits until a later date.

With identity and focus at the forefront, attention can be given to what the Launch Team is actually going to accomplish. Once the Launch Team is inaugurated, it’s now time to introduce our serving Teams, their leaders, and expectations for how our Teams will function. Although this phase may be as short as four weeks, there are several important things to establish and communicate with the group:

1. Understanding “why Teams?”
2. Understanding “which Teams?”
3. Selection and equipping of Teams Leaders
4. Assigning people onto Team(s)
5. Equipping Teams with specifics of their role and dot connecting their role to the mission
6. Opportunity to practice, ask questions, and course correct before public launch
7. Gaining a collective heart of service to God rather than man

These are some of the priorities of the Team phase of the pre-launch. Unlike the Core Team phase, the Launch Phase is a predetermined length at the outset. The objectives of the Launch Team phase are not determinative of whether or not to Launch, but rather the quality of the Launch.

### **Launch**

During this stage, the new congregation emerges publicly for worship services and extended ministry. The Launch Team becomes a church. All major ministry components will be planned, prepared, trained and ready to go prior to the launch date. The primary needs during this phase are prayer, sacrifice, finances, participation, set up/break down, follow-up, promotion. The timeframe for this phase is really just one week—the weekend of launch.

### **Stabilization**

During this stage the new church begins to grow, bear fruit and multiply. Ministry advancement will take place as will the addition of new ministries such as students, missions and compassion, possibly men's and women's ministry. Pruning also takes place in this stage. Trials, challenges, disappointments, discipline will cause some to leave, but ultimately it will strengthen and bring maturity to the body. The primary needs during this phase are prayer, sacrifice, finances, endurance, assimilation, discipleship, evangelism, courage.

### **Maturation**

During this stage the church is established, strong and autonomous in its ability to thrive on its own. It is a ministry-giving, ministry-multiplying body. It has deep roots and a resilient base evidenced by a deep and growing fruitfulness and the church's ability to endure difficulties. It is a church-planting church. The timeframe for this phase can range 1-5 years.

### **Conclusion: Boldly Calling People to Commit**

Given the careful examination of selecting a model, the compelling mission statement within the model, and the clear process for carrying out our church planting model—the only thing that remains is to call people to commit to it. In a church plant, it is the church planter’s job to faithfully teach about the kind of church being planted (DNA) and the way it’s being planted (process), then to boldly call people to join. With clarity and conviction in both the kind of church and the chosen methodology for planting, it’s the planter’s solemn responsibility to pray that God will grip true believers’ hearts to readily commit and sacrifice for a mission that is devoted to being all about God’s glory and the multiplication of worshippers of Him.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

At the time of writing, we've recently launched as a church and are now holding weekly public worship services. The implementation of the project pursued fulfillment of the three goals concurrent with the pre-launch stages of the church plant.

#### **Accomplishing Goal 1: Developing a Church Planting Strategy**

The first goal was to develop a church planting strategy that takes into account both the biblical record and the modern context in which we're planting. The success of this goal was measured by articulating a planting methodology that is faithful to Scripture and rooted in best practices based on modern context. In addition to what's already been discussed in chapters 2 and 3, what follows is an overview of this played out in our context.

#### **Training (January 1-May 31, 2022)**

Prior to relocating to San Diego for the pre-launch work, the process of planting a church began by being trained for the work of church planting. The program we chose was through a church network called Vintage Mission hosted at Christ Church in Gilbert, Arizona. These five months were critical in not only shaping convictions and competency regarding the process of church planting, but also deepening my dependency and faith as we set out to plant a church for God's glory. The fourfold focus of Healthy Church, Healthy Preacher, Healthy Leader, and Healthy Start were interweaved throughout the five months.

### *Healthy Church*

This primarily consisted of time within the ministries of Christ Church across all three campuses, but also involved interviews with various staff members about their respective roles at the church.

### *Healthy Preacher*

This involved extended time with the Lead Pastors in their preaching preparation, as well as many opportunities to teach and preach with critical/constructive feedback provided in both the preparation and post-delivery.

### *Healthy Leader*

Input and exhortation were given on the need for dependence, prayer, and faith for the planting process. Additional instruction was given on the importance and execution of the vision meeting.

### *Healthy Start*

Instruction was given on initial concepts involving Core Team development, specifically geared toward Core Team growth and development.

In retrospect, we are incredibly thankful for the time of refreshment and discipleship that we received during the training phase of the process. We've seen the benefit of not only training but also coaching that's helped foster us being healthy prior to seeking to establish a healthy church.

### **Selecting a Location (January 1-February 28, 2022)**

Discerning God's will for where to plant turned out to be more difficult than expected. While God used the possibility of planting in San Diego as the initial spark to draw out a calling toward planting, upon entering the planter training program, we intentionally reopened the realm of possibilities as to where God was leading.



Amidst a lot of time in prayer and seeking counsel from various places, a weighted decision matrix was used (see table 2) to help evaluate various opportunities that were on the table. This helped to discern what factors were involved in the decision-making process, and really—to express the turmoil within my own heart of wanting to follow God’s lead.

