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# Sustainable Church Planting: A Missional Approach

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SUSTAINABLE CHURCH PLANTING:

A MISSIONAL APPROACH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

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## ABSTRACT

In my experience with church planting today, there is a concern for its sustainability due to financial constraints, leadership burnout, and results. The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss the problems therein with traditional church planting and to also lay the foundations for a more sustainable church planting option through the vehicle of missional community. My intentions are for my local Wesleyan conference to benefit from this work as it has been constructed through the culmination of my research and study as well as my own practical ministry experiences as a church planting pastor. While church planting is not new and neither is the idea of missional communities, a methodology of planting new churches missionally through these small communities is, and provides a more biblical and sustainable method for today's world and economy and reaches a whole crowd of people who are not a part of the body of Christ.

In this work, I have established two major sections. The first is titled "Defining a Missional Church Planting Philosophy." In this section I discuss three major items: Two different operating systems for church planting, the programming language for a discipleship-based operating system, and a focus on missional communities themselves as a wonderful option for planting new churches.

The second section is titled "Missional-Community-Driven Church Planting." Here I focus on developing a missional community as the basis for church planting beginning with the foundations needed to do so, the sustainability of planting churches this way, and finally a chapter devoted to missional church planting pastor pre-requisites.

## INTRODUCTION:

### MIND THE GAP

*For all that has been lost in the Western church today, there is hope. There has never been a greater opportunity to see the transformation of people, society, and the world, but it will mean a radical redefinition of following Christ and impacting the world.*

*-Bob Roberts Jr.<sup>1</sup>*

There is a cultural gap slowly yet steadily drawing in Jesus followers and non-followers every single day and I must admit up front that I am in that gap. Or, at the very least I was in that gap and am now climbing out on a ladder filled with God's grace, grab bars lovingly given by Jesus, and steps built by the Holy Spirit. Let me explain...

My first visit to London, England was instigated by my doctoral studies as I embarked on a journey with my cohort to a much older country to take a closer look at what has arguably become a post-Christian society. One of my first encounters with London came while leaving Heathrow Airport as I boarded the train known as the underground. As I waited for the approaching line, I heard a phrase I would continue to hear at every train station during my two-week wanderings: "mind the gap." You see, when one approaches the train door there is a yellow line highlighting the gap between the platform and the train car itself. Mind the gap simply means to be careful of that gap between the platform and the train when boarding so as not to trip and fall, to get a shoe

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Roberts, *Transformation : How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 14.



stuck, to get luggage stuck, to lose something, or become hurt in some way. It is a warning of something dangerous looming in the path of every traveler trying to get from the platform to the train, and eventually to their destination. At every station I set foot in, I found the yellow line and audible alert highlighting my last step before the gap, warning me to mind it.

Recently I came across an interesting gap-story. On August 6, 2014, at Stirling train station in Perth, Australia, a man named Andy became stuck in between a train and the platform when his left leg accidentally slipped into the gap. He was just doing what he did every day: boarding a train on the way to his destination. However, this time the gap caught him. The gap had been there every single day, and the same goes for the warning signs and audible message, yet even so, on this particular day Andy fell into it. In the video online you can see him quite visibly stuck with most of his leg in the gap and people coming to his aid. In the end, Andy was set free by hundreds of people who joined together to push on the train, tilting the entire side car so he could get free. Without their working-together help, Andy might have been stuck in the gap for a long time.

There are numerous news reports online that can be found about this by Googling key words and even searching YouTube and watching the whole seventeen minute event from the train stations security footage. Nine News in Perth has a report segment covering this on their website, which does a very good job of explaining the ordeal. In the video you can see Andy slip into the gap and struggle to get out along followed with the mass of people coming to his aid. At the end of the Nine News interview the reporter asks if he is nervous about getting on the trains again, to which he said “no.” The reporter

then says with a smile, “You just have to mind the gap next time,” to which Andy replies, “That’s the message, mind the gap.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Peering Into the Gap**

Being a student of semiotics, *mind the gap* quickly became lodged in my memory banks, seizing my attention as I wandered around England and considered the church today in light of church planting. I recall the moment it hit me while sitting on a bench at Warwick Parkway station waiting for my train to Cambridge: “There is a gap between the church and today’s culture and we in the church are not minding it well.” This gap is widening as fewer and fewer people discover a relationship with God through the church and find themselves continually looking for him. Simply put: The gap is the space between where the church is and where today’s culture is; the more the church fails to connect with people today and to connect them in a relationship to God, the wider the gap becomes, separating the church from culture. The problem does not seem to be that people are turning away from God, but rather, that they are looking for him and finding it difficult to see him in today’s church. I myself have encountered many people in my church planting journey who tell me that it is not God they are struggling with, for they truly want to discover him more. The issue they have is found in the church today, which seems to be focused on the wrong things, in their opinion. The more people cannot find God in the church, the wider the gap becomes.

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<sup>2</sup> Kaitlyn Offer, "Passenger Fails to Mind the Gap at Stirling Train Station," 9 News, Perth Australia, accessed August 9, 2014, <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/passenger-fails-to-mind-the-gap-at-stirling-train-station-commuters-work-together-to-free-him/story-fnhocxo3-1227015379624>.

In their book *On the Verge*, Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson talk about the “60:40 problem” that originated from Hirsch’s Future Travelers groups.<sup>3</sup> What this idea basically says is that the contemporary church (an attractional-extractional<sup>4</sup> church) only reaches forty percent of the population, which begs the question: what about the other sixty percent? What about the growing number of people who are no longer connecting to Christ through the church? What about the growing number of people looking at the church today, scratching their head and wondering what it is really all about? My theory is that the sixty percent is slipping into a gap of disconnectedness from the church and spiritual wandering without mature followers of Christ leading them. They see value in God but cannot figure out how to connect with him in the current mode of ministry.

It makes me think of a bit of computer technology and the time before a graphical user interface like Windows or Apple IOS. Before then, people saw great potential in computers but had a difficult time using them and figuring out how to bring them into their lives. How could a computer become something for the everyday person and not just some big mega-business? How could the gap be closed that existed between regular people and the wonderful technology of computers? The answer was in a new operating system with a new interfaces for people to connect to a computer with.

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge : A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 27-31.

<sup>4</sup> I first heard the term extractional from Alan Hirsch in a talk which he gave where he explained that in his opinion, the word extractional better defines the attractional church. While attractional is a good word because the attractional church seeks to attract people to itself, extractional is better because it describes what is truly happening: people being extracted from their live to attend services and programs at a church building. The real problem I have with attractional is that anything can be attractional including missional community church planting. For these reason I will use the word extractional for the remainder of this dissertation. For further reading on Alan Hirsch’s thoughts, visit the following website: <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/attractional-or-extractional-church-cultural-distance/>. Also read “Right Here Right Now” by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost found in my bibliography. See also chapter one of this dissertation under church operating systems and extraction.

As I contemplate the gap today between culture and the church through my church planting eyes, I see the need for the church to get an upgraded operating system. One that will connect people directly to God through a personal relationship in him that they themselves own and run every day. One that will connect people to the true life of the body of Christ and all the relational joy that comes from the body living as it was intended to. One that will teach, mold, and disciple people in a life of walking with the Spirit and joining in the work of Jesus happening all around them in their community. And one that will challenge and empower people as Jesus-followers to live incarnational lives each and every day.

The gap is growing and the church is not paying enough attention to it. It goes about the day thinking everything is fine, taking for granted the warning signs everywhere. If the church doesn't pay close attention to the gap, people will continue to get stuck there and all of a sudden the church will be even smaller than it is now. It is past time to close the gap, but it will not be easy and it may have to widen before it can close. It is going to take people in the church believing that enough is enough, coming together, and pushing the gap open even farther so that it can more clearly see people and help them out of the gap. It is going to require shutting down some dilapidated stations so that new upgraded stations can be built. And it is going to require a journey back to the original blue prints for the church and a discovering of how that is innovated today for the body of Christ.

This dissertation is not about replacing any current forms of ministry nor is it about bashing anything in particular, for respect is due to the contemporary church today that is doing great things for the Kingdom. More so, this work is about seeing the future

and connecting the dots. It is about seeing the gap and taking the gap seriously. As I draw lines between the dots in my research and study, the picture coming into focus is one of the church developing an upgraded operating system that plays itself out through planting new churches. I concur with a couple of authors: Aubrey Malphurs, who writes, “...church planting is the best solution to the current state of the church in America—a church in crisis.”<sup>5</sup> And Stuart Murray, who, in his argument for starting new churches, writes:

I cannot imagine how we can respond to the diverse missionary challenges of the twenty-first century, or even survive as a Christian community, without the stimulus of church planting and the opportunities this offers to explore fresh ways to incarnate the gospel in a changing context.<sup>6</sup>

Church planting does indeed offer the potential of a fresh new way to incarnate the gospel to the sixty percent, to the people stuck in the gap. The key lies in the potential of what church planting can become, for we cannot continue planting churches the same way we always have. I believe what is needed is not a revamping of the contemporary form of church planting but, rather, a truly missional form that is focused on mission, relationships, discipleship, and incarnation.

A new couple recently started attending my current church plant missional community and what they fell in love with is the missional aspect of who we are. Missional is not simply a new buzz word to make churches sound better and nor is it simply a fancy term for a few more mission trips. Missional is not a new name plate or new sign to put on top of an existing ministry structure and it is not something that

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<sup>5</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting : A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church*, Kindle Electronic ed., Kindle Ebook vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century : A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, North American ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 17.

revamps current ministry efforts. Missional is about following Jesus into the nooks and crannies of a zip code. Missional is about discipleship, relationships, and incarnating Jesus in one's own context. And I believe that missional is what the people in the gap are looking for<sup>7</sup>. Something to note; while I mention it briefly here, chapters one and two pay more attention to defining missional and to its connection in a missional church planting model.

In the chapters to come, I will provide a foundation to a missional form of church planting that reaches the growing sixty percent hanging out in the gap. I will show how it is more sustainable in today's difficult economy and how it will put the church back into the community where the sixty percent are. In part one, I will discuss two church operating systems: the more traditional and extractional church operating system and a discipleship operating system. I will also discuss the programming language for the discipleship operating system followed by a deeper look at missional communities as a church planting vehicle. Then, in part two, I will lay the groundwork for missional church planting that attempts to address the major questions and concerns while also highlighting the benefits and practices therein as well as drawing from my own experiences in the past three years of being a lead pastor in church planting ministries. I will lay out the

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<sup>7</sup> I do understand that the word missional brings with it an instant confusion in defining what it is and situating one's self in the missional conversation today can be tricky for so many people have such varying opinions. Much literature has been written using the word missional and in so many different ways. In fact there is such a great deal of confusion today that some are even writing books based on clearing up the confusion, or at least attempting to do so. A helpful book in this arena is clearly "The Missional Church in Perspective" by Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zschile for they do a very thorough job of evaluating the many different texts available today. Nonetheless, for the sake of this dissertation I believe that missional is a focus on God's mission and it is why I use chapter two for building the foundation of the programming language of the discipleship operating system and by going to the book of Acts for the first church planting movement. Mission is what God is up to and "al" is our active participation in it. Therefore, missional is living in God's mission. I break this down further in chapter one where I seek to further define what missional is.

foundations which create the underpinnings of church planting, the sustainability of missional church planting, and the pre-requisites for missional church planting pastors.

## PART ONE

### DEFINING A MISSIONAL CHURCH PLANTING PHILOSOPHY

*We've become increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it's in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally changing its structures.*

*What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised and updated edition. ed.



CHAPTER ONE  
OPERATING SYSTEMS

*We, as God's people, must become better so that when we are multiplied the world will  
be better. It is time for an upgrade.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Neil Cole*

In my bi-vocational career to date, one of the positions I held in my diverse background was that of a systems engineer for an IT company. I was certified in Microsoft software, internet security, and virtual desktop environments. Having learned so much about computers, I know that a computer without its programming language (code) and operating system (OS) is nothing more than a box of plastic, circuit boards, metal pieces, and random parts. In keeping things simple, for a computer to function as designed, it requires electricity for power, code for the machine to operate, and an operating system used to interface with a user. Power is self-explanatory, for electricity gives it life. The code or programming language is trickier, for it tells all the parts of a computer what to do so that when power is applied it can begin to compute. For the average user, this code is extremely complicated and difficult to navigate, hence the need for an operating system. The OS is a user-friendly interface that makes it possible for the computer to be useful and beneficial to people in their day-to-day living without requiring a four-year degree to do so. It makes using the computer practical, much easier,

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Cole, *Church 3.0 : Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, 1st ed., Leadership Network (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010). Preface xiv.

and quite enjoyable. For my purposes in this chapter, the illustration of a computer is a wonderful modern-day picture for the church. Like a computer that needs certain life-giving essentials in order to be more than just a box of parts, the church needs its own essentials as well for it to function the way it was intended.

Based on my fifteen years of ministry experience in the Protestant Evangelical church in North America and by what I have read in my research to date, I have come to understand two main operating systems for the church that cannot be avoided when discussing church planting. Certainly it could be argued that these two systems are not the only two but for the sake of this work they are what I have narrowed things down to. The first is what I call the Church Operating System (COS) and the second is what I call the Discipleship Operating System (DOS). While the COS is undeniably permeating throughout church planting today, DOS is slowly growing to a greater prominence. It is therefore important for me to dissect them both and take some time to unpack the details and give definitions to each.<sup>2</sup>

For both systems the code or programming language is the Holy Bible. God's Word lays the foundation for our belief system and sets the stage for everything that happens in the church, instructing it how to live in the world. But where the two systems begin to differentiate themselves is in the operating system and life-giving power they use. The COS is an interface that deals mainly with buildings and properties, extractational events, attendance figures, and cash flow, and the power to do so is based much on human effort,

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<sup>2</sup> It could be argued that COS fits under the category of attractional-extractional church and DOS under the category of missional church. While this is true, I prefer to use these two acronyms because they are easy to remember. For more information on readings that support my descriptors of COS and DOS here as well as in chapter one, please see the titles in my bibliography. A few to point out are "Right Here Right Now" by Hirsch and Ford, "Missional Renaissance" by Reggie McNeal, "Reimagining Church" by Frank Viola, "So Beautiful" by Leonard Sweet, "Radical Renewal" by Howard Snyder, "Not A Fan" by Kyle Idleman, and "Church 3.0" by Neil Cole.

which has limits. The DOS is an interface that deals mainly with relationships and people's connection to one another, to Jesus' mission in that particular zip code, and to the discipleship of all people into disciple multipliers. The power for DOS comes from the Holy Spirit.