Table 2. City decision matrix

CITY DECISION MATRIX								
Score (0-5)	Flagstaff	Phoenix	Montana	San Diego	Tucson	Boise	Sun Valley, ID	Denver
<i>Is there spiritual need?</i>	<b>4</b> Liberal city w/ mountain people, hippies, and college kids.	<b>3</b> Always spiritual need, but it is a very church city.	<b>5</b> Few impactful, missional churches in the state.	<b>5</b> Yes. South Bay needs a church about the Word.	<b>3</b> Unsure at this point	<b>2</b> Not particularly	<b>5</b> Yes	<b>5</b> Yes. Liberal city that is growing fast
<i>Does it have healthy churches?</i>	<b>4</b> Yes and no. Only a few impactful in the community.	<b>3</b> Scottsdale could probably use a Christ Church	<b>4</b> Not in every city, and not churches like Christ Church	<b>5</b> Very few churches in southern region	<b>3</b> Unsure at this point	<b>2</b> Yes, everyone wants to plant in Idaho	<b>5</b> No	<b>4</b> Many dying. Would be revitalization work
<i>Do we fit?</i>	<b>5</b> We're from mountains and know the mountain life + liberals	<b>3</b> Phoenix has a mix of all kinds of people.	<b>4</b> 100%	<b>4</b> With some, esp. military	<b>3</b> Unsure at this point	<b>5</b> 100%	<b>3</b> With some. Upper class extremely wealthy is large demo. though.	<b>5</b> Yes
<i>Do we want to go?</i>	<b>4</b> Trina more than Matt. Unsure of origins of hesitations.	<b>3</b> There are attractive things about living in Phoenix	<b>5</b> Yes	<b>3</b> We're open, but would be diff. from MT	<b>4</b> We will go anywhere.	<b>5</b> We would if it made sense	<b>3</b> Not really. Not great for family	<b>5</b> We would if it made sense
<i>Does Christ Church have a heart for it?</i>	<b>5</b> 100%	<b>5</b> 100%	<b>1</b> Not really	<b>3</b> Yes, to some extent	<b>5</b> Yes	<b>2</b> Not that I know of	<b>0</b> No	<b>0</b> No
<i>Is there movement in people toward it?</i>	<b>4</b> There are some initial stirrings.	<b>5</b> Not sure, but I would assume so	<b>2</b> No movement at this point, one open pulpit.	<b>2</b> Just a few.	<b>1</b> No	<b>4</b> Not here, but in Kingsburg there are	<b>3</b> Yes, some, but not Core Team contributors	<b>5</b> Some contact with dying churches that own buildings
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>

The matrix above attempted to quantify the components that should be evaluated in determining where to plant. The six categories in the column farthest left were intended to quantify subjective feelings with a score of 0-5. These six categories were used to evaluate eight potential planting locations, each of which had a legitimate possibility and reason for being evaluated. After assigning a number to each category for each city, the values were added and the total was given at the bottom. This decision matrix was not meant to be a hardline deciding factor, but simply a tool to help quantify which factors were weighing more heavily than others in the decision process.

What we've learned through this process is that God can use an initial opportunity to bring out a calling that ends up redirecting elsewhere. For us, that wasn't the case—but it was close. We took two visits to Flagstaff, and had initially pivoted to it as our planting location. But after more wrestling in my own heart, prayer, and discussions, we reverted back to San Diego. In our case, the initial calling was the place where God ultimately led us. The process of reconsidering the full realm of possibilities following what we felt was an initial call from the Lord to plant in San Diego was both good and stretching for both my wife and me.

We also learned that God can't be placed on a spreadsheet. Despite the clear leading of the chart toward Flagstaff, San Diego became the place where God was indicating he wanted to plant a church. He used a clear the gospel need, the excitement of kingdom opportunity, and genuine relational connections to lead us where he wanted.

### **Producing a Church Planting Playbook (March 1-May 31, 2022)**

The product of the training was to gain clarity on three items: process, product, and person. First, I needed clarity on the process of how to plant a church. The six models given by NAMB each have attractive elements and each have noticeable limitations—so which would we choose, and why? Whichever model was chosen and implemented, I wanted to know it's limitations and defend it when needed. The process given we ended

up choosing is a hybrid of several of the models presented by NAMB. Given the uniqueness of what we were trying to do, developing our own playbook was necessary prior to beginning the plant.

One benefit of producing a church planting playbook was gaining clarity on our process of how we would go about planting a church. The playbook not only details our process, but also what kind of church we were endeavoring to plant (the product). There are many types, styles, and emphasis of churches, making the issue of the type or kind of church important as well. In order to maintain clarity in distinctives, the playbook has resulted in several axillary playbooks, including a “Kids Playbook,” “Worship Playbook,” and “Connections Playbook.” Overall, the playbook helped refined me as a leader, knowing that people will ultimately be attaching their lives to my leadership. Writing myself clear has helped me to be able to speak and articulate vision more clearly than if I’d not gone through the labor of producing the playbooks.

### **Accomplishing Goal 2: Determine the Critical Factor(s) within the Chosen Strategy**

The second goal was to determine the critical factor(s) for a successful plant within the chosen strategy. The success of this goal was measured by a clear articulation of the critical factor(s). With our chosen model being what we’ve called a “High-Impact Service Plus Depth of Discipleship Model,” we determined the critical factor to be high commitment levels from the people joining their lives to the plant. By the sheer nature of what we’re trying to accomplish, non-committed people will sink the plant before it even begins. Because of this, we didn’t take the time to further defend the biblical precedent of calling people to an increasing commitment (though both Jesus and both did so in the New Testament). Nor did we trace commitment levels from our people. Instead, we’ve simply allowed the planting method and the DNA be the basis by which we determined high commitment to be the critical factor within our planting model.

### **Accomplishing Goal 3: Develop a Training Plan**

The third goal was to develop a training plan that will help implement the chosen strategy and that maintains focus on the critical factors in preparation for launch. This goal was considered successfully met when the training plan was evaluated and affirmed by an expert panel according to the rubric provided.

#### **Core Team Commitment**

In order to be part of the Core Team, we asked each potential member to prayerfully consider the cost and to commit to a certain set of Core Team commitments. These commitments are as follows:

1. You are fully aligned with our mission, vision, values, and distinctives.
2. You are willing to submit to the leadership and the lead pastor.
3. You have healthy motives for joining the Core Team.
4. To the best of your ability, you will make a healthy church transition.
5. You are prepared for the constant change of church planting (flexibility).
6. You realize sacrifice will be the norm, not the exception.
7. You are aware of and committed to prepare for spiritual warfare.
8. You are committed to grow the Core Team and financially support the vision of the church plant.

To summarize these commitments then, we asked people to be excited about our vision and willing to take bold steps of faith to see that vision come to fruition. In summary, the Core Team phase sought to develop a group of disciples of Jesus who are compelled, committed, contagious, and courageous in relation to the church plant.

Having established a high bar to join the Core Team, as the group grew the objective was to unite them around a set of objectives (or targets) of the Core Team. We had ten, and it's the planter's job to constantly keep these objectives before the always changing Core Team. These objectives were as follows:

1. Discipleship: we are disciples who make disciples.

2. Ownership: this is my church.
3. Relationship: we are in the people business.
4. Alignment: we serve a collective mission, not a personal agenda.
5. Unity: bitterness is poison, so we embrace the work of genuine peace.
6. Spiritual warfare: this is a battleship, not a cruise ship.
7. Service: all hands on deck.
8. Submission: we joyfully live under authority.
9. Sacrifice: cost is the norm, not the exception.
10. Humility: this is not about us.

These 10 Targets helped us to give the Core Team something to aim for. Each member can be cultivating personal growth and maturity in these ways, and in so doing, benefit the overall growth and development of the plant. So, we sought to see a group of people form who were compelled, committed, contagious, and courageous, and who together would pursue the 10 Targets of a Core Team.

### **Core Team Training**

Core Team meetings began once we had six to eight families committed to the Core Team Expectations. These meetings were once a week during an evening. The very early prayer meetings began in a home, but our first official Core Team Meeting was at a public Community Center. The first meeting was July 10, 2023, and had nine Core Team members in attendance. The following outlines the goal, training overview, and curriculum training track that was followed from this point forward.

The goal of this time period with the Core Team was to fully assimilate and integrate each Core Team member into the DNA, distinctives, and doctrinal beliefs of our church. Not every person who is interested in the plant will be a good fit for the Core Team. There may be some who are better suited to join the church at the launch. Core Team members will need to fit the expectations outline in the Core Team Expectations

guide, as well as commit to be present and engaged in the following training time during Core Team meetings.

### **Training Overview**

Within the pre-launch phase of Core Team Development, there are several critical beliefs, commitments, and concepts that need to be transferred to the Core Team.

#### *DNA and Distinctives*

Core Team members need to know, believe, and own the DNA and distinctives of the church. This outlines the kind of church we want it to be, and it's vital that the church itself is bought into the vision that is laid out here. Equipping the Core Team in these matters allow for symmetry across the board as the Core Team seeks to bring others into the family of God.

#### *Doctrine*

Unity apart from doctrine is no real unity. Ephesians 4:11-16 paints a picture of spiritual leaders who equip the saints to minister to one another in order to build up one another into full maturity. This process of every member ministry, growth, and ultimately maturity is necessarily dependent on doctrinal education by the spiritual leaders, leading to doctrinal fortitude. Establishing deep convictions on essential issues of doctrine is important, while also giving liberty in the spirit for matters of conscience. It is critical then that the Core Team is unified in doctrine in preparation to reach a city for the gospel.

#### *Leadership Qualities*

The contrast of secular leadership and spiritual leadership is stark. The leaders of the secular world have excelled in many areas, including work ethic, innovation, inspiration, organizational structure, customer satisfaction, and most of all, profit. Certainly, there are respectable and even godly components of leaders who have nothing

to do with Christ. However, there are also fundamental and essential issues that are missing from the secular leadership model in order to be a successful spiritual leader. As a church launches then, exemplifying a godly leadership and equipping others toward a spiritual leadership that is godly and impactful in our current age should be a high priority.

### *Attitudes of Serving*

Success of the church's mission and commitments is predicated on the ability of the church to sacrifice. Through generous giving, volunteer hours, and prioritization of church functions and relationship, the gospel of Jesus Christ will move forward.

However, with sacrifice the threat to the church becomes entitlement. Sacrifice can come with strings attached and can produce expectation of role, title, and status. This will be detrimental to true spiritual life and growth in the body of Christ. So, the Core Team must be instilled with godly attitudes in pursuit of sacrifice and serving.

### **Training Curriculum**

The Core Team training curriculum below (table 3) helped achieve alignment and buy-in, in turn producing commitment.

Table 3. Core Team training curriculum

<b><u>DNA Alignment</u></b>	
The Core Team and Its Objectives	1 week
The Church and The Kingdom of God	1 week
The Mission	2 weeks
Pillars	2 weeks
Discipleship Rhythms	1 week
Cultivating Culture	1 week
<b><u>Doctrinal Alignment</u></b>	
What We Teach	4 weeks
<b><u>Ministry Alignment</u></b>	
Ministry Standards	1 week
Serving and Leading	2 weeks
<b>TOTAL = 15 weeks</b>	

The curriculum above can be adapted to faster or slower timeframes, but fifteen weeks is in line with an overall five-month pre-launch Core Team phase when making room for monthly Vision Meetings and occasional holidays. The curriculum above played out in our plant in the calendar below (table 4).

Table 4. Launch strategy calendar

<b>LAUNCH STRATEGY CALENDAR</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Teaching</b>
06/19/2023	Fellowship Gathering	
06/26/23	Fellowship Gathering	
07/03/22	<i>Fourth of July</i>	
07/10/22	Definitions	What is a Core Team and its objectives?
07/17/22		What is the church and its relation to kingdom?
07/24/22	VISION MEETING	
07/31/22	Definitions	What is the gospel and how it transforms us?



<b>LAUNCH STRATEGY CALENDAR</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Teaching</b>
08/07/22	Mission	Glory
08/14/22		Great Commission/Great Commandment
08/21/22	VISION MEETING	
08/28/22	Pillars	Unapologetic Preaching, Unashamed Worship
09/04/22	LABOR DAY (FAMILY GATHERING)	
09/11/22	Pillars	Unceasing Prayer, Unafraid Witness
09/18/22	VISION MEETING	
09/25/22	Rhythms	Services, Teams, Groups, Studies
10/02/22	Culture Code	How we live out mission and pillars
10/09/22	Doctrine	
10/16/22		
10/23/22		What we believe about salvation, eternity, and the church
10/30/22	Guest Speaker (Church Planting Pastor)	
11/06/22	VISION MEETING	
11/13/2022	Doctrine	What we believe about missions, conduct, and future things
11/20/22	Ministry Standards	How we execute
11/27/2022	Leadership	Heart of humility, servanthood
12/04/22	VISION MEETING	
12/11/2022	Leadership	Every member ministry
12/18/22	<i>Christmas</i>	
12/25/2022	<i>Christmas</i>	
01/01/23	<i>New Year's</i>	
01/08/23	Launch Team	Teams training
01/15/23		Pre-Launch scrimmage
01/22/23		Pre-Launch scrimmage

### **Core Team Completion**

The Core Team phase was completed when the six indicators of launch readiness were achieved. These six indicators had to be accomplished prior to announcing the end of the Core Team phase and a launch date to the Core Team.