### **Defining "Missional"**

Before delving into COS and DOS much further, I think it is important to briefly discuss a couple of definitions. Most often in literature I've read I find the terms attractional (extractional) and missional: for my purposes, extractional is most associated with COS and missional is most associated with DOS. However, it is just too simple to call a church extractional or missional because I believe both terms are generally misunderstood in that the extractional church has more going on which defines it as such than merely extractional to hip events and services, and the missional church is much deeper and wider than the traditional view of mission work.

In his book *So Beautiful*, Leonard Sweet brilliantly describes what he calls the "APC" church and the "MRI" church:

APC church creates an attractional (members), propositional (believers), and colonial (consumers) environment and the MRI church creates missional (missionaries), relational (disciples), and incarnational (world changers) environment.<sup>3</sup>

Extractional church ministry is one that is indeed focused on luring people to its services, events, and location(s), and has its metrics focused on attendance figures, cash flow, and modernization. Honestly as I've shared in an earlier footnote, I think it is better to call this kind of church an *extractional* church, and then define it by its extractional methods:

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful : Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 19.

so then, the extractional church uses what might be incorrectly called an attractional methodology. I say this because my main argument against the attractional- extractional church is not really against its desire to be of great quality, hence attracting people, but because it truly extracts people from their context and requires them to be at a certain building or property. People are extracted from their culture and brought into the building and culture which the church has designed. In a talk at the “And Conference” in 2010, Alan Hirsch gives an alarming research statistic about new believers in the extractional church: “Within three to five years of a person becoming a Christian, they will no longer have any significant meaningful relationships outside the body of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> In other words; because the extractional church requires people to attend it where its facilities are, people are pulled out of their context and church becomes something that is attended rather than something that is lived.<sup>5</sup>

The term missional seems to be a more confusing term. One of my first experiences with this came during an interim pastorate in which I was assigned to help a dying church survive. During the first all-church meeting I conducted, I began to discuss the great need for the ministry to become more missional and as I did I was interrupted by a nice lady who declared: “Pastor, I am not called to be a missionary and I’m not about to go to Africa or anywhere else. Frankly, our church has bigger problems than needing to be involved with missions work and besides, we already send a monthly check to a missionary in China!” I remember vividly the deep sigh and feeling of “whoa” that

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Hirsch, *Living in the Land of And* (Conference lecture, AND Conference, Granger Community Church, Granger, IN).

<sup>5</sup> For more reading on attraction versus extracting, see Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford’s book titled “Right Here Right Now”. I simply love the better description and clarification that comes from using the word extraction, or extractional.

settled over my spirit in that moment of realizing just how misunderstood and confused many in the Body of Christ are about missional ministry. The church has done a great disservice to all by creating a context wherein mission is about missionary endeavors in other parts of the world. Being missional is not about being a called missionary to another people group abroad but rather about being actively engaged in the church's local zip code(s) with God's mission. Author Reggie McNeal discusses what missional is in the following way:

Missional is a way of living, not an affiliation or activity. Its emergence springs from a belief that God is changing his conversation with the world and with the church. Being missional involves an active engagement with this new conversation to the point that it guides every aspect of the life of the missional believer. To think and to live missionally means seeing all of life as a way to be engaged with the mission of God in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Authors Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile have written a book titled "The Missional Church in Perspective" that takes a very good look at clearing up the missional definition confusion. I particularly like their acknowledgement of the "elasticity" of the term: "We are proposing a different argument in this book, namely, that "missional" displays an inherent elasticity that allows it to be understood in a variety of ways."<sup>7</sup> AS one can read from my work, the context or way that I seek to understand and define missional is within church planting.

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<sup>6</sup> Reggie McNeal and Network Leadership, *Missional Renaissance : Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, "The Missional Church in Perspective : Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation," in *The missional network*(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

The Missional Church Network (MCN) also has some great things to say on what missional is.<sup>8</sup> Basically, MCN declares that being missional is about the missionary nature of the church, the incarnational aspect of the church, and the *Missio Dei*, or mission of God. I like to put it this way in breaking down missional: “*Mission*” is what God is up to in our zip code and “*al*” is the church actively participating in that. Simply put, the *Missio Dei* is the redemption of all God’s children unto Himself that they may live in relationship with Him. Jesus put it this way: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19) The missional church is a body of Christ made up of people who are actively engaged in God-mission, which is the discipleship of all people, welcoming them into the relationship and work of the Body of Christ, and sending them out to make more disciples.

### **The Church Operating System**

With a better understanding of what missional and extractional are, it is safe to move on to unpacking the two operating systems which I’ve presented. The first, and most common to date, user interface between the Bible and the people is the church operating system. Developed since the beginning of the church, within the COS lies this unexhausted list of vocabulary containing words like extractional, attractional, propositional, building-focused, cash-focused, colonial, attendance-driven, and

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<sup>8</sup> Missional Church Network, "What Is Missional?" Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/what-is-missional/>.

membership-oriented.<sup>9</sup> The idea of attraction carries forth into church planting as well as existing ministries and what has been, and maybe still is, arguably the popular model to follow. As I've researched this, I have drawn my findings together into four main attributes that define where the Church Operating System is focused: extraction, facilities, cash flow, and attendance figures.

### *Extraction*

A major focus of the church operating system is to extract people from their environment into the church meeting spaces. Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford discuss this well: "In other words, extractional evangelism in missionary contexts results in extracting them from their previous relationships and cultural context."<sup>10</sup> Now, with all due respect to the contemporary church, I am not saying that is its intentional hopes, but rather, it is the product of the COS culture. Driven by services, events, classes, and more, the extractional church puts everything into getting people to come to itself. Willow Creek Church staff and author Nancy Beach wrote in her book *An Hour on Sunday*, "It all begins with Sundays. Weekend services at any local church drive every other part of the

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<sup>9</sup> Anyone who understand computer operating systems language will relate to the COS and DOS idea. I especially like DOS because it refers to an older OS that is still the back bone to PC operating systems today, even though they have new user interfaces. Similarly, a discipleship operating system goes all the way back to Jesus and his discipleship of people leading to the planting of the new church. See my section on programing language and the metanarrative of Acts. For more information, reading through this chapter will reveal many resources that give support to the words I've used here describing COS. Basically, many authors in my bibliography who are discussing an attractional-extractional/traditional model of ministry use vocabulary like this in describing it.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now : Everyday Mission for Everyday People*, Shapevine (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 251.

ministry. They are the big kahuna, the whole enchilada, the first impression.”<sup>11</sup>

Extractional churches have a mindset that the hour on Sunday morning, and its attendance figures, is the most important thing the church does. Being extractional means getting people to want to come to something and in today’s attraction-driven culture, this does indeed make some sense. I cannot deny, however, that it feels more like a business, institution, or concert that markets and advertises itself in such a way as to win people to attending their version of the product. Around my city, the big churches take up space on billboards, television, newsprint, and radio declaring their offerings to people and stating why they should attend.

I recall one day a few years ago having a conversation with my son about what it meant to go to church. In his answer he said that going to church meant physically traveling to a building called the church and once there, singing songs and listening to a sermon. Not only did I realize in that moment my own personal failure to teach him what the church really is, my eyes were opened to a misunderstanding that is deeper and wider than my immediate family. People everywhere in North America go attend a church and then return to their daily lives. This may seem harsh but in my mind it is kind of like going to a stadium to cheer on one’s favorite team and then heading home, back to real life when the game is over. Some refer to this as the stadium church or mall church. Kyle Idleman writes, “My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Beach, *An Hour on Sunday : Creating Moments of Transformation and Wonder* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 23.



being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium...<sup>12</sup>

### *Facilities*

A major focus of the church operating system is the buildings and properties. In order to extract people from where they are to where the church is, the church must have a place and space to meet in that is modern, hip, and attractive. Millions of dollars every year are poured into buildings, upgrades, and improvements all in the name of providing an excellent space for people to gather in for the church events and services. The basic underlying mentality is that if we build it, people will come and the attendance will go up. Concerning his APC church definition, Sweet says, “The attractional church thinks that if they build it, and built it hip and cool, people will come.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of the field of dreams, it is the church of our dreams.

An extractional church must have a great building for the people to gather in and it is such a focus that many ministries put more money into their facilities than they put into their ministries. David Platt shares a story of receiving a brochure for a church celebrating its new \$23 million building and on the same page a statement about having raised \$5,000 for missions.<sup>14</sup> And I’ll never forget my experience in a church within my tribe where the mortgage guided the ministry, for the church was cutting back on budgets and staff for ministries in order to pay the \$13,000 per month mortgage payment. The

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<sup>12</sup> Kyle Idleman, *Not a Fan : Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Sweet., *So Beautiful*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> David Platt, *Radical : Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2010), 16.

point is, a major driving focus of the extractional church is having a cool modern space to gather the people in.

### *Cash Flow*

Simply put, without cash flow the church operating system cannot function and therefore income has to be a major ministry focus. To plant a new ministry with a COS, the plant needs thousands of dollars, and sometimes hundreds of thousands, just to begin. And existing churches must have increased cash flow to sustain the demands of being extractional and building focused as I mentioned above, or face the hardship of being a ministry driven by making the mortgage payment. Sermons on tithing, courses on financial management, and multiple platforms to give dollars become a pronounced voice from the leadership. While those things aren't inherently bad, they do become a negative when it is a driving focus, as I remember sitting in many a church business meeting discussing the financial problems and how to get people to give more money. Mega-church pastor and successful launch style church planter Nelson Searcy writes concerning church planting, "No matter how strong you're calling or how good your intentions, a new church cannot succeed without funding."<sup>15</sup> Searcy continues and shares how his church plant called The Journey needed one hundred thousand dollars just to launch, let alone operate after the launch.<sup>16</sup> It is a pretty strong statement to declare that a church plant's success depends on money ahead of calling and passion. But it is the way the

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch : Starting a New Church from Scratch*, Kindle Electronic ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2006), 68-69.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

COS operates. It takes great amounts of money to be extractionally focused in today's attraction-driven culture.

### *Attendance*

The fourth major focus of a church operating system following extraction, facilities, and cash flow is the attendance numbers. With the COS, attendance is the metric determining success, for if the attendance is high and growing, then the church has done well in extracting people from their place by attracting them with state of the art facilities and programming and because of that, the cash flow can be very high. For many years in my tribe, I fought against denominational monthly reports that focused on attendance, conversion numbers, and cash flow followed with a small space at the end to share anything really cool going on in the ministry. Inevitably, if the numbers were showing plateau or decline then there must be a problem in the church and a phone call from HQ would follow. Ministry success is driven by attendance numbers and the most successful pastors are those who have the largest churches. McNeal discusses a needed shift in metrics and describes the more traditional (extractional) way of thinking in terms of doing church:

Typically, results have been measured in church-centric and one-dimensional ways: how many (attendance), how often (volume of and participation in church activities), and how much (the offerings). The current scorekeeping actually keeps the church from going missional!<sup>17</sup>

Without attendance, there is no church. Without attendance, there is no cash flow.

Without attendance, there is no way to maintain facilities. COS needs people attending in order to exist, otherwise the structures crumble and leaders have nothing to do.

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<sup>17</sup> McNeal and Leadership. *Missional Renaissance*, 68.

## COS and Church Planting

Before moving on to a discipleship operating system, I think it is important to discuss briefly the impact of COS on church planting. There will be more on this in later chapters but for now, when a person approaches the beginning of a new ministry within the midst of a church operating system, those very foci as discussed above drive the vision, direction, and work of church planting itself. The following is how.

### *Planning*

In order to be a COS-driven church plant, much planning and preparation must take place ahead of time. It must be noted that prior to this planning phase, a church planter is advised to have gone through a discernment process and assessment to confirm the call to planting. Church planter and author Darrin Patrick writes about calling: “Pastoral ministry is a calling, not a career. It is not a job you pursue because you like attention, or because your mom thinks you’d be good at it, or because it doesn’t involve heavy lifting.”<sup>18</sup> And in similar manner Nelson Searcy writes, “In order to plant a successful church, you have to know that you know that you are undeniably called by God. Period. There is no way around this truth.”<sup>19</sup> It is a bit ironic reading this that, as I shared in the cash flow section above, Searcy seems to think that funding can undermine calling. Nonetheless, COS demands planning ahead.

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<sup>18</sup> Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter : The Man, the Message, the Mission*, iBook Electronic ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 74-75.

<sup>19</sup> Searcy and Thomas, 34.

During this time, the planning, moving to the location, acquiring a coach, demographic studies, budgeting, programming, name and branding, structure or government studies, vision casting, and more are all taking place and this time is typically at least one year long. Douglas Crumbly lays out his 12-15-50 model wherein the 12 is 12 months of planning, the 25 is the minimum number of people needed, and the 50 is fifty thousand dollars minimum needed before the launch. Crumbly speaks of the first stage in this way: “Preparation time is not wasted time. The time you invest in these first few months of your church will be the most important part of the launch. This is not the time for shortcuts.”<sup>20</sup> This is when some of the most crucial aspects of the church plant are worked out and need to happen, for when the launch has begun there will not be time for much planning. Essentially, to be COS means to be focused on extraction, facilities, cash, and attendance, and, for that to happen, much planning and preparation are required.

### *Fundraising*

I will not spend too much time on this as I’ve already discussed some financial matters. Suffice it to say that the COS needs a great deal of money to operate and so fundraising is crucial to the church plant. This is the opportunity to raise financial resources needed to cover things like rental fees or building purchases, staff wages, marketing, AV equipment, furnishing, food and drinks, and so on. What amount is needed depends on the specified budget created in the planning phase and usually seems to be somewhere between fifty to one hundred thousand dollars or more, as I’ve mentioned above in the cash flow section. And even so, I have seen in my studies some

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas Crumbly, *Church Planting 101*, Kindle Electronic Edition ed. (2013), location 580.

church plants needing upwards of \$250,000 just to begin. Truthfully, what drives that cost comes from the planning phase and the level of attraction the church plant decides to be for. Basically the more modern and hip, the more money that is needed.