### *Cohesion*

The group needs to begin relating as a church. Launching with disunity, or even a dynamic where people don't know one another—could affect effectiveness at calling others into community post-launch. Disunity in the core could call for a delay in launch in order to give more time to facilitate relationship so that the Spirit can do what he does in bonding believers together. The group of disciples gathering to launch the church should be bound together by the truth and love (2 John 4-6).

### *Alignment*

The Core Team needs to be aligned in the critical factors of mission and DNA. While there's room for divergence in some areas of doctrine, there are other areas of doctrine, philosophy and practice that must be agreed upon for the sake of unity in the church. The accomplishment of the mission is dependent on a people unifying around shared values and commitments (DNA).

In fact, alignment is central to the overall findings of this project. It's being suggested here that commitment increases when a group of people comes to agree upon a shared DNA. Without a shared DNA, commitment will be lacking.<sup>1</sup> In order to see commitment increase and a sustained church launch, training toward an alignment in DNA is critical prior to launch.

### *Momentum*

Based upon our chosen model of planting, momentum is a critical factor heading into launch as well. There should be more people joining and committing to serve and sacrifice to make this happen as launch approached—not the other way around. A decline in commitment could mean that there's something systemic and cancerous. A lack of momentum isn't cause for a hard-stop, but it could mean that a pause on choosing

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 36-43.

a launch date and officially ending the Core Team phase is needed. On the other hand, if cohesion and alignment are truly being achieved, momentum should be the natural byproduct—not something to be pursued in and of itself. In a sense, it’s the searching for the “open door” spoken of in the Scriptures (2 Cor 12:12), confirming that God is in fact willing the plant forward. If not, there may be need to pivot.

### *Critical Mass*

One of the implications of the chosen model is reaching a critical mass of committed adult Core Team members prior to launch. Within the training received by Vintage Mission, the recommended goal is 60-100 adults in order to facilitate the kind of worship service that we’re aiming for. Practically, by the time the Kids Team, Welcome Team, Usher Team, Facilities Team, and Worship and Production Team are filled out (even in a simplified approach), nearly 30 people are serving on a given Sunday morning. With 60 adults, this means people are scheduled to serve every other weekend, freeing them to worship and interact with guests on their off days.

The danger of failing to reach critical mass prior to launch are twofold. First, a slim Core Team may result in a worship gathering that lacks excellence and is filled with distractions. A key mark of our model is to facilitate a gathering that is intentional, well-thought out, and distraction-free for those who come. The second danger of failing to reach critical mass is the high potential of burning out the volunteers who are serving on Teams. Though we’re each endowed with spiritual gifts to be used in service of the local church (1 Pet 4:10-11; cf. 1 Cor 12:7, 12), we also need to be in a regular rhythm of worshipping God through song, fellowship, and sitting under biblical preaching. The danger of presented with a lean Core Team is removing volunteers from the God-intended means of grace that the worship gathering is meant to be. A third danger of failing to achieve critical mass is a compounding effect of the first two concerns, which is that the plant will eventually fold. When volunteers begin to lose their passion for service

and when the product (the public worship gathering) is failing to facilitate true worship and genuine connection with God, the life of the church begins to fade—and eventually, it dies. Thus, the metric of achieving a critical mass prior to launch is important within our selected model.

The table on the following page presents a study of one American church’s track record of planting other church. For Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, the size of their initial Core Team and has shown to directly correlate with not only planting sustained churches, but ones that have grown.<sup>2</sup>

The first advantage demonstrated by the table above is the correlation of a healthy start with a healthy (fruit-bearing) church. Especially when compared with the general statistics on the fail rate of church plants, starting with a sizeable Core Team seems to result in a higher percentage of growth and stabilization. Another advantage of starting with a healthy-sized Core Team is the accessibility of planting to more lead pastors. “When Wooddale plants a church like Westwood Community Church, the pastor does not need to have the same gifts as the church planter who is ‘parachuted’ into a community.”<sup>3</sup> Instead of having to wear multiple proverbial hats, the planting pastor is immediately surrounded by numerous believers, each of whom have their own spiritual gifts that contribute to planting and establishing the new church. Starting with a committed Core Team makes the prospect of church planting available to a broader group of pastors who may otherwise feel ill-equipped for the role of church planting.

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<sup>2</sup> There’s a need to caveat this with the recognition that numbers are not the only metric that measure a church’s vitality, effectiveness, or spiritual fruit. However, metrics do tell a story—especially when compared to the general statistics on church planting in the United States. The table on the next page simply demonstrates the correlation between a critical mass on the core team and the end result of an established church.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 65.

Table 5. Wooddale church plants, Core Team vs. attendance today<sup>4</sup>

<b>Church</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Approx. Number from Wooddale</b>	<b>Typical Worship Attendance Today</b>
Woodridge Church www.woodridgechurch.org	1991	75	800
Woodcrest Church www.woodcrestchurch.org	1993	35	950
Westwood Community Church www.westwood-church.org	1994	250	3000
Bridgewood Church www.bridgewood.org	1998	50	600
Oakwood Community Church www.oakwoodonline.org <sup>25</sup>	2000	35	150
Northwood Community Church www.northwoodcc.org	2000	25	250
Timberwood Church (150 miles distant) www.timberwoodchurch.org	2004	25-40 summer residents	200
City Church www.wooddalecitychurch.org	2005	75	225

### *Worship Leader*

Given the nature of a worship service, finding a worship leader gifted in both music and leading is an important piece of launch readiness. Especially when the Core Team is small, there may not be anyone with these kinds of giftings and skill. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Table 5 is taken from a table produced by Ed Stetzer in *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 66. Attendance numbers have likely changed for these churches over the years, but the point of the table is to illustrate the correlation between Core Team starting critical mass and the end result of a growing congregation.

without a worship leader, it will be difficult to facilitate the high-impact, transformational worship gathering that we're aiming for, thus making it a necessary component of launch readiness.

In our plant, the Lord provided someone willing to lead worship on a volunteer basis. Though he will travel a fair amount for work, he is a godly man with an incredible gift in leading worship, resulting in gratitude for God's provision.

### *Launch Location*

From a practical level, it would be unwise to bring the Core Team phase to a close and announce launch without first finding a facility to gather. Finding and securing a launch facility was the final critical factor of launch readiness.

In our plant, we created a spreadsheet to record various options and organized them by location, cost, capacity, ascetics, setup/teardown needs, and accessibility. After evaluating nearly fifty options, we landed on a high school performing arts center located strategically off of three separate interstate or highways.

With the goal of increasing commitment among the Core, these six indicators of launch readiness provide the indicator of how it's going. Without them, something will be missing and the plant's vitality will be put at risk. These indicators of launch readiness are more for the planter than the people, and it's up to the planter to cultivating urgency and focus in order to reach these six indicators of launch readiness. Altogether, the Core Team phase should be between four and nine months.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the project involved pursuing achievement of the three goals stated at the outset. First, we were able to achieve the first goal of arriving at a strategy that was believed to be both biblical and culturally relevant. This strategy was supported in chapters 2 and 3 and ultimately produced in a church planting playbook. Second, the critical success factor of our chosen model was believed to be commitment,

which we called for at every stage of the plant. Finally, the training plan was produced and implemented in real time with our growing Core Team.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The ability to carry out this project in harmony with the actual planting of a church has been a life-time hallmark and memory—both academically and pastorally. This project benefited the actual planting of a new church of Jesus Christ, wherein he dwells and for whom he died. Because of the Spirit’s ever-present movement among Doxa Church, people’s lives are being transformed through the proclamation of the gospel and steady discipleship rhythms of people’s spiritual growth. For me, the opportunity to see the academic implicated in the pragmatic is extremely satisfying, and more than that, a cause for worship. It’s both helpful and worshipful then to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of this project.

#### **Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to select a develop a strategy for planting a church, to determine the critical factor(s) for this strategy to be successful, and to make a plan to implement this strategy in real time and space. In retrospect, the project’s purpose was found to have an achievable target that was accomplished as the project ensued. The strategy for planting was primarily developed through the five-month training process with Vintage Mission in Phoenix, Arizona, at the start of 2022. Our strategy has been developed by Vintage Mission through years of trial and error, tested and tried in multiple countries, and still yielding tremendous gospel fruit for the glory of God. One regret of this project is the limitation in not being able to gather more data—one set of which would have been the stats on all Vintage Mission/Harvest Bible Fellowship



churches. Nonetheless, the first purpose of the project was appropriate and helpful to what was actually taking place in real time.

Critical to being able to accomplish the purpose of the project was narrowing the scope to a methodology and process, not metrics. Had the objective been to select a strategy that guaranteed certain outcomes, or to develop a plan that would guarantee increased commitment, the purpose would have been subject to failure due to elements beyond human control. But, since the purpose was to merely select a launch strategy and to develop a plan to deploy this strategy, and one that we believe will increase commitment—these matters could be achieved, even if their “success” was not.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

The first goal was to develop a church planting strategy that takes into account both the biblical record and the modern context in which we’re planting. The success of this goal was measured by articulating a strategic plan that is faithful to scripture and rooted in best practices based on modern context. The strategy we chose can be thought of as a “High-Impact Service Plus Depth of Discipleship Model,” with a few key additional components, such as genuine relational connection, an outward missional and attractional in relation to our community.

The model we chose involved developing a Core Team of compelled, committed, contagious, and courageous individuals who gelled together in order to launch a church. This Core Team consisted of 52 adult members by the time a target launch date and facility were chosen. The church launched with a total of 175 people that God brought to our first public launch. The ultimate test of this team’s true cohesion and alignment can only be determined over time, but at this phase there seems to be a sweet unity among the group that is in fact, contagious.

It’s important to note that while a model was chosen for this church plant, this is by no means the only model or even necessarily the best model for every planter in

every context. It is believed that this was the best model for this church plant in this context, but the cursory overview of first century plants in chapter 2 demonstrated that there is biblical evidence for various models of starting new churches. Therefore, what's learned from this study should be the benefits of planting a church this way, but should by no means prohibit other approaches from being considered, especially with varying circumstances surrounding the plant.

The second goal was to determine the critical factor(s) for a successful plant within the chosen strategy. The success of this goal was measured by a clear articulation and biblical defense of the critical factor(s). This goal was limited due to a lack of further survey research and analysis to verify the claims made. For example, an additional survey could have been sent to the pastors of churches who implemented a similar launch strategy. From the survey, aspects of the critical factor in their plant could be gathered and assessed, either confirming or denying our hypothesis that the critical factor is in fact an increasing level of commitment from the people in the core.

However, as it is, we allowed two evidences to make our case that this is in fact the critical component. First, the model of planting we chose demands a high level of commitment, without which, the model will not work. Second, high commitment is embedded in our DNA and is the very thing that people are willingly signing up to be a part of. So, joining Doxa Church has high commitment built in as a prerequisite based on the nature of the thing they're joining.

The third goal was to develop a training plan that will help implement the chosen strategy and maintains focus on the critical factors in preparation for launch. This goal was considered successfully met when the training plan was evaluated and affirmed by an expert panel according to the rubric provided.