### *Recruiting*

With the COS, it is important to intentionally bring together a solid group of Christians that has the potential to form the leadership core as well as being the foundational people starting the ministry. Even before beginning, numbers are important. This is not necessarily the time for evangelism or discipleship, for what is needed are people who can, with some minimal training, hit the ground running and serve in the church so that when the big attendance happens at the launch, there is staff to support them. Murray emphasizes the understanding that a church planter cannot go at it alone but needs a team to help in the work.<sup>21</sup> This is a defining attribute of the COS in church planting.

Most COS-launch style church plants are hoping to begin as big as possible, attracting hundreds of people to the event so to have a large attendance. Those numbers bring the need for much help, as one person cannot carry that load. Ed Stetzer writes about being careful in recruitment and the big launch: “I encourage church planters not to launch with a crowd more than ten times the size of their core group. I call this crowd-to-core ratio...,” and he goes on to say that if the crowd at the launch is too big “...the core is frequently overwhelmed because there are not enough workers for music, child care,

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<sup>21</sup> Murray, 170-171.

assimilation, etc.”<sup>22</sup> Driven by numbers already, the COS style church plant almost requires a large team that needs to be full of Christians with experience in the Body of Christ and even church planting.

### *Launching*

The majority of COS church plants have a major launch moment. This is the phase where the actual ministry programming begins. Proponents often refer to this as *launching large* or *launching fast*. Ed Stetzer writes that “most churches today start with a large launch.”<sup>23</sup> That is wherein a great effort has been made during the previous phases to have a large number of people attend the service, Christian and non-Christian. All the work has come to a head and the big day has come. The idea is that with the large sums of money raised, with the planning done and the worship service programming created, and with all the teams in place, the church can now begin by having big weekend services. And, moving forward, the COS sets the pace with the vast majority of energy spent focused on this hour on Sunday mornings and creating the best possible experience so that people will want to attend. However, that is not all that begins with the launch, for now the church plant is faced with visitor follow-up, regular weekly planning and prep, beginning small groups, establishing committees and meetings, appropriate staffing, regular office hours, and more. A key point to remember is that at this launch phase, big church has begun and if the work required in the first three phases isn’t done well, the launch phase will be that much more difficult or, even worse, it will fail.

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<sup>22</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 265.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-266.

## The Discipleship Operating System

The DOS church is in the people business, not church business. While I do not necessarily agree with everything Frank Viola says, he does give a great perspective from his experience in the church and what the church could look like instead. He writes in *Reimagining Church*, “The church we read about in the New Testament was ‘organic.’ By that I mean it was born from and sustained by spiritual life instead of constructed by human institutions, controlled by human hierarchy, shaped by lifeless rituals, and held together by religious programs.”<sup>24</sup> The discipleship operating system is much less focused on systems, events, and extractational methods. Within the vocabulary of a DOS discussion, there are words like missional, incarnational, relational, externally focused, outreach-minded, decentralized, and more. One could argue that DOS has been around as long as the COS or longer, for much of its foundations are found in the New Testament. The discipleship operating system cares about connecting people to the Story, about inviting people into the relationships in the Body and the incarnational living of the Body, and about being the church in God’s mission. A primary question that the DOS keeps in front of people is not about how to attract people to the church but, rather, what is God up to in our community and how we can be a part of it? As with the COS, I will unpack some of the main attributes of DOS that make up its foundation: discipleship, relationship, incarnation, and mission. Following that, I will give a brief introduction to its use in church planting, brief because the majority of this work is about missional

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<sup>24</sup> Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church : Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 32.



church planting that uses the DOS and so much more will be unpacked in the chapters to come.

### *Discipleship*

Discipleship is the core of the DOS interface, not attraction, extraction, properties, systems, events, or anything else. It was Jesus' final word to his disciples and it is what the mission of the church should be centered around. The DOS church keeps discipleship at the center of everything it does and the metric is not numbers but, rather, the spiritual maturity of believers. The DOS church is not content with just evangelism nor just a decision for Christ but seeks to help people be in relationship with Jesus and to learn to follow him daily. Here, discipleship is not a 10-week book discussed over a cup of coffee once a week but, rather, like Jesus' three-year-long discipleship of the 12, a commitment to a relationship and journey with another Jesus follower. Mike Breen has said on many occasions as well as in his writings that "If you make disciples, you will always get the church. But if you set out to make a church, you rarely get disciples."<sup>25</sup> And David Kinnaman has shown in his research and study that one of the greatest failures of the church today is a failure to disciple people, especially the Millennials and younger.<sup>26</sup> With DOS, the interface people encounter is one that connects people to the Jesus story and to a thriving relationship in Him. It is what Christ himself did on earth and begs the question: why would we do anything different?

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<sup>25</sup> Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 2nd ed. (United States: 3DM, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub. Group, 2011), 19-21.

### *Relationship*

A discipleship operating system cares about the relationships in the body of Christ. It is more important to have connection and extended family than it is to experience high-quality programming and facilities. In the DOS, people find themselves sitting in circles around fireplaces, dinner tables, and living rooms. They find themselves playing together at the park, sharing meals at a local restaurant, and participating in holidays and celebrations together. In the DOS, people aren't wooed to a place but are met in their context and invited into coffee shops, homes and friendships. In my church plant, we all often refer to our church as our extended family and recently when we went on a camping trip together, one of youngest children said to her friend that she was going camping with her family. God is in the business of relationships: relationships with His children and the relationships of His children. In Genesis chapter two we read of the beginning when He created Adam and one of the first things He said was, "it is not good for man to be alone." With the DOS, relationships are key to the body of Christ. It may sound harsh but it is true to say, in the COS people can sit next to each other in rows every Sunday and still be strangers. In the DOS, friendships blossom as Acts 2 comes to life in the Body. DOS is all about invitation, but not an invitation to an event. The invitation is to enter into relationship with likeminded people and an invitation to journey together in all of life's joys, obstacles, struggles, and triumphs.

### *Incarnation*

Incarnation is to live Christ in our lives. The DOS interface that people experience is that people would embody the Story in their everyday living. The sub title of Neil

Cole's book *Organic Church* reads, "Growing faith where life happens" and inside he writes, "In our organic church movement we have come to understand church as this: the presence of Jesus among His people called out as a spiritual family to pursue His mission on this planet."<sup>27</sup> People in relationship (family) and living out Christ mission in their lives. And Sweet points out that a more accurate translation of *go* in the Great Commission is "while going," insinuating that making disciples is something that happens while you're out and about every day.<sup>28</sup> The point is that in DOS, people do not attend a place to experience Jesus but rather they live Jesus and his work in their daily living. They learn and grow in being Jesus everywhere they are in their zip codes. Church is not something they do once or twice a week but, rather, church is something they are everywhere they are. In the DOS, people aren't instructed to attend but are disciplined into being.

### *Mission*

In the COS church, the mission seems to be to get people to attend. Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren write, "It is not that we shouldn't be attractive for those looking for a church to attend; it is that this has become the primary focus of churches, and as a result they miss what the Spirit is up to in the world."<sup>29</sup> One of the great misunderstandings of mission and missional within the DOS is in thinking that being

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<sup>27</sup> Neil Cole, *Organic Church : Growing Faith Where Life Happens*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 53.

<sup>28</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 151.

<sup>29</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church : What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*, Kindle, Electronic Edition ed., Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), location 182.

missional is another church program to get people out on service projects. It is just not so. In DOS, being on mission is all about doing what Jesus is doing. It is about getting involved in what Jesus is already working at, the redemption of all people unto God and their discipleship in life. In DOS, people will not experience missions trips or the yearly outreach event. In DOS, people begin to see that the mission is discipleship of all people and this is manifested through relationships and incarnational living in the body of Christ. Church is not the mission in the discipleship operating system but, rather, church is what God wants to use to accomplish His mission and He invites us, the church, to get actively involved.

### **Church Planting and DOS**

This section will be brief, for, as I mentioned above, the remainder of this study and work is devoted to making my case for the DOS as the basis of sustainable church planting. Nonetheless, I will open up this treasure chest for an initial looksee. In essence, the discipleship operating system creates a slower, smaller, more organic movement of church planting that is less resource-dependent, more sustainable over time, and focused on the sixty percent. The main vehicle for the DOS church plant is the missional community (MC) and for good reason. Mike Breen refers to MCs as “lightweight, low-maintenance, mid-size communities, led by lay people and typically have three to four official meetings per month in their missional context.”<sup>30</sup> One of the key points to this philosophy is the lightweight structure independent from the need for huge amounts of cash, people, and administrative duties. When a church plant cares more about

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities* (United States: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), 7.

discipleship, relationships, mission, and the like, needs change from an extractational focus to going and being where people are. The DOS-based church plant gathers and scatters in its zip code. It meets in homes, coffee shops, parks, sports events, and more. Instead of attracting hundreds of people to events, the DOS church sets out to disciple one person at a time and seeks to build the church through discipleship rather than just conversion and attendance. In an article on discipleship, Linda Lowry quotes church planter Winfield Bevins: “When Jesus said ‘make disciples’ the disciples understood it to mean more than simply getting someone to believe in Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> It is a long-term investment into people’s spiritual maturity in Christ. The DOS church doesn’t put all its efforts into one hour on Sunday filled with high-quality presentations, music, and sermons, but rather pours itself into relationships in the community, to meeting new people right where they are and hanging out with them there. A DOS-based church plant brings the church to the people.

The church plant driven by a DOS knows that discipleship is a long-term investment of life-on-life living that is slow and takes time. It constantly remembers that the mission is to make disciples and accepts that the result is not big attendance numbers quickly but, rather, slow individual life change.

### **Conclusion**

Today, sixty percent of the population in North America is not being reached by the contemporary church and, frankly, many of them do not want to be reached by it. The gap is widening as the church-based operating system simply cannot be everything to everyone. Giving credit and respect where it is due, the COS church is successfully

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Lowry, "An Organic Approach to Making Disciples," *Outreach Magazine* 12, (2013): 124.

reaching forty percent; however, something must be innovated to shrink the gap and it is my belief today that church planting via the discipleship operating system inside the vehicle of missional community can shrink the gap and begin to reach the sixty percent. In the chapters to come, I will begin to show how a DOS-based philosophy is a beautiful foundation for church planting today by taking a closer look at its programming language, its missional community vehicle, and its wonderful sustainability.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE PROGRAMING LANGUAGE FOR DOS

*Perhaps we should take a step back at this point and consider what Jesus was able to accomplish. In less than three years, he was able to disciple a group of men, most of whom no one else would have chosen, and taught them to DO and to BE like him in such a way that, when released, they would change the course of human history forever.<sup>1</sup>*

–Mike Breen

In looking at Jesus' ministry through my church planting eyes, I see two prominent themes to his ministry and it is the second theme that I will focus on in this chapter. Jesus was writing an operating system code and instructing the end-users how to use it at the same time. In other words, he was teaching, changing, and establishing a new order and all the while discipling others to do exactly what he was doing so that they might build the church.

The first theme is the new covenant established through Jesus' ultimate sacrifice, his death and resurrection. The grand *Missio Dei* is the redemption of all God's children unto himself that they might live in relationship with him forever. Jesus paid the price for my sin and yours and by aligning ourselves with him and following him, we can have eternal life to the full with our Father in heaven. Everything was now about faith in Jesus Christ first and then learning to live out his message of love, mercy, grace, compassion, and servanthood.

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<sup>1</sup> Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 16.

The second theme of Jesus' ministry that I see is kingdom work in the discipling of people to teach them how to follow him and how to build the church and teach others to do the same. So important was this mission to train up the church planters of His church that Jesus spent three years with his handpicked 12, molding them into the disciple-movement-makers He intended them to be. He called them out from the context of their lives with an invitation to come and be "fishers of men" and to change the world. And Jesus was not training up leaders; he was discipling followers, discipling men and women to share what he gave to them through the community of life on life living. "We have been told our entire lives that we should be leaders, that we need more leaders, leaders, leaders. But the truth is that the greatest way to create a movement is to be a follow and to show others how to follow. Following is the most underrated form of leadership in existence."<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I will take a much closer look at the foundation of the discipleship operating system: Jesus and those he discipled. I will look at the *Missio Dei* followed by how I see the discipleship operating system in the New Testament. Lastly, I will look at Jesus and his discipleship of the first church planters as well as the Acts of the Apostles or, the metanarrative of the Book of Acts.

### **Jesus the Disciple Maker**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says; "Very truly I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). His final command to the disciples at the

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *I Am a Follower : The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 14.



end of the book of Matthew was to go and make disciples just as he did. Jesus spent three years mentoring twelve key people to prepare them for growing the church by doing what he did with them. I often ask the question; why would we do anything different today than what Jesus did in his physical time on earth? The answer is, we shouldn't. The foundation Jesus built for the church to be planted on and to prevail began with inviting ordinary everyday people into his life to walk with him, to learn from him, and to be transformed into disciples. It was all about relationship. And they were not the rich and most scholarly of the world but everyday people, the tradesmen in villages and fishermen by the sea who would become builders of the church and fishermen of people.

Jesus did not practice extractional attraction; he went to the people and wandered around with them in their zip codes. He met in the streets, ate in their homes, hung out with them at the lake, and spent the majority of his time with the perceived lowly of the day. As I read the four gospels, I find it difficult to find today's extractional contemporary church operating system present in the Story. Instead, I find a life-on-life disciple-making operating system. I do not see Jesus raising thousands of dollars, building grand facilities, and recruiting high-quality church leaders of the day in order to attract people to himself and his message. I see Jesus inviting people into his life and challenging them (Matthew 4:19). I see him sitting next to a fisherman and inviting him to change. I see him walking alongside men and teaching them how to build the Kingdom (Mark 2:23). I see him touching the sick (Luke 17:11-19), loving the prostitute (Luke 7:36-50), embracing the lost (Luke 15:1-7), raising the dead (Mark 5:21-43), and embracing the sinners (Matthew 9:9-11).