The training plan started with preliminary commitments and targets for every Core Team member to agree to and pursue. Then, we created a curriculum schedule for the Core Team meetings allowed opportunity to equip the team in doctrine, DNA,

distinctives, and culture. This schedule was accompanied by a detailed outline of each training session, which involved elements of devotion, DNA, and direction. Together, the schedule and curriculum were helpful guard rails to ensure maximizing the Core Team times together as we pursue the single critical factor of increasing commitment among the core.

### **Evaluation by an Expert Panel**

An expert panel was chosen based on each expert's experience with planting churches and/or training church planters. Kirk VanMaanen is the Missions Pastor at Christ Church in Phoenix, Arizona, and currently runs the Vintage Mission family of churches committed to planting other churches. Kirk previously served as the Missions Pastor at Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago, Illinois, and oversaw the church planting ministry of the church, as well as the Harvest Bible Fellowship consisting of churches planted by Harvest. Throughout his time in ministry service, Kirk has directly invested in 131 church plants across the globe, many of which have gone on to plant their own churches as well.

Beau Hughes is the Lead Pastor of the Village Church in Denton, Texas. Beau began in this role as the first campus to branch off of the Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, where Matt Chandler has served as pastor. Having established the Village Church Denton from the start, Beau has had the opportunity to implement many of the same foundational principles experienced in many church planting models. He has also been part of planting a number of churches and has coached church planters affiliated with various church planting networks. He holds a Doctor of Educational Ministry from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Kevin Peck is the Lead Pastor of The Austin Stone Church in Austin, Texas. The Austin Stone was planted in 2002 and has gone on to plant and establish five additional congregations around the city of Austin. Kevin formerly served as the Vice

President of Acts 29, a church planting network responsible with 741 church plants worldwide. He holds a Doctor of Educational Ministry from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The expert panel was given chapter 3 of this project and asked to fill out the rubric based upon their experience in related fields. The surveys from the panel are in the appendix, the results of which are summarized in table 6 below.

The findings from the expert panel reveal several things. First, there's clear need to raise awareness of the obstacles that will be encountered in the process of planting with our given methodology. According to the expert panel, the stating of the obstacles is "sufficient" but not "exemplary." It will be vital for us to be able to clearly identify and state obstacles so that in turn, we can produce an action plan to address these obstacles as they arise. Specifically, these obstacles relate to the "commitment" of our people, which has been identified as our critical factor of success. Thus, heeding the feedback of the panel will be beneficial moving forward.

Additionally, there's some indication from the panel feedback that further clarification could be added to the organization and timeline of the plant. One thing that was not initially included but has now been added was a calendar with dates (see table 4 above).

There was also a theme of concern regarding accessibility to the average person. This showed up in the question regarding the transferability of the mission to other people, as well as the rhythms providing the context for growth to occur. Perhaps removing the theological/organizational language in using these in the context of a plant will help increase the accessibility of these elements of the DNA to the average person.

Table 6. Expert panel results

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool</b>				
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary				
<b>Question</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
The need for commitment is clearly stated.				3
The process for planting a church is well-organized.			1	2
The timeline for the planting process is clearly stated.			1	2
Obstacles that may hinder commitment within the plant have been stated.			2	1
I believe the plan can achieve high a commitment level from people.			1	2
The mission is biblical.				3
The mission is clearly articulated.				3
The mission is compelling.				3
The mission is transferrable to others.			1	2
The mission can be accomplished.				3
The pillars are biblical.				3
The pillars support the mission.				3
The pillars are relatable to the average person and compelling.				3
The rhythms are biblical.				3
The rhythms provide the context for growth to occur.			1	2

The other primary takeaway from the expert panel was primarily encouraging. The panel affirmed that the need for high commitment was clearly stated. They affirmed that the mission is biblical, clearly articulated, and compelling. They also affirmed all questions pertaining to the pillars with complete unanimity. Given the track record of faithfulness and fruitfulness of the men providing this feedback, this is encouraging for our process moving forward.

### **Evaluation of Weaknesses of the Project**

The weaknesses of the project stem primarily from the limitations of time and capacity to do further research. First, the project could have been bolstered by research on what constitutes true commitment, and what are the metrics? For example, data could have been taken throughout the Core Team phase in the process of evaluating whether or not commitment is increasing over time. Two such metrics that would have been easy are attendance and giving. What date did a person commit to the Core Team, and what date did they begin giving?

It would have been also advantageous to survey a wide range of churches who planted with a similar model and DNA to ours on their planting history. Learning from their past planting experience and what trends they saw in commitment around the vision for the church would only be a benefit for us, both in the project and the actual plant. What would they have done different to induce greater commitment sooner? How big were their Core Teams at the start of the pre-launch phase, and what number did they launch with? Did their critical factors for launch differ from ours, and if so, how? It also would have been insightful to see what trajectory their church took following the early stages that we're in now.

Another weakness of the project was the failure to root it in historical theology. While we briefly overviewed contemporary models of planting, there was basically no reference to models of church planting in history—at least not beyond the past few

hundred years. Though this level of research would have likely been more suitable for PhD level work due to language acquisitions required, digging up history of church plants throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe through the Medieval Ages would be a fascinating and insightful study. There's little doubt that history would provide further support and perhaps, correction, to the chosen model.

Finally, a weakness in our project is not being able to see if it actually worked. It's still far too early to determine what God has really accomplished in our midst through our chosen process of planting a church. Commitment is not a stagnant state, but dynamic—meaning it can change over time. Will our people's commitment continue to grow, stay the same, or decline? And what factors will be at play in each scenario? Time will only tell, and even when it does, it's results will not be easily connected to a cause.

### **Theological Reflections**

Drawing now upon the themes of chapter 2, the theology we set out with can be evaluated now that we've been at work within the model for nearly 9 months.

First, church planting blesses the sending church. Jesus's words hold true at the congregational level as well when he said, "Truly, it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In our case, we have two churches significantly vested in the plant. In both cases, there are tangible expressions of excitement, sacrifice, and missional focus. For Grace Bible Church in Bozeman, not only did they invest significant finances into the plant, but two individuals moved to San Diego to help us establish the church as part of the Core Team. In addition, there has been a stirring of the Spirit toward church planting in the future among the people here. It will be fascinating to see what God does in and through this church moving forward.

For Christ Church, they have been passionate about church planting since their inception as a plant just ten years ago. They have sacrificed resources, loads of time, and even a staff member to help bring the plant to fruition. In the midst of this, even in the

short time of our planting process, the church has grown and has now launched their own campaign to establish permanence. Yet another testament of God’s faithfulness to bless those who give. For both GBC and Christ Church, I’ll borrow a quote from another planter as a testament to their sacrifice and yearning for the mission to advance: “All of this speaks to the church’s love for the growth of the gospel over the growth of their little kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

Second, our chosen methodology for planting has shown itself to be a good choice for our context. Though it has not been without challenges and even disagreement by some, I believe that launching too soon or launching without enough critical mass would have greatly hindered if not compromised the effort. Allowing the Lord to assemble a Core Team of compelled, committed, contagious, and courageous individuals who together will launch a church with excellence has been a joy. This is especially true of our launch day where the Core Team was busy serving the many guests who came to visit our brand-new church. Our methodology is not perfect, but God has shown his willingness to work within it, at least in this plant—and for that, we’re thankful.

Third, the need to increase commitment should not only be for church plants. The urgency in seeing commitment levels increase is a necessity in a church plant context. However, I would submit that it should be treated as such in large, established churches as well. Just because the budget is not hurting and the worship center is fairly full should never mean that leaders lower the expectation or lessen the urgency and excitement about the mission. Instead, established churches should be constantly engaging in and catalyzing new gospel works all over the globe—a move that undoubtably requires commitment to increase in God’s people. So, the precept of leading

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<sup>1</sup> Mike McKinley, *Church Planting Is for Wimps: How God Uses Messed-Up People to Plant Ordinary Churches That Do Extraordinary Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 29.



people to deeper and deeper devotion to Christ should be seen through greater and greater commitment to His church should be for all churches everywhere.

Finally, it's the Holy Spirit who plants, builds, and establishes churches. Regardless of the strategy, the makeup of the team, or the giftedness of the planter, the Spirit of God must be at work to establish a new spiritual entity called a church. Without the Spirit, all efforts and strategy will fail. An effort may show signs of growth, and the church may even start, but it will not be sustained as a spiritual, fruit-bearing entity that reproduces followers of Jesus Christ. Dependency must be the constant posture of the planter and the Core Team.

### **Personal Reflections**

This project has become my life over the past year and a half because it has at the same time been my full-time occupation. The privilege of partnering with the Lord to plant a new local expression of the body of Christ is an indescribable joy and profound blessing. Certainly, it has been a challenge and I fear will only get more difficult in the months and years ahead. However, extreme difficulties are often the precursor to life's greatest blessings. To see theology, philosophy, and strategy come together in seeing a person's life being transformed is the delight of a project like this. Specifically, there are a few key spiritual lessons the Lord has taught me that are worth sharing.

*First, lacking sufficiency.* Having grown up as an athlete and straight-A student, it was built into the fabric of my psyche that "I got this." Just work harder, maneuver with more cleverness, and know the right people—and things will typically work out favorably. Though this mindset was prior to meeting Jesus during my freshmen year of college, remnants of this mindset undoubtedly carried into my Christian life and ministry. But the task of planting a church has stretched me beyond my own abilities. There have been countless moments where I didn't even know which direction to point my vehicle in the morning, I just knew I needed to be going somewhere. That feeling of

lostness is hard to describe, but it was accomplishing something good in my soul. Looking back, what I believe the Lord was really doing was teaching me to pray. The blessing of this plant has first and foremost been in the increased dependency on God to show up and be the one who provides and for him alone to get the glory. My competency is not sufficient to plant a church. He is our sufficiency.

*Second, refining what I'm most passionate about.* For me personally, I've never been drawn to Christian leaders who have an opinion about everything. From my best assessment, over-dogmatism can create unnecessary noise that ultimately deters from the thing that we should actually be loud about. The church planting journey has refined in me more openness than I thought I would ever have on certain issues, while at the same time deepening my passion for that which is really critical. As a pastor, I've honed in on three passionate pursuits that have risen above the rest: (1) passionately preaching God's word with an aim toward transformation, (2) lovingly shepherding God's people, (3) leading our church family to be a discipling church. That's it. Now, that's not to say that doctrine or philosophy or ecclesiological matters don't matter—they do! But by focusing on my main roles as a pastor, and maybe in particular, the Great Commission, there are so many things that I care less about than I did in the past. In the end, I'm just not convinced that they'll matter as much as leading a group of people toward glorifying God by fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment will.

*Third, leading the church to unite around mission.* Because of my experience in church planter training and now in the planting process itself, I am more convinced than ever that the Great Commission is meant for everybody. Not all will be gifted in the same way or have the same capacity, but I'm convinced the whole body of Christ have spiritual gifts to build up the body and the whole body of Christ is meant to have a missional mindset. It's easy for the church to drift into a niche thing that overshadows the reason why God put us on the earth. Maintaining critical focus on fulfilling the Great

Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment not only helps the church stay on a track toward multiplication and growth, but also brings unity and peace.

*Fourth, humility toward planting and planters.* Writing this just a few weeks post-launch of what has amounted to nearly 9-months in San Diego and 14 total months of total preparation, we have really been humbled by the process. What we've done has not been perfect, nor is it the only way, or even the best way to plant a church. It is a way that I was trained in and stuck with in order to accomplish the thing that we believed God was calling us to do in San Diego. However, following the actual planting of this church, I have tremendous respect for any church planter who comes after us in the effort of planting a new church for God's glory. I also have gained greater humility in the wake of this project in researching various approaches to planting. Overall, I have no regrets about our chosen model. Yet, I also believe that God can use many models to accomplish His will in planting new churches around the globe until Jesus comes again.