### *Missio Dei Then*

From Genesis through Revelation, God's mission is the redemption of all his children unto himself that they may all be in relationship with him by his love, mercy, and grace. It all starts with the creation and the fall of Adam and Eve as God still provides a way for them to know him, and goes all through the Old Testament as God continually seeks to bring his creation back to right relationship with himself. God worked through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to establish relationship between him and his children. He used Moses and Joshua to lead his people out of bondage, to teach them lessons, and lead them into a promised land. He spoke through judges, major and minor prophets, and teachers, and even gave his whiney kids their choice of having human kings. It is in 1 Samuel chapter eight when the people of Israel ask the prophet Samuel for a human king like all the other nations have. Right away Samuel knows how bad this choice is, but God lets them have their way with a stern warning of what will come of this decision:

And the Lord told him [Samuel]: Listen to what all the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their King. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights. (1 Samuel 8:7-9)

In classic parenting form it is as if God says, "Fine! Don't listen to me; have it your way. But do not come crying to me when it all falls apart!" Yet even in that, God's love for them is clearly evident as he lets them learn the hard way. And when the time of the kings came to its inevitable end and Israel endures the consequences, God's love for his children prevails as he chooses new people to lead Israel back into relationship with him. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah lead the way in three waves of people known as the

Remnant of Israel returning for the restoration of Jerusalem, the re-establishment of the law, and the governance of right living.

It is from the return to Jerusalem that some four hundred years go by before the Story picks up again with the New Testament and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We find God's children still not living the way he intended, full of hypocrisy and legalism and unable to live according to the law. We also find them pinned under the thumb of the Roman Empire, enduring persecution and harsh living conditions, and heavily taxed. It is at this time when God sends his only Son to save them once and for all (John 3:16). Out of his great love for his children who just cannot live right lives aside from him, he gives them the ultimate gift... he gives them the Messiah. By aligning their lives with Christ and believing in him all of God's children can receive forgiveness and salvation. Through Jesus, all people can be in relationship with the Father and it is this that Jesus teaches during his ministry in the flesh while also discipling men and woman who would go on to establish the church. And the church being that group, that gathering, that body of people following Jesus who help each other, encourage one another in their faith, and seek to tell all people about God's gift of grace and mercy through Christ.

### ***Missio Dei Now***

Still today, the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) is for all of his children to know him through Jesus and to follow Christ into renewed relationship with the father. It was Christ's mission to teach this, preparing men and women to spread the news and also to live this as the church should live amongst the people. Not only was Jesus discipling people, he was showing them what the church does and what it should look like. In their

book *Jesus: A Theography*, Sweet and Viola give seven main actions of Jesus during his ministry: “feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner, care for the sick, befriend sinners, and side with the weak and the least.”<sup>3</sup> That is an excellent word for how the church was supposed to live then, and how it is still supposed to live today. Jesus followers embedded in their zip codes where people are, not extracting them from their day to day lives to a building but joining them *in* their day-to-day lives, helping them, and showing them Jesus at work and how to follow him. And as Jesus went about these things, he kept the disciples by his side in an on-the-job training format.

Jesus rewrote the code, doing away with legalism, sacrifices, law following, and having to do anything other than to first believe. In the book of Galatians, Paul’s basic message is to stop the legalistic adherence to the Law and to start living in Christ. He preached that faith in Christ brings salvation, not law. Now, he recognized the value of the law for he acknowledged that he needed it to know how to live; however, salvation does not come by works but by faith. Works follow faith as people learn right living through discipleship in the church. Everything I read in scripture points back to God’s mission to save his people and it is all reflected on Jesus, for when enough was enough, he was born.

### **DOS in the New Testament**

A discipleship-based operating system means that everything happening in the ministry happens through the lens of discipleship. Evangelism, teaching, outreach,

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus : A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 154.

mission, socializing, worship, service, healing, prayer, and more all get passed through the discipleship sieve. In my church plant, our mission statement has been whittled down to one short word: discipleship. Everything we do is done with discipleship in mind and I believe that is exactly how Jesus functioned in his public ministry and preparation for the first major movement of church planting. In everything he did, there resided in the back of his mind, discipleship. The appointed twelve went everywhere he went, even if what they were doing was not directly focused on them—Jesus still ministered with the twelve in the background, learning all the while. When Jesus turned water into wine he was discipling people. When Jesus taught the crowds he was discipling people. When Jesus walked on water, calmed storms, and filled baskets full of fish and bread, he was discipling people. When Jesus healed the sick and brought back to life the dead, he was discipling people. When Jesus passionately flipped over merchants tables in the temple, he was discipling people. When Jesus defied the authority of the day by healing on the Sabbath, eating grain on the Sabbath, hanging out with tax collectors, associating with prostitutes, touching the sick and dying, loving and playing with children, and so many more acts, he was discipling people. I simply cannot read the Gospels without realizing that Jesus was constantly discipling people to follow him and do what he was doing. He came to seek and save the lost and all along the way, teaching others to do the same in his name.

Jesus' life and ministry rewrote the code, and the operating system by which it is translated to the people is discipleship. He journeyed about the land visiting people where they were and teaching them about the Kingdom of God, and as he went he invited people to join him as his apprentices or disciples. For Jesus, discipleship was not meeting

up once a week for a cup of coffee and hour-long chat. Discipleship was life-on-life sharing based on his invitation to go follow him and a foundation for the church to be built through. As I read scripture I see Jesus doing three main things in discipleship: he spent intentional and extra time with twelve hand-picked people; he and those twelve spent time with the church of the day, teaching it and challenging it; and he and the twelve spent time with masses of people everywhere engaging in teaching, healing, helping, and loving all. I believe these three activities are the foundation to Jesus establishing his church and it is what he expected his followers to do.

One of the most important words in scripture comes at beginning of Matthew 28:19, as Jesus is about to give the Great Commission: “therefore.” That is a key turning point in Jesus’ ministry when he hands the reigns over to the apostles and tells them to go and do what he has been doing and teaching them to do. That *therefore* is a *teacher-to-disciple* transition, a baton passing, a coming-of-age talk, a handing over of the torch. It is the pivotal moment when the planting of Jesus’ church via discipleship begins amidst all the fertile soil his life and ministry created.

#### *Jesus Disciples the Future Church Plant Leaders*

Ray Vander Laan has spent much of his life learning Jewish culture and developing a ministry focused on helping people to understand the Bible in the context of its day. Of the many of his wonderful teachings is a video series called “In the Dust of The Rabbi” in which he takes an in-depth look at discipleship and what following Jesus was like. I have included a large quote here because I believe it gives a great look at what

Jesus was doing in selecting disciples and, more importantly, who and from where he selected them. In the companion guide to the video series, Vander Laan writes,

When Jesus came to earth to bring the good news of the kingdom of God and to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice to redeem the whole human race, he also chose disciples who would continue to make disciples long after he returned to heaven. Jesus selected his disciples from a unique people in a unique place—a four-by-six square mile area on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee. The Jews living in this part of Israel were the most obedient, faithful followers of God to be found. These people knew the Scriptures, they knew how to apply the teaching of scripture, and they were committed to obeying God in everything every day of their lives. From among them, Jesus chose a handful to carry the news of his kingdom to the world.

To some, Jesus' disciples would seem like an unlikely group. To their world, they weren't the brightest and best biblical scholars; most of them were fishermen. They didn't know their way around the huge, sophisticated cities of the Roman Empire; they came from small, rural villages. But they had just what Jesus needed—the commitment, the passion, the desire to be his talmidim. For three and a half years, the disciples walked with Jesus. They followed him everywhere. They did everything they could to learn to be like Jesus—to know and interpret the Scriptures as he did, to love as he did, to proclaim the news of God's kingdom as he did, and to make disciples as he did.<sup>4</sup>

It can be argued that many people gleaned from Jesus' teaching and became disciples, but there were a specific twelve whom he hand-picked and spent a great deal of time investing in. His *talmidim*,<sup>5</sup> or disciples, were to be the main leadership of the new movement in establishing churches throughout the world. These average Joes would be tasked with carrying on the work Jesus was doing and how he taught them to do so.

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<sup>4</sup> Ray Vander Laan, Stephen Sorenson, and Amanda Sorenson, *In the Dust of the Rabbi : 5 Faith Lessons*, The Faith Lessons Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 8.

<sup>5</sup> The term "talmidim" is a Hebrew word meaning "disciple". In the time of Jesus, the Talmidim were the best of the best! The chosen ones deemed able to devote themselves to a rabbi's teaching and the committed life that required.

They were highly educated people devoted to the scriptures and desirous of following a rabbi with hopes of becoming a rabbi with their own talmidim. At some point a rabbi would basically say okay to a student trying to pursue this and allow them to follow him. But this is not how Jesus got his disciples, for he went looking for them. He saw things in them they didn't even know they had and Jesus invited them to follow him, to learn, and to be changed so as to continue in Jesus work of changing the world.

Jesus' discipleship of the twelve was intentional and specific. He was constantly in a pattern of what Mike Breen would simply call "invitation and challenge."<sup>6</sup> Jesus invited the disciples into his life to learn followed with a challenge to change, grow, and apply. It was a continual pattern of teaching, sending, and debriefing. This occurred all throughout the three years of training the disciples received until the one day when Jesus cut them loose.

In The Book of Mark chapter three, Jesus designates the twelve disciples: "He appointed the twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). This verse is important because it shows Jesus' desire for the twelve to be with him but also to be sent out on mission. Many times in the Story, Jesus spends time alone with the twelve, spends time with them among the crowds and places he was teaching, and then sends them out to take a crack at what they've been learning. A little later in Mark in chapter six, Jesus specifically sends the twelve out in twos on mission with authority to preach and to heal. "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mark 6:12-13). Jesus' discipleship of the twelve was on-the-job training at its finest. He taught them, deployed them, and then continued to teach them. Sometimes he even rebuked them for their lack of faith or misunderstanding.

### *A Metanarrative of Acts*

The book of Acts just might be my favorite section of the Story. "It covers a period of time of some thirty years" as it tells the story of the birth of Jesus' church and

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<sup>6</sup> Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 16-20.



how it carried out his command to make disciples of all nations.<sup>7</sup> My heart beats for church planting, of course, and when I think of building the church I cannot imagine looking to anything but Acts first, for Acts lays out the many great journeys of the Apostles as they spread the Good News. In *Thirty Years That Changed the World*, Michael Green writes: “The Acts has so much to say to our half-hearted and cold-blooded Christianity in the western world. It rebukes our preoccupation with buildings and ministerial pedigree, our syncretism and pluralism, our lack of expectancy and vibrant faith. As such it is a book supremely relevant for our time.”<sup>8</sup> Concerning church planting, Ed Stetzer writes that “The book of Acts is the most important book ever written on the subject.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Acts is relevant for our time. Especially with missional-community-focused church planting in mind, for, as I read Acts, that is how I see the Apostles planting churches. After Pentecost, with the power of the Holy Spirit having filled them in such a unique way, the Apostles grew the church in the Spirit’s strength. Great and wonderful things happened as their ministry unfolded: some terrible and tragic and some miraculous and magnificent. Nonetheless, the joys and pain of birthing the church emanate through the Acts and offers up the key which unlocks the door to understanding how to live Jesus’ Great Commission.

The book of Acts actually begins with the Book of Luke, for both are written by the ever-detailed doctor. Green writes that “You could call his two volume work,

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<sup>7</sup> Pat Alexander and David Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World : The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), Preface.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 37.

‘Salvation, its root and fruit.’<sup>10</sup> That meaning, the book of Luke is the roots or foundation and Acts is the result of all the hard work. At the beginning of his writing, Luke gives some very important details to his passion:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too have decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

Sharing stories was one of the key methods for spreading information back in that day. Luke does an exceptional job of giving us much detail and information and it is clear that his great concern is for the readers to know the story. Luke is a humble physician and scholar tagging along with Paul and other disciples, gleaning from them as they journey the lands planting the church. His writings make it crystal clear what Jesus’ mission was and how Jesus’ disciples carried out that mission. Without Luke’s account as written in Acts, we may not know how the Apostles carried out Jesus’ great commission to “make disciples of all nations.”

At the end of the Gospel story, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and replicate themselves everywhere, and this is also clear from the beginning of Acts as Luke quotes Jesus in chapter Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” An important note to make is that this meant the disciples were going and doing just what Jesus did. I really think the following quote puts this into great perspective. In *The Atonement*, Auguste Sabatier writes;

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<sup>10</sup> Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World*, 25.

Merely to repeat His words is not to continue His work; we must reproduce His life, passion, and death. He desires to live again in each one of His disciples in order that He may continue to suffer, to bestow Himself, and to labor in and through them towards the redemption of humanity, until all prodigal and lost children can be found and brought back to their Father's house.<sup>11</sup>

A major key to Jesus' ministry was that it gave the disciples the example of what to do when they became Apostles, and Luke paints this picture well. Jesus was discipling them so that they could in turn disciple others, resulting in the new church. But this wasn't done in their own strength or by themselves, for at the forefront of Acts we read of the most important attribute that an Apostle needs, the Holy Spirit. Pentecost must have been an extraordinary experience. In his commentary on Acts, Phillip Bence writes, "Without the coming of the Holy Spirit, there would be no Acts of the Apostles."<sup>12</sup> This was the transformational key in the disciples' lives. The Spirit is the power they had making them bold, strong, and evermore passionate about their mission. The Spirit gave Peter his power and authority as he stood soon thereafter giving the first sermon and, for all intents and purposes, the first altar call, where about three thousand people received the message and were baptized, igniting the church in Jerusalem.

To see the missional metanarrative of Acts, I will focus on what I believe are the main features of the story depicting it as such. I believe they are the Apostles' focus on discipleship, their presence in the communities, their following the Holy Spirit, and the way they lived life-on-life with people. Those four items fall within missional living, incarnational living, and relational living—which are also the heartbeat of a missional community church plant. The Apostles went out and lived what Jesus taught them; they

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<sup>11</sup> Auguste Sabatier and Victor Leuliette, "The Doctrine of the Atonement and Its Historical Evolution," (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), location 1099.

<sup>12</sup> Philip A. Bence, *Acts : A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Pub. House, 1998), 37.

walked his walk, talked his talk, and arguably did even greater things than he for Jesus himself said: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

### Spirit-Led Living

“The church begins in Acts 2:4 as they were filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup> The Spirit gave the Apostles the strength and power for what they were about to do. This feeling overwhelmed their very being, turning them into God’s missionaries to be sent to begin the new church. “The Spirit enables repentance and faith in Christ through the preaching of the gospel, creates a unique fellowship of prayer, praise and generosity based on devotion to the apostolic teaching, and empowers the Disciples of Christ for ministry.”<sup>14</sup> And with the Spirit’s power enabling them, the Apostles were then sent to do the work they were prepared for. They went to the streets everywhere, going to where the people are, spending time with them in their context. L.E. Brown writes: “God’s sent people would follow the apostolic impulse to produce self-replicating communities.”<sup>15</sup> Apostolic impulse could also be said as the Holy Spirit’s nudge, his little push towards Jesus’ current work. The Spirit would nudge people and send them where he needed

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<sup>13</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God : A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 323.

<sup>14</sup> T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 288.

<sup>15</sup> L. E. Brown, "Missional Ecclesiology in the Book of Acts," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, (2011): 87.

them. Following the Spirit's nudge, the Apostles often went into the nooks and crannies of life to be with people and establish new communities of believers.

One of my favorite sent stories is of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. Led by the Holy Spirit, who told the Apostles to "set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work which I've called them," they prayed, laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, and then sped them on their way to spread the news (Acts 13:1-3). Do not miss the key here, as we often focus on Paul and Barnabas being sent by the apostles. In verse two, it was the Holy Spirit who nudged the Apostles to send Paul and Barnabas and in verse four the scripture reads that "the two of them were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit." In the discipleship-driven metanarrative of Acts, the most important detail is that the Apostles were Holy-Spirit-led. Where they went, what they did, and how they lived was done via a relationship in the Spirit through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. With just a quick scan of the first half or so of Acts, I find over fourteen occurrences of the Holy Spirit leading or filling the Apostles giving them the power, strength, and presence they need for the Lord's work.

The following, from Acts 20:22-24, is another great example of the Apostles (Paul in this case) being led by the Spirit. And I believe this not only shows the Spirit leading Paul but it shows Paul's passionate desire to live his life in the Spirit:

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

### Community Presence

Community presence is a key part of the Acts story. The apostles did not have a mission to purchase property, build buildings, and invite people to come and hear the best

of them orate sermons. No, the Apostles went to where the people were living and planted churches in their homes and local places within villages. Michael Green writes this beautifully:

I found an Episcopal diocese in America recently setting aside a million dollars for church planting: but to my amazement it was in order to create two new buildings for the plants to take place! This is not how it was done by the early Christians, nor indeed how it is done in the fast growing churches of the world. They do not bother with buildings: they go for people, and meet in homes or, if need be, rented buildings. It is all too possible to stifle church planting by preoccupations with buildings, or else by over-protectiveness.<sup>16</sup>

Community presence does not mean having a property full of fancy programs in the center of the city. It means living day-to-day lives with everyday people in the nooks and crannies of one's zip code. It means going for people and introducing them to Jesus, who is already at work all around their lives.

The Apostles continued Jesus' work by going to where the people are and beginning discipleship relationships, and therefore beginning new churches. After the establishment of the church in Jerusalem and the great persecution that scattered people across the land, the Apostles started heading out on apostolic adventures, for apostolic means that an Apostle is sent out on mission. A great example is of the church in Antioch in Acts 11. Verse nineteen speaks of the scattering of Christians and the far places they wound up at. When the news reached the Apostles in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch and then onto Tarsus to find Saul so that they might join together in mission in Antioch (Acts 11: 22-26). When they finally connected in Tarsus and returned to Antioch, they stayed put there in that community for "a whole year... they met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at

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<sup>16</sup> Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World*, 143.

Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Saul (also called Paul) and Barnabas did not go give a onetime speech but, rather, they stayed in the community, building up the church over time. This is a key point of missional ministry: it is not focused on a building or property and programs but on being out in community, teaching, and living life together with people right where they are.

In Acts 13, the book turns to a central focus on the Apostle Paul and his three missional journeys, with the pivotal point of shift being at the Jerusalem Conference that I sometimes call the first church business meeting. In short, there was controversy about what constituted a Christian, for some were saying that one needed to be circumcised or else was not a Christian. This false teaching set Paul ablaze for the truth and led to a meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem. After making their case, James the brother of Jesus declared that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are coming to Christ. (Acts 15:19): “The center now shifts away from Jerusalem and the apostles, with the emphasis on the mission to the Gentiles, and the new churches.”<sup>17</sup> A letter was crafted by the Apostles and then sent out to the people letting them know that faith in Jesus is all that is required and that he is for all people.

Paul’s journeys span about 10 years and cover a very large terrain. He often spent a year or more establishing churches in people’s homes and villages. During his second journey alone, just shy of three years, Paul established churches in five communities.<sup>18</sup> During his third journey, he spent a great deal of time in Ephesus teaching, discipling, and writing.

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<sup>17</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Handbook to the Bible*, 654.

<sup>18</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Carlisle, Cumbria: Baker Books, Paternoster Press, 2001), 591.

Acts chapter 18 is another wonderful example of the Apostles going to where the people are and spending time with them in their lives. Paul was in Corinth here and he met a couple people named Aquila and Priscilla. Striking up a friendship with them through some commonalities in the tent-making profession they shared, Paul stayed with them, and for “quite some time,” as verse 18 reads. It is so important to pay close attention to everything in scripture for it is very easy to read quickly over things that seem inconsequential, yet are truly important and revealing. Do not miss the fact from verse three that the Apostle Paul struck up a friendship with common people here, discovered a commonality in their lives, and then proceeded to stay with them, working with them, and living life with them. And then on the Sabbath each week he preached and taught the Good News. Now here’s the real beauty in the story: a little later on in the chapter we read of Aquila and Priscilla journeying with Paul and them meeting up with someone named Apollos in Ephesus—Aquila and Priscilla start doing with Apollos exactly what Paul had been doing with them. They begin spending time with him, sharing life with him, and teaching him.

That right there is the essence of community presence and sharing life with people. Aquila and Priscilla were not invited to the next temple program and neither was Apollos invited to come to an outreach event to hear Paul speak. These people joined in with other people’s lives right where they were. The Apostles had a huge presence in the community and, yes, they taught at the temple but the vast majority of their ministry happened out on the streets, in the shops, and in people’s homes.

Discipleship



Conversion decisions were not the central focus to the Apostles' work; rather, it was discipleship. The decision is merely a step in the discipleship process once a person comes to the conclusion that they need to align themselves with faith in Jesus Christ. Discipleship is happening before the decision and far after the decision. When the disciples made the choice to follow Jesus, the transformational work in their lives was only just beginning. It was three years later that their great ministry began to unfold as the church was planted through the Spirit's power at work in them. It was now the disciples' mission to finish what Jesus had started.

How can something so important be left out of so many churches today? I've often heard it said that discipleship is the wide open back door to the church. Without discipleship, faith does not stick. Without discipleship, seed that is sown falls on rocky ground and is blown away or eaten by birds flying by. Francis Chan gives a great description of discipleship in his book *Multiply*, and rather than try to put it in my own words I've provided them here:

Making disciples isn't about gathering pupils to listen to your teaching. The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them. Jesus's call to make disciples includes teaching people to be obedient followers of Jesus, but the teaching isn't the end goal. Ultimately, it's all about being faithful to God's call to love the people around you. It's about loving those people enough to help them see their need to love and obey God. It's about bringing them to the Savior and allowing Him to set them free from the power of sin and death and transform them into loving followers of Jesus Christ. It's about glorifying God by obediently making disciples who will teach others to love and obey God.<sup>19</sup>

One of my favorite stories is found in Acts 3 when Peter and John encounter a beggar who was at the gate called beautiful because his friends dropped him off there to beg. The man, seeing Peter and John entering the temple, asked them for money. Peter's

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<sup>19</sup> Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply : Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 44.

response is so unlike people for he says “look at us!” They do not walk by ignoring him, nor do they wave him off with their hand. Peter understands that there is far greater power in love than in money and so they offer the man far more valuable: Jesus Christ. Money is a means to temporary things but Jesus, he transforms life. That is discipleship: inviting people into the life-transforming power of a relationship in Jesus Christ and that is something which happens over and over again in the Acts.

Leonard Sweet writes, “We adamantly claim we are disciples. But the ‘follow Jesus with me’ invitation, as well as the investment that such an invitation entails, has almost wholly been jettisoned for the ‘hear me preach’ or ‘help me lead’ or ‘help me run my ministry’ invitation.”<sup>20</sup> Paul says firmly at the start of chapter eleven in his first letter to the Corinthians: “Follow me as I follow the example of Christ.” If that statement does not speak more loudly to the discipleship of people by the Apostles than anything else, I’m not sure what does. For that is what Paul spent his time doing—following Jesus and inviting other people to follow him following Jesus. That’s discipleship. That’s how people were mentored and should be mentored today. Life on life, living together.

### Life-on-Life Fellowship

Fellowship is a word that’s often misused with things like potluck dinners and Super Bowl parties. While the two possibly exist inside of fellowship, they are not entirely fellowship. Sharing life together as an extended family was a core component of the establishment of the church. Warren Wiersbe describes biblical fellowship in this way: “The word *fellowship* means much more than ‘being together.’ It means ‘having in

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<sup>20</sup> Sweet, *I Am a Follower : The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*, 196.

common' and probably refers to the sharing of material goods that was practiced in the early church."<sup>21</sup> This fellowship was *koinonia*, which is Greek for a deep and intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing together. People ate together, prayed together, learned together, cried together, loved together, served together, and made sure that everyone was without need.

We first read of life in the body of Christ in Acts chapter two following Peter's big sermon. According to verses 42-47, the believers devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. All the believers were together having everything in common and gave to everyone who had need. They met daily together and met in homes for meals, prayer, and worship. Wiersbe writes,

The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for "services as usual." They met daily, cared daily, won souls daily, searched the Scriptures daily, and increased in number daily. Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine. Why? Because the risen Christ was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

The best part of Wiersbe's quote is that the Christian faith was a day-to-day reality.

Fellowship was something that happened all day long, seven days a week, rather than just one hour on Sunday. The early Christians truly shared life together, living life-on-life relationships. A Greek word often used for all of this was *oikos*, which means household. The *oikos* was something that extended past the roof over one's head. Being more than mom, dad, and siblings, often the *oikos* included neighbors, friends, co-workers, and more. In explaining the *oikos* further Mike Breen writes, "they were essentially extended families who functioned together with a common purpose. In the early church,

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<sup>21</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 411.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

discipleship and mission always centered around and flourished in the *oikos*.<sup>23</sup> The Oikos is bodies of Christ gathering together and sharing in each other's lives; on mission together in the growth of the church and discipleship of all people.

From scripture we glean an even closer look at what the *oikos* was like: "All of the believers were united, they were unselfish in sharing everything, they were powerful in teaching and filled with the Lord, there were no needy people among them, and any excess was distributed to those who had need" (Acts 4:32-35). In John B. Polhill's commentary on Acts, he puts it like this:

The opening two verses are almost identical with 2:43–44, only in reverse order. Together they characterize the community life as marked by four things: their unity in mind and heart, their sharing of their possessions, the power and witness of the apostles, and the grace of God, which rested upon them. The overarching concept was their unity, their being "one in heart and mind," their fellowship in the Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to how the early church lived, operated, and functioned in the New Covenant, it cannot be denied that it occurred through *oikos* meeting in homes, village squares, on the streets, and in their day-to-day living together. Life-on-life fellowship didn't occur in one hour each Sunday; it happened every day. Everyone was without need and everyone shared what they had including, and most importantly, their faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

I recently sat with a new couple who had just visited my church plant, Oikos Church, for the first time. They were invited by our worship leader and his wife. Following our gathering, I was able to catch up with them to get to know them a little and

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<sup>23</sup> Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 151.

to get an idea on where they are at spiritually as well as where they stand on attending church. Specifically, they are looking for something smaller that is serving regularly in the community. Following our gathering they told me they were very excited and felt that our little church plant was a breath of fresh air. They were really drawn to our atmosphere of family with kids running all around and also enjoyed our more organic format and structure. They even told me that it felt more like the Bible to them and that they would be returning to join us each Sunday. For me, that was a wonderful testimony to who I am trying to be as a pastor and what I am trying to build our church plant to be in this community. The discipleship operating system is key to what we do at Oikos and though it is slow, it is extremely effective.

I believe the discipleship operating system bleeds through all the pages of the New Testament writings. The focus on relationships, on incarnational living, on mission-focused living, and on disciple multiplication drive the Story into its new era of the church. The mission was never just about converts but about transformed lives. It is about people seeing Jesus, believing in him, and then allowing God to put them back on the potter's wheel for some extended remodeling.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHY MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES?

*Missional community is a different expression of church than its congregational cousin. It differs in its rhythm, celebrations, activities, and scorecard. It is not for everyone, nor is it a replacement of centuries of church practice. But it is a growing phenomenon...<sup>1</sup>*

-Reggie McNeal

One day in 2011, I sat at a missional community teaching, frustrated with traditional models of church planting, scratching my head wondering if a church could be planted using a missional community (MC) for the vehicle. I was not alone, for many people there were church planters searching for a new way to plant that was more viable and sustainable over the long haul. Many of us were beginning to ask questions or expressing our fascination with discipleship and MC- centered ministry but were confused as to how to implement it for a church plant. Like the others present, I fell in love with the main principles of the MC, which are: discipleship, relationship, incarnation, mission, and community. Deep within me, my years of traditional COS background wrestled with the exciting realization that something new was coming for church planting. I was beginning to believe that we could plant churches this way, but at the time I could not put all the pieces together for myself and that confusion launched me into the last few years of learning, of mistakes, and of growing.

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<sup>1</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities : The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), xxi.

When it came to today's church and church planting, the more I learned about missional community the less I wanted to do church in the more traditional ways I was accustomed to, like ministry with an extractional program focus or, better yet, a church operating system. None of that sat well with me any longer as I attempted to plant an extractional church while at the same time feeling that it was so wrong and so institutional. I found myself sitting up in my chair and shouting yes to the stories of others who've become frustrated with church as we've known it. Frustrated with young people leaving, frustrated with Jesus fans rather than followers, frustrated with the demands for money to be extractional and to achieve excellence. And frustrated by the results of a traditional- and extractional-focused ministry. These words by Frank Viola in his book *Reimagining Church* resonated within me:

Why did I leave the institutional church? To begin with, I became painfully bored with Sunday morning church services. That was true across the board—no matter what denomination (or nondenomination) I attended. I also saw very little spiritual growth in the people who attended these churches. And the spiritual growth that I myself experienced seemed to occur outside of traditional church settings.

In addition, something deep within me longed for an experience of church that mapped to what I read about in my New Testament. And I couldn't seem to find it in any traditional church I attended. In fact, the more I read the Bible, the more I became convinced that the contemporary church had departed far from its biblical roots. The result was that I pulled the rip cord on institutional Christianity, and I began meeting with a group of Christians in an organic way.<sup>2</sup>

Like Viola, there came a day when I declared for myself that enough was enough and I departed from a traditional and institutional church mentality. I remember the time well, as my church plant was meeting in a church building struggling to be something it wasn't. Every weekend we worked to attract people to our version of the church but had an awkward feeling that it was not right. For a year and a half, I attempted the

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<sup>2</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 11.

extractional launch style model of church planting and yet along the way I was being confronted and convicted with a missional style focused on discipleship. There came a time when I was tired, I felt fake, and the results from my efforts seemed so shallow and weak that I knew I, and we the plant, had to change. The conclusion was to begin being who we actually were deep down inside. Like the person always trying to be something or someone they are not, I finally led us down a path to who we truly were, which meant leaving the buildings and meeting in a home. It meant dropping all the attempts at great worship bands, cool media experiences, and big sermons, and having church in living rooms, community parks, or coffee shops. It meant embracing that we cared more about relationships, family, discipleship, and serving our locale than we did about showmanship, attendance figures, and modern buildings. And it meant realizing that truly planting a ministry that builds disciples following Jesus was going to take a lot of time and a whole different mindset and methodology. I was no longer going to be a traditional pastor living that traditional life and making a salary from the church. I was going to become much more like Paul the tent maker who passionately followed Christ into the nooks and crannies of life, spreading the good news and making disciples who make disciples.

In the second of the Back to the Future movies there is a scene, set in 2015 nonetheless, with Marty's future family sitting around the dinner table waiting for their pizza. It was not fast food, it was not delivery, and it was not oven-cooked nor microwaved. It was hydrated and heated in a matter of thirty seconds. Granted this is just a movie, but the idea that things can happen more conveniently and faster than they do today is one that comes to reality all the time with the constant inventions and



innovations to speed up and simplify day-to-day routines, etc. But what if some things are just not as good when they are cheapened and hurried? In this transition in church planting style, I've been saying no to the microwaved or hydrated mega church planting model and returning to a slow crock pot where things simmer, stew, and meld together over time. It is like chicken on the barbeque grill: the slower you cook it, the better it is. Cook it too fast and it becomes tough, dried out, or even burnt.

### **Why Use an MC For Church Planting?**

In his book *Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins Today*, Dr. Howard Snyder writes, "It is hard to escape the conclusions that one of the greatest roadblocks to the gospel of Jesus Christ today is the institutional church."<sup>3</sup> I cannot help but see some truth in this statement. From my experiences in the church since my ministry start in 1999, we seem to be overly concerned with attendance figures, dollars in the tithe plate, and the Sunday morning program. And I find this more and more in my personal experiences today and in my research. Hirsch and Frost acknowledge that there's a big problem in the church today when they write, "We've become increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it is in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally changing its structures. What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach."<sup>4</sup> Hirsch and Frost promote a turn back to a more missional and incarnational church as in the days of old. One that is not tied down to buildings and

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<sup>3</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *Radical Renewal: The Problem with Wineskins Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things To Come*, 19.

properties, one that is not extracting, and one that is not focused on the pastor's sermon or the Sunday service. It is a church that is imbedded in the community, a part of its neighborhood and meeting therein, serving on mission together, and building relationships through the existing organic networks. I believe this revolutionary new approach is by planting churches through missional communities and discipleship and as the future unfolds I see missional community being the driving force of church planting.

Dr. Howard Snyder brilliantly sums up what this might look like:

First, all the church buildings are sold. The money is given (literally) to the poor. All congregations of more than two hundred members are divided in two. Store fronts, small halls, or community centers are rented as needed. Sunday school promotion and most publicity are dropped. Believers gather often in private homes; midweek prayer services become superfluous.

Pastors get secular jobs and cease to be paid by the church; they become, in effect, trained "laymen" instead of paid professionals. "Lay" men and women take the lead in all affairs of the church. There is no attempt to attract unbelievers to church services; these are primarily for believers, and perhaps are held at some other time than Sunday morning.

Evangelism takes on new dimensions. The church begins to take seriously its charge to preach the Gospel to the poor and be an agent of the Kingdom of God. It ceases to take economic potential into consideration in planting new churches. It begins to lose its enchantment with suburban materialism. Et cetera. What would happen to such a church? I suggest it would grow—and might very well replay the Book of Acts.<sup>5</sup>

Snyder's words have missional community written all over them for as I've studied and researched them I've learn that they are mission-focused, relationally focused, incarnational-focused, organically focused, and discipleship-focused. The MC doesn't live in a building nor necessarily own one in any haste and they're not seeking to be a mega church but rather a sending church. The staff is small to none, often lay-led, typically unpaid or only given a small stipend if anything, and bi-vocationally holding employment in the church's zip code. The MC doesn't extract people from the

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<sup>5</sup> Snyder, *Wineskins*, 25.

community but rather goes to the community to meet people where they are, they live life together, and build relationships that are growing in Christ alongside one another. And when it comes to worship services, they are more like large family reunions that re-fuel the body of Christ for its mission-focused work. In an MC, the sermon and Sunday service are not the end-all but rather a half-time speech given to pump up (re-fuel) the team. It is for these reasons and more that missional communities are a beautiful church planting model when considering all the challenges and obstacles faced in an extractional launched based model.

### **Traditional COS Planting Struggles**

An important question requiring exploration here is whether or not missional communities make a good church planting platform. Is the traditional model of church planting really working? Are churches multiplying and are movements starting? Are missional communities really just something a traditional established church can transition into?

Traditional church planting today is difficult and there is just no way around that fact. Church planter and author Joel Comiskey writes, “It is easy to feel like a failure. Only church planters understand the inward emotional pain that comes from the lack of growth—the feeling that you haven’t arrived.”<sup>6</sup> The pressure to grow numerically and to do it fast is tremendous and often placed on church planters by their leaders. And if the numbers are not increasing to their liking, there must be a problem. Church planters also face tremendous administrative burdens. When you are trying to function like an existing

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<sup>6</sup> Joel Comiskey, *Planting Churches That Reproduce : Starting a Newtwork of Simple Churches* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Pub., 2009), location 655.

church with all the quality, flare, and excitement in the services and programs, it becomes extremely stressful and difficult because most church plants do not have the help needed and, folding into the pressure to succeed, the church planter works insane hours trying to perfect everything. Fifty plus hours a week are regularly given to sermon prep, audio visual prep, worship practice, media and video, publications, marketing, advertising, and everything else required to attract and perform. They take their toll on the planter and, even more seriously, the planter's family.

Then, if the extractational method is successful and droves of people show up, the church planter must sustain all of that as well as adding in visitor follow-up, counseling, weddings, funerals, business meetings, finance meetings, property maintenance, and more! It is no wonder that an alarming number of church planters drop out of ministry due to the burnout of themselves and their families. In a research report by Exponential and Ed Stetzer there are 7 main issues that church planters face, which are often some of the main causes leading to burnout.

1. Leadership – incredible pressure to find quality leaders.
2. Finances – risks from financial strains and income.
3. Teams – mobilizing teams and volunteers to help.
4. Systems – building systems, structures, and processes.
5. Mission Drift – drifting away from the original vision for planting.
6. Evangelism and Discipleship – attractional ministry takes over.
7. Health – Spiritual, physical, and mental health of the planter and family.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ed; Wilson Stetzer, Todd, *7 Top Issues Church Planters Face* (Exponential, 2001), 1-17.

These seven issues show where church planters struggle the most and I must agree with all seven based on my own experiences in church planting. I have had my own issues dealing with leadership and teams, for it is far more difficult than I expected to recruit and train up people who will and do so over the long haul. For me, turnover in this area has been high. Finances are another very difficult subject but on a positive note, they've been good for me because I am bi-vocational. Planters who expect to not work secular jobs and receive all their income from the church plant are in for a big surprise if the plant fails to become large and self-sustaining within a year or two, assuming they received some sort of seed money to last a year or two. However, seed money is becoming a thing of the past as denominations struggle financially in today's economy. I also agree with systems, mission drift, and evangelism/discipleship for without good leaders in place building up teams and structure, these areas become a burdensome weight on the church planter.

In a research project Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird take a hard look at the success of church planting in the United States: "...in spite of increased church planting ventures, there has yet to be a documented church planting movement which involves the rapid multiplication of churches rather than the simple addition of churches."<sup>8</sup> Their findings in the research shows a problem with church plants across the board. Even now when there's never been more material available, more excitement for the venture, and more people embarking on the journey, many are still failing. The study by Stetzer and Bird produces results I'm not sure I totally agree with as I believe there is more to the story.

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<sup>8</sup> Ed 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 Summer 2008*, (2008): 3.

They seem to focus in on the disposition of the church planter rather than the planting methodology. “The research shows that church-plant leadership impacts the survivability of the new church.”<sup>9</sup> While there is truth to that, is it the only problem? Stetzer and Bird also use a study from the Vineyard church that says “Hunter concluded that the primary indicators for church-plant failure rested with the disposition of the lead church-planter.”<sup>10</sup> I should add here that this study from Stetzer and Bird is of their research findings and might not necessarily be of their personal opinions. Nonetheless, the findings point to the church planter for success or failure. Were they truly called? Are they prepared? Has there been proper training and assessment? They look at the mountainous pressure that a church planter faces, concluding that it is often just too much. “Many church planters are finding fulfillment as their God-given dreams come to fruition. Yet many more struggle with the personal and professional demands of planting a church and nurturing it to mature, healthy, reproducing viability.”<sup>11</sup> Only a few seem to have what it takes to go the long haul with a COS church plant and it is not enough to create movements of multiplication. This seems to limit church planting to only a specialized few then can grow church plants into mega churches. But is that really a good metric: How fast the plant grows, grows big, and how many people attend? Thinking this way leaves me wanting, as I hoped for some research on the methods used to plant churches and whether or not that is a problem. This is something I’ve continued to research as I believe all the blame should not be piled on a pastor and their gifts and talents or lack thereof but rather, more blame would be put on the methodology because I

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 41.

have the ever-growing belief that missional communities are not just for existing churches. Missional communities are just what church planting needs today.

Nonetheless, it is worthy to discuss the failures based on the pressure of traditional church planting, as just maybe it is too overwhelming with too much stress and pressure. One can conclude that the more traditional form of church planting is failing in part because of its enormous financial burden, time burden, administrative burden, and need for high attendance; all placed on the shoulders of the leader. (And the leader's family. Let us not make the mistake of thinking it only affects him or her.) One person carries it all and only a few are able to transition and delegate responsibility. In my experience so far, many church planters set out to create an incredible experience for an hour on Sunday in order to attract people to their service. Their focus is on performance quality, high levels of excellence, large reliance on technology, and the home-run-sermon and what I find is that very few people can sustain this as a church planter. Burnout sets in, family issues arise, stress overwhelms, and within 2 to 4 years, the plant becomes a statistic.

I have a friend planting an extractational church and I'll just call him John. John set out to plant a huge extractational church and spent a couple years dotting all the "i's" and crossing all the "t's" in order to prepare for the big launch. As the church began, I noticed something about John every time I saw him: he was continually growing tired, weak, stressed, and developing those bags under the eyes. His excitement and joy were waning due to the overwhelming administrative tasks on his plate, coupled with the pressures of a media-intensive worship service, and followed with the responsibility of caring for this new flock of worship service attenders. Then came the inevitable day when John was

broken, tired, and burnt out. He shared his struggle and asked for prayers as he tried to figure out hiring more staff so that he could slow down. John was suffering, his family was suffering, and the ministry was beginning to suffer.

Today there is a plethora of material on missional churches transforming into a missional mindset with missional communities, but there are not many talking about church planting through missional communities. As I mentioned already, Breen and 3DM have declared in the past quite firmly that MCs are not a church planting method. Yet now, in the newest revision of their book on MCs they write; “So you could think of launching MCs as lightweight/low-maintenance church planting model if you want! Many people we know have used MCs as a framework for developing a church planting strategy, multiplying MCs to become the core team of a new church plant.”<sup>12</sup> It seems as though some, including myself, are moving forward with this idea for starting new ministries, for there are apparent benefits. Missional communities are not just for existing churches any more. And with the denominational world crying out today with frustration over the high financial cost and resource intensiveness of church planting, it is clearly time for a new model. One can see from my chart in Appendix A that for the most part, the resources I gathered show that MCs are much less resource-intensive, less leadership-intensive, less administratively intensive, and less time-intensive. (This chart is discussed and unpacked in more detail in the next section.) The truth is that an MC can begin with little to no finances, no building burden, no elaborate worship, and with very low administrative effort because the focus is not on establishing the extractive piece but rather, it is on building relationships, connecting with the community, and going to where

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<sup>12</sup> Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 135.



the people are. If this may be the case, then how can missional communities not be a great church planting method? I will break this down more in part two, chapter four.

### **What Do the Experts Say?**

For this section I have chosen seven different sources of information on missional communities. In my research, they are some of the top practitioners of missional focused ministry having knowledge and experience to back it up. In Appendix A I have provided a chart comparing their thoughts and ideas. I've specifically looked at naming convention, descriptions, focus, structure, leadership, and location. I've also been very blessed to have had the opportunity to speak directly to most of these people via email conversations including, Ed Stetzer, Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, Howard Snyder, Neil Cole, Reggie McNeal, and even a skype session with Mike Breen. This has helped me tremendously in better understanding what some of the experts say today as well as clearing up any misinterpretations I've had.

In looking at the chart, what these fine people call a missional movement differs slightly from Organic Church, to Missional Church, to Missional Communities. Yet in each of those are similarities that make me believe they are just different ways of saying the same thing. Some common themes are: being sent out on mission as a group or family; smaller sizes capable of meeting in homes and small public spaces; an emphasis on being a part of the culture the MC is in or, better said, an active part of the neighborhood; and of truly establishing a cultural DNA that is missional. I prefer Mike Breen's description: families on mission. That seems to say so much about what the group of people are to each other, and what they are to the community. With this in mind,

I believe Neil Cole would agree as well as he even uses the Greek word *oikos* in reference to his churches and the movement they create. Neil wrote to me the following: “The true tracks that a movement runs on are the relational connections of new disciples with unbelieving friends, family and coworkers. We use *oikos* to describe this.”<sup>13</sup>

In comparing what the focus is, I draw out some commonalties with a more prominent one being discipleship or people development. All of the authors generally believe in establishing a culture of discipleship with the MC. This is a huge component which many of today’s more traditional churches seem to be lacking. Many people I speak with even go so far as to agree that there has been a great failure of the church to authentically disciple people. Also in the area of focus is a relational aspect, directly impacting discipleship, wherein friendships and relationships are important, even quite intentional; especially relationships outside the body of Christ with nonbelievers. I quote my conversation with Neil Cole again with the following about creating a movement with missional communities and the importance of friendships with nonbelievers:

Most who have been a Christian for a year or longer have a tendency to have cold connections with unbelievers and this makes movement near impossible because the gospel is not naturally following the path. Those who are new to faith have all those relationships and their changed life and testimony is closer to them all. Starting with those who are not already Christians greatly enhances the chance of seeing a true movement of transformed lives. This is the “hang up” that prevents movement for most MCs that start from small groups of Christians already in a church. They do not have strong vital relationships with unbelievers, so from the very start, the “movement” is handicapped.<sup>14</sup>

Concerning the structure and leadership of an MC, things start to get a little different amidst the authors. Four of the six clearly believe in a non-hierarchical structure

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<sup>13</sup> Neil Cole, "Email Interview," ed. Brandon Hempel (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

that's flat and shared. MCs are lightweight, easy to oversee, and have a very low cost. While most of this is true for 3DM and Ed Stetzer, they, however, believe in a more organized structure with a clearly declared leader or leaders who are also trained to lead the MC. Stetzer would shoot for a clear hierarchy that is more traditional and even recognizes a higher cost associated with it. 3DM still would like to keep cost down and not have a big hierarchy but also would like to see trained leaders up front. Even so, I sense they both would like to see things be as organic and free flowing as possible. However, in my opinion, the more structured and hierarchical the ministry gets the less organic and free it can be.

Location is another area where there are some slight differences in the chart. Five of the six see missional communities meeting in the market place and neighborhoods. Places like homes, parks, schools, coffee houses, small halls, community centers, and more. Stetzer, however, still sees the MC meeting in a more formal setting, but I would add to that from my conversations with Dr. Stetzer that I surmise he is more focused on the church being a missional church and possibly not as much on being an MC, which would lend to him not really thinking about alternative meeting spaces outside the traditional setting. It is worthy to note that this is one thing most missional community proponents are against because it ties the body of Christ back to a specific location or building and has a tendency to become extractational all over again.

It is interesting and I think worthy to note how the chart shows great similarities to the Howard Snyder quote I used earlier; Snyder's book was originally written in 1975 and the references in my chart are all recent. Maybe Snyder was ahead of his time or maybe he just saw something others were not willing to open their eyes to back then.

With these thoughts in mind, I contacted Dr. Snyder directly hoping to ask him some questions and he generously replied giving me new insight. Here is what he wrote to me:

As to what I wrote in 1975: I may have in some ways been “ahead of my time,” but really I was reflecting back over the course of prior church history. Throughout history (also today) there has been plenty of evidence that the church is often most dynamic and adaptable when it is not tied to church buildings. Of course the prime initial example is the early church itself. We have a fascination with buildings and other physical or visible monuments, when the one true “monument” is the living, breathing, Body of Christ. (It is hard to imagine anything being clearer from the New Testament!)<sup>15</sup>

I would only add to Dr. Snyder’s thoughts that the church has been most dynamic when it has not been tied to church buildings *as well as* not tied down to financial issues, structure/leadership challenges, and extractational programmatic ministry efforts. Nonetheless, Snyder’s words speak well into this modern-day struggle I have in church planting and my desire to avoid all of those traditional monuments.

### **What I Believe on the Matter**

I find today that a great many people are in search of church and Jesus, for the problem in church decline doesn’t appear to necessarily be a spiritual one. More and more people are simply looking for something deeper and more real than the typical Sunday sermon and show. In *Organic Church*, Neil Cole writes, “Modern pollsters tell us that a large number of those who are not Christians are indeed interested in Christ but not in attending church. One bumper sticker reads, “I love Jesus; it is the church I cannot stand.”<sup>16</sup> I myself have had actual conversations with millennials wherein in they tell me exactly that: they love Jesus but do not want anything to do with the organized church.

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<sup>15</sup> Howard Snyder, "Email Interview," ed. Brandon Hempel (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Neil Cole, *Organic Church : Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), xxii.

And many church plants today seem to be more like a movie remake than a new show; it is the existing fans who go to check out the new version, having grown tired of the original. It is very good that many churches today are exploring and trying to become a more missional church, and now it is time for church planting to be more missional as it was originally intended when the Apostle Paul began going to where the people were, sharing the Gospel, and growing bodies of Jesus followers in villages and towns. I'm pretty certain the Scriptures do not show Paul getting a building (though they did meet in the existing temple), choreographing an excellent worship service, and then marketing to the town so that they would come see what the church is doing for Jesus.

A major problem with church planting is due to what it has become over time. As I mentioned in the beginning, Frost and Hirsch speak to the "Christendom mode" of doing church, a traditional form of church throughout time that draws on three big flaws causing its distress: "...attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical."<sup>17</sup> First, by attractional Frost and Hirsch refer to the church placing itself firmly in a location and expecting people to come to the building and join the programs. Second, by dualistic they refer to the church seeing the world outside of itself and the Christians are all tucked away inside nice and cozy. Basically, Christians are not being taught by the church to connect their faith with the external world... a separation of faith and real life, you might say. Third, by hierarchical they mean that the church has a top-down, bureaucratic model of leadership that is excluding many from leading. It is perceived that the leaders are chosen, trained, and exceptional people are who the only ones capable of doing what they do. It is no wonder most Christians do not think of themselves as ministers of Christ, for

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<sup>17</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 35.

how could they compare to the example they see every week? Imitating that is simply not something any disciple could or should do and, most importantly, it is not what Jesus did when he trained up his twelve.

Following my research to date and my own experiences now in planting a church, I've come to the conclusion that church planting must become more like a missional community if it is to regain traction today. Starting with a missional community is easier, less stressful, less costly, more focused on where people are, and more like what Jesus and the disciples did in the beginning. I'm not declaring that church planting has to be literally as it was in the days of the New Testament (neither am I saying that the extrational model is totally broken yet) but I am saying the principals of going, loving, serving, discipling, and helping the poor are completely transferable to today. And in the realm of the MC where there the burden of a building or property doesn't exist, where there is not an emphasis on attraction but rather on family and relationship, where there is not a constant financial burden, where the hour on Sunday is not that important, and where people are equipped and empowered to minister; those very principles can thrive. I'm excited for the journey God has me on and I have a great vision for a new church made up of multiple missional communities all over a city that are a movement of multiplication, that are imbedded in communities joining in God's work right here and there, that meet in a huge worship gathering once a month for a powerful halftime speech, and that are not making converts but rather are making disciples of Jesus Christ.

PART TWO:  
MISSIONAL-COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CHURCH PLANTING

*“When people say they want to be part of something bigger than themselves, it doesn’t necessarily mean a bigger church. The cutting edge of what the Spirit is up to is not mortar-happy churches, or mega-happy churches, or emergent-happy churches, or revolution-happy churches, or bigger and better mousetrap churches. Not come and gather churches but as-you-go-scatter churches. Not an “in here” church, but an “out there” church.”*

*-Leonard Sweet<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful : Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, 20-21.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
FOUNDATIONS

*More and more Christians of the old churches have come to recognize that a church that is not “the church in mission” is no church at all.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Lesslie Newbigin*

Planting churches through the vehicle of missional community brings a whole new meaning to wiping the slate clean and starting over. Even though the basis for this can be pulled from scripture as I discussed earlier, this remains to be a bit of an unknown methodology to many today. Even though there is a growing knowledge and passion today to de-sacralise methods and practices in the church amongst missional thinkers, there seems to me to be a long way to go. In *The Open Secret*, Lesslie Newbigin writes:

The 1960 conference, convened at Strasbourg by the World’s Student Christian Federation on “The Life and Mission of the Church,” saw the emergence of a radically secular interpretation of the *missio Dei*. The assembled students were challenged “to move out of the traditional Church structure in open, flexible and mobile groups” and “to begin radically to de-sacralise the Church.”<sup>2</sup>

I mentioned earlier in chapter three that Howard Snyder may have been ahead of his time back in 1975 with his writings and I feel the same about Newbigin with his incredible missiology back in the ‘70s as well. Their thoughts then still speak loudly today to anyone trying to reach those caught in the gap. Missional community church planting requires a clean slate indeed and a willingness to unlearn much of what the church has

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret : An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Kindle eBook ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), location 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., location 127.



told us that church looks like today. It requires a de-sacralising of its methodology and a review of how it meets and what it meets for. It requires a great unlearning process followed with a willingness to let go of things unlearned. One of the greatest struggles I have had in my journey from COS to DOS was that very unlearning process. Ten years of ministry in a traditional settings furnished the footings of what I thought church was and as the Holy Spirit slowly opened my eyes to the realities of the early church, I began a learning process of unlearning.

Two of the best things I've done with my missional community church plant came through unlearning. The first was moving my MC from a rented church building and more COS-driven worship service setting to the living room in my house. Gathered around the fire place sitting on couches and random chairs, my church plant moved from COS to DOS as the worship became more personal and authentic, the message became discussion-based as we teach and disciple each other, and the atmosphere moved from service program to family gathering. At the rented building, I was still trying to incorporate COS stylings in our meetings with the sanctuary room, worship band, media, and a pulpit-style sermon. What I realized one day was that in order for us to truly be a missionally driven church plant, we had to get out of that traditional meeting space, and it might have been the best decision I've ever made in my church planting career to date. The second change was in our church plant's name. Originally, our church plant was called *Real Faith Community Church*. That name was driven out of my passion to not be known by a location nor a denomination but rather to be known by what we wanted to be. Real Faith came out of my own dirty, messy spiritual journey in which God taught me many lessons on what it truly meant to trust in him. Even though the name was painfully

birthed out my own experiences, I of course ran into trouble with it along the way having many conversations with people trying to explain that I really was truly not a self-righteous pastor disgruntled by previous experiences, hence by secretly saying with the name that all other churches have *fake faith*. And though that wasn't the case by any means, I slowly learned that the name did more against us than it did for us regardless of where it came from. Then, the straw that broke the camel's back was in discovering an existing church nearby called *Faith Community Church*... yep, that was awkward. Especially when I became good friends with that pastor and he asked me what the name of my church plant was. Nonetheless, I knew we had to change our name as we redefined ourselves and sticking with my desire to not be known by location or denomination, I started to dwell on who we actually are being rather than who we want to be. What I discovered was that we were being a family for each other. A Jesus family sharing in each other's lives and growing spiritually together while trying to find the best ways to serve in our community. People who are a part of our MC are so because of the God-centered family feel we have. My light bulb moment came when I said to myself, "we are an *oikos*!" We are a church family on mission, sharing life together like the early church did, and so our new name became Oikos Church.

Those are just two of my experiences in the journey from COS to DOS amongst many more unlearnings and mistakes along the way. What I hope to unpack in this chapter is a beginning development of what I believe the underpinnings of a missional community church plant are. The word underpinnings is perfect for this because as it is described in a dictionary it means a solid foundation laid below ground level to support or strengthen a building. That is an absolutely beautiful picture for the basis of this

chapter. The key to MC-driven church planting, or missional communities in general, is to first develop a whole new culture in the body of Christ as well as an early-church-style reason for existing. COS ideas and methodologies have to be discarded in general so that new methods are learned and acquired in the heart. Journey with me, if you would, as I build the underpinnings that will support the missional community church plant.

### **MC Underpinnings**

Culture is everything and if the culture of missional community church planting is not set in stone amidst the people, it will never feel like it is more than just a new program. It has to be lived and breathed every day, kicked off by the key elders and followed by the whole family. It has to be seen in the church plant's decision making as well as its daily living in its community. One of the beautiful perks about church planting is in the opportunity to create a fresh culture rather than work with an existing one. From the get-go, the missional church plant leader can establish the base and direction for the ministry and for missional community church planting. It is ever more important to establish that culture right up front.

Culture is something that is always talked about and runs in the veins of the body of Christ. Mike Breen writes how language creates culture in his book *Building a Discipling Culture*, which is birthed from of his 25 years of experience discipling people and developing missional communities. Breen writes that “a common language is often the most obvious sign that people share a common culture.”<sup>3</sup> The language spoken amidst the missional community should speak the culture of the MC and it should bleed through

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<sup>3</sup> Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 47.

everything that happens. People should be always talking about things in terms of DOS, mission, *oikos*, discipleship, repeatable rhythms, lightweight and low maintenance, and gathered and scattered. These and more are the underpinnings to missional community culture ( I have them in no particular order) and must be established, and taught frequently.

### *Underpinning 1 – DOS*

The first underpinning in an MC-driven church plant is to establish quickly the discipleship operating system. Due to this being a major focus of chapter one, I do not need to spend much time explaining it here, but suffice it to discuss a couple of things. The fact is, Jesus' last command to the disciples was to go and make disciples. Discipleship was to be a major underpinning to everything the apostles did from that point forward, and they had Jesus' three years of ministry to learn from. Simply put, I do not believe a missional church can be planted inside of the COS. It can be argued, of course, but I do not buy in. The focus of the church plant is discipleship and it is the operating system everything passes through. It needs to drive everything the church does. It needs to be the major focus point of the culture in the body and the force steering the direction on everything in the ministry. Establishing DOS is a primary focal point in laying down the underpinning for the missional community.

In chapter one, I laid out DOS in more detail, including the four main aspects of it: discipleship, incarnational living, relationships, and mission. At Oikos, we do the best of our ability to keep centered on those things. For example, our main focus is not on conversions or baptisms. Yes, I just said that. We believe that conversion is a part of the

discipleship process and not even the beginning point. And baptism, that is a special event shared in the life of a believer at a point in their discipleship process when they become ready for that public declaration of faith. Many COS church plants today have their focus on conversion decisions, attendance, money, and then volunteerism. They also focus in on buying a building, establishing new programs, achieving attendance goals, and Sunday worship services. At Oikos, we focus on relationships and the body of Christ as a family. Everything we do has to be run through the filter of discipleship and if it cannot, we do not do it. When we consider worship, we think of how it is a part of someone's discipleship and growth in God. When we consider our discussions (not sermons), we think of how it plays a part in discipleship. And when we consider our mission responsibility in the community, we see it as one of the most valuable times in the life of a disciple to see what incarnational living is truly like. Truth be known, our mission outings are more about the people we disciple than the outing itself.

Making DOS apart of the underpinnings for a missional community church plant truly begins at the top. The missional leader must establish the language and heartbeat of DOS from the very beginning. At every single meeting, he or she is speaking DOS in mouthfuls and teaching their disciples to do the same. This can take some time to achieve; at Oikos, it seemed to take over a year for our people to really start getting it. I remember earlier this summer we went camping for a weekend as a missional community. It was a time focused in on ourselves, our fun, and our friendships. One of the moms called me just before the adventure and told me a story of her little 5-year-old daughter. When the neighbors asked what they were doing for the weekend she spoke up and said, "I'm going camping with my family." That spoke volumes to me because even

our children are getting it now. I could hardly contain my excitement as joy-filled tears rolled down my cheek.

### *Underpinning 2 – Mission-al*

The second underpinning in an MC church plant is that it understands mission and is then missional about it. An MC is an extended family (Body of Christ) living in God's mission each and every day. Mission is what drives the MC and missional is the people's involvement and responsibility in the kingdom. Leonard Sweet describes missional this way: "Missional is a not program arm of the church or a line item in the budget. It is living a life born in the very being of God. It is the body of the church dancing to the tune of the Spirit, or, as Paul put it in Galatians 5:25, keeping 'in step with the Spirit.'"<sup>4</sup> In the second chapter, in the metanarrative of Acts, I discuss Spirit-led living of the Apostles in the life of the early church. Sweet says beautifully what they did: they danced in tune with the Spirit. Three items here are crucially important for a missional community church plant. The first item here is the Spirit Himself. The early disciples were not led by their own hearts or desires but by the desires the Spirit put in their hearts; He was in their hearts because they received Him. Without the Holy Spirit, an MC is left to wander on its own trying to figure out what to do. The Spirit is here to guide us in His path and to show us where to go and what to do just as he did at the start of the church so long ago. The second item is to be in tune with the Spirit, for being out of tune creates a song so unpleasant to the ears that it is difficult to dance along with. Like an instrument that needs to be in tune with the proper note, an MC needs to be in tune with the Spirit and

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<sup>4</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful : Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, 27.

what He is up to. Being in tune creates an opportunity for the second item, the dance. Dancing is so beautifully fun and creates so much joy in our lives. Living by the Spirit is not meant to be a chore, to be something so difficult, or to be something so hard to figure out. It is meant to be fun and it is not as difficult as we tend to make it. The Spirit is at work all around us whether we see it or not and part of becoming in tune with Him is realizing the work that's happening and getting involved in the dance. An MC that's dancing with the Spirit is having fun serving and getting involved in what God is doing in its community.

The church has a tendency to make mission a great and grand event or program that happens once or twice a year. It has a tendency to turn mission into merely sending a check somewhere over seas. Though these things are not inherently bad and indeed fall under the category of mission, mission and being missional are so much more. A missional community dancing in tune with the Spirit is daily serving in the Kingdom with every opportunity put before its feet right in their own zip code. It is not rocket science and it is not difficult at all to figure out how to be missional. It simply means to get involved with what the Spirit is doing now, right now in our lives.

One of the ways this has played in out in my MC church plant is through the happenings of the Spirit in my own life. A huge part of discipleship is to be inviting people into my life, to invite people to join me as I dance with the Spirit. And so developing missional living in my MC begins with me inviting people to join me in what I'm doing as I follow the Spirit. This has played out wonderfully in two arenas of my life: with the bus garage that I work at and with the soccer team that I coach. Ministry is far greater than the buildings and offices we pastors love to sit in and work at. Ministry is

being involved in mission in our context and I love the opportunities God gives me every day. The bus garage is a part of my bi-vocational income. I've been building connections with people there and establishing new friendships and out of that has come my desire to want to serve them more. Following the Spirit's nudge, I invite my MC to join me in blessing the bus drivers with a homemade breakfast from time to time to say thank you for getting our kids to school safely every day. No, it is not a grand service project day or huge missions trip... it is simply getting involved with what the Spirit is doing and those breakfasts have a huge impact on the people whom I work with. It has opened so many doors to lasting friendships and ministry opportunities, from me performing weddings for bus garage people, to drivers continually coming to me to talk and ask questions about God. Missions trips are nice but dancing with the Spirit develops lasting friendships with lasting impact right where we live. The second way the Spirit has given me opportunity to be on mission in my zip code is through the girls U-11 premiere soccer team that I coach. Through that team I am able to connect with twelve families in my zip code and am able to live Christ before them as well as serve them. This is an opportunity the Spirit has placed in my life and so I also invite my MC to join me in serving them. My MC attends our games periodically and provides ice cream to the girls after a game or provides coffee and doughnuts before a game. This creates a wonderful opportunity to serve people and also to mingle with these twelve families again, building relationships. Those little touches by my MC make huge waves amongst my team as the parents are constantly so grateful as well as shocked that these random church people would come out to the games and do this.



As an MC, we do other typical things like helping at a homeless shelter, providing food baskets at Thanksgiving, providing food and gifts to people at Christmas, and more. But the really missional work is done in the everyday opportunities given to us in our lives by the Holy Spirit. That's where God is truly working all the time and that's where He invites us to get involved. Writing a check to some missionary overseas is way too easy, as is going on a missions trip. Getting involved in the dirt of people's everyday lives in our zip code is much more difficult. It requires us to get out of our comfort zone every day and is truly missional living. It is dancing in tune with the Holy Spirit.

### *Underpinning 3 – Oikos*

The third underpinning to the foundation of an MC-based church plant is found in the Greek word *oikos*, which means house, household, or family. It is a word used to describe the early church gatherings and it included neighbors, co-workers, friends, and more. When the early church gathered together, we read of them meeting in the temple but, even more often, they meet as an *oikos* inside homes and community places. I think the early church is best described as an *oikos* together on God's mission in the world.

In my church plant, Oikos Church, we consider ourselves an extended family on mission together in our zip code. *Oikos* is the body of Christ, the believers in their gatherings and time together. *Oikos* describes our church living out its discipleship together in Jesus Christ as we are out on mission in our zip code. *Oikos* describes our church caring for each other, praying for each other, and sharing our lives together. *Oikos* describes *koinonia*, which is Greek for intimate life sharing. It means we are involved in everything in each person's life, that we care deeply for each other, and that we help each

other in every way we can. *Oikos* describes our gatherings at my house sitting around the fire place singing worship to the Lord and reading scripture together. *Oikos* describes the meals we share, the times playing at the playground in town, and the times celebrating each other's children in their sports and events. *Oikos* describes who we are and it is why we use it in the name of our ministry.

If a missional community church plant does not establish *oikos* as part of its culture from the very beginning, it fails to establish a key underpinning to its foundation. A missional community is not a program arm of the church; it is not an addition to an extractive ministry to be able to add the word missional to its vocabulary. It is an *oikos* body of Christ, it is an imbedded part of the culture, and it is the great dance floor for joining in on the Holy Spirit's dance party.

#### *Underpinning 4 – Lightweight and Low Maintenance*

The fourth underpinning to a missional community church plant is in keeping it lightweight and low maintenance. I will admit right up front that this was probably the most difficult for me to grasp due to my ministerial upbringing in the extractive church setting. It was engrained in the way I approached ministry and it took me quite some time to unlearn it all. I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping a missional community church plant at the level it functions best: lightweight and low maintenance. Time and time again I have seen my pastoral friends exhausted, burnt out, and discouraged due to the demands of a church plant with heavy structure and high maintenance. When we approach a church plant expecting it to be like an existing church of a thousand people, we set ourselves up for disaster. And when we approach church planting that way we also

put a tourniquet on the MC, greatly restricting it from what it was meant to be. It is not difficult and it is not rocket science... it is actually very simple. And it is in that simplicity that makes an MC church plant so wonderful. In the book *Simple Church*, Thomas Rainer and Eric Geiger make a case for keeping church simple: "Simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth."<sup>5</sup> Making things complicated and heavy with programs, board meetings, policies, etc., weighs the church plant down and keeps it from focusing in on the simple mission of making disciples. Keeping the MC lightweight and low maintenance should be a top priority for the culture of the church plant.

Frank Viola writes that "today's leadership structure characterizes the contemporary church as hierarchical and positional."<sup>6</sup> This means that there is someone at the top with multiple positions under that person and who you are is about where you are in that hierarchy. This type of positional leadership has been around for a long time in the church; typically, there is a senior leader with associates under them, administration staff, and then departmental leaders. That is of course a very simplified example, for some churches have a much more complicated structure while others are smaller and simpler. The real issue in a hierarchical structure is that it does not allow the ministry to be flat with a distributed leadership. For a missional community to function well, the leadership needs to be simple, flat, and handed out to the people in the MC. And without the burden of maintaining a leadership structure, the MC is free to focus on ministry. Now I do believe there is always a need for a pastor to lead the MC church plant, to

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<sup>5</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church : Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*, Kindle eBook ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 2006), 60.

<sup>6</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 154.

oversee sacraments, and to provide some vision and direction. But that pastor functions much more like a river guide rather than a CEO, for the river guide helps the group down all the winds and turns of the river without dictating where it goes, but helps it along the way of its path and journey. Hierarchical leadership puts someone at the top and makes them king, so to speak. Simple lightweight leadership keeps everyone on the same level playing field, all working together for the same mission. There's still a team captain, but they are getting just as dirty as everyone else and working as a part of the team, not solo.

In terms of being lightweight, it is important to not add more than is needed. I recall the days of beginning this church plant, back when it was still called Real Faith. We tried to meet in a building, put on a great worship set, use multimedia presentations, give elaborate but hip and cool sermons, and to attract people to our space. This created so much work for myself and the handful of leaders we had that it did indeed begin to create burnout. Trying so hard to have so much structure so fast detoured us from the real mission of making disciples as I got caught up in the institutionalization of church. I remember realizing that was not who we wanted to be and that there had to be an easier way to plant a new church that was more biblical. With a missional-community-based church plant, the structure is whittled down to a family style meeting in a house. At Oikos, a weekly worship gathering looks like this: Coffee and snacks for socializing, a guitar and a few songs to sing while gathered around the fire place, and a discussion-based scripture reading where everyone shares and teaches each other. A monthly social time can replace a worship gathering and is usually a big meal with prayer and plenty of time for board games, movies, and fun. And a monthly serving time can replace a worship gathering and is when we get out in the community somehow serving:

sometimes with my soccer team, sometimes at the bus garage, and sometimes with someone else's idea like cleaning up the city park or serving at a food kitchen. Notice that something is never added to the schedule, but rather happens in place of. It is easy, simple, and lightweight yet powerfully creates an atmosphere for discipleship and *koinonia*. Plus, there is not a huge burden on any one person or set of leaders and, in the end, so much more is accomplished in the spiritual growth of our people.

With the lightweight structure of an MC, low maintenance becomes possible and the benefits are wonderful. First of all, it frees up the leaders to truly be ministers rather than maintenance pastors. They can truly shepherd people, give spiritual direction, and disciple people like Jesus did. Too many pastors in traditional churches are far too preoccupied by being CEOs and do not have time, sadly, to be pastors. Secondly, without all the worries of a heavy structure to oversee, there is plenty of time for bi-vocational work as well as ministering to people. And one of the great benefits of bi-vocational work is that it puts you with real people every single day. Basically, becoming lightweight and low maintenance comes down to decreasing the COS and increasing the DOS. Decreasing the COS in my church plant was one of the greatest things I ever did because it freed me up to spend more quality time with my people. My "sermon" prep time each week is about 1 to 2 hours max. My gathering prep time is merely tidying up my house and making coffee. My time spent in business meetings or staff meetings, etc., is all of a couple hours a month at max. And because of a flat structure that is delegated out amongst the MC, my oversight time is minimal to none. The beauty of all this is more time to spend on relationships with people and more time in discipleship. There is hardly

anything to maintain, for the MC functions on its own with very little direction; it is very self-sustaining.

### *Underpinning 5 – Gather and Scatter*

The fifth underpinning in the foundation of an MC church plant is to grasp the concept of gathering and scattering. I've heard this concept many times and have adopted it in my ministry philosophy. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay wrote a whole book under the title "And: The Gathered and Scattered Church" and in it they paraphrase Isaiah 1:11-17 and Amos 5:21-27:

Stop playing church! Don't bother me with your long worship services, prayer gatherings, and self-help classes. I'm not that into your singing and you're mostly doing it for yourself anyway. You've created a God who lets you show up for a weekly service, but you so seldom serve anyone. If you want to get into what I'm into, go help someone! And you who lead... what are you leading? You are the ones who are afraid to call people to the real deal. I'd love to hear the worship and see the sacrifices if they really mean much, cost much, or were integrated with lives that are transformed. I don't mind my people meeting together, but make it count for something bigger.<sup>7</sup>

Gathering for worship is not bad; it is important. However, the church in North America has taken it way out of context and focuses far too much on the gathering. In an MC church plant, the entire church needs to embrace gather and scatter in the underpinnings. It needs to understand that we gather together *so that* we can scatter together. Now, I love to watch college football but if the focus of the game was all about half time it would be a very boring game to watch. The excitement, energy, and fun all happen out on the playing field and half time is just a half time speech to pump up the team as they go back out together to work. In a gather