There are probably many other reflections upon the project and ultimately, the plant, which will be realized as time goes on. But at this time, I can say I'm truly grateful and humbled to have been chosen by God to be parting of planting Doxa Church in San Diego.

### **Conclusion**

The challenges with planting a church in the twenty-first century in the United States are significant. Aside from the fiscal, spiritual, and emotional challenges, the public perception of church planting has affected how church planting is view—and not for the better. Nevertheless, the Great Commission continues to stir up faithful and courageous people and teams of people to endeavor to plant a new church together.

Given the aforementioned headwinds, there's great caution in carefully choosing the right method for planting in a particular context. In our case, we've selected what we belief to be the most effective process for our culture and context in order to

bear fruit quickly. Gathering a group of individuals who are being disciplined to be committed, compelled, courageous, and contagious in order to launch a high-impact worship service that will provide life for the rest of the weekly ministries is our model. It has been used in similar contexts many times, and we have seen the blessings of the model already.

However, every model has critical factors for success, and we determined that ours is commitment. This increasing commitment is formed primarily around a shared DNA, which we've defined as our mission, pillars, and rhythms. We have asked a lot from our people, and they have responded by sacrificing their time, talent, and treasure. At least so far, we've found that there is actually joy in giving of oneself to further the mission and bring more glory to God.

Our model and critical factor of success required a training plan. Our training plan was developed in my own church planter training and was modified on the ground as we progressed through the pre-launch phase.

What remains is to continue to fostering commitment by teaching and modeling our DNA while calling people to commit to it. Commitment may be a dynamic reality that needs to be continually fostered from a human level.

Together, with a model of planting that biblically backed and tried-and-true, with a type of church and set of church DNA that are likewise rooted in Scripture, and with people who are willing to sacrificially commit to building into the plant—we are prayerful and hopeful that God will be pleased to bless these efforts in establishing a church that's effective and fruitful in reaching many lost souls for the sake of the kingdom. Beyond our plant, we will be asking the Lord that he'd be so favorable as to allow us to be part of planting other churches for his glory in the years ahead at Doxa Church San Diego.

APPENDIX 1  
EXPERT PANEL FEEDBACK

The expert panel consisted of hand selected experts in the field of church planting or training church planters. They were asked to read chapter 3 and respond by filling out the Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool. Their responses are included on the following pages.

Name of Evaluator: Kirk R VanMaanen Date: 02/08/2023

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Overview</b>					
The need for commitment is clearly stated.				x	Illustration of Church-going to core commitment is excellent
The process for planting a church is well-organized.				x	
The timeline for the planting process is clearly stated.				x	Phases are clearly defined with stated purpose & focus; may consider stating evidences
Obstacles that may hinder commitment within the plant have been stated.			x		
I believe the plan can achieve high a commitment level from people.				x	
<b>Mission</b>					
The mission is biblical.				x	
The mission is clearly articulated.				x	
The mission is compelling.				x	
The mission is transferrable to others.				x	
The mission can be accomplished.				x	
<b>Pillars</b>					
The pillars are biblical.				x	
The pillars support the mission.				x	
The pillars are relatable to the average person and compelling.				x	
<b>Rhythms</b>					
The rhythms are biblical.				x	
The rhythms provide the context for growth to occur.				x	

Other Comments:

Name of Evaluator: Kevin Peck

Date: 2/13/23

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Overview</b>					
The need for commitment is clearly stated.				X	
The process for planting a church is well-organized.			X		
The timeline for the planting process is clearly stated.			X		
Obstacles that may hinder commitment within the plant have been stated.			X		
I believe the plan can achieve high a commitment level from people.				X	
<b>Mission</b>					
The mission is biblical.				X	
The mission is clearly articulated.				X	
The mission is compelling.				X	
The mission is transferrable to others.			X		
The mission can be accomplished.				X	
<b>Pillars</b>					
The pillars are biblical.				X	
The pillars support the mission.				X	
The pillars are relatable to the average person and compelling.				X	
<b>Rhythms</b>					
The rhythms are biblical.				X	
The rhythms provide the context for growth to occur.				X	

Other Comments:

Name of Evaluator: Beau Hughes Date: 2/08/23

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Overview</b>					
The need for commitment is clearly stated.				X	
The process for planting a church is well-organized.				X	
The timeline for the planting process is clearly stated.				X	
Obstacles that may hinder commitment within the plant have been stated.			X		
I believe the plan can achieve high a commitment level from people.				X	
<b>Mission</b>					
The mission is biblical.				X	
The mission is clearly articulated.				X	
The mission is compelling.				X	
The mission is transferrable to others.				X	
The mission can be accomplished.				X	
<b>Pillars</b>					
The pillars are biblical.				X	
The pillars support the mission.				X	
The pillars are relatable to the average person and compelling.				X	
<b>Rhythms</b>					
The rhythms are biblical.				X	
The rhythms provide the context for growth to occur.			X		

Other Comments:



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## ABSTRACT

### LAUNCH STRATEGY AND CORE TEAM DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PRE-LAUNCH PHASE OF A CHURCH PLANT IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023  
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This project's objective was to assist in the process of planting a church in San Diego, California, in the 2022-2023 timeframe. Specifically, the project sought to find a planting method that was both biblically rooted and culturally relevant. Then, the critical factor of success was to be determined within the selected planting method. Finally, a practical training plan was to be developed based on the chosen methodology and the related critical factor for success. Chapter 1 outlines this development. Chapter 2 provides the theological basis for planting a church. It begins with the starting point for a kingdom-building mission, then introduces church planting as the vehicle for the mission to advance. Chapter 3 details our chosen methodology for planting a church and provides a brief defense of our model and its critical factor. The chapter closes with an overview of our process of planting. Chapter 4 takes the chosen strategy for planting and details a practical curriculum and calendar intended to see commitment levels increase. Chapter 5 reflects on the findings of the project and draw final conclusions. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the selected planting methodology and what could have been different in retrospect.

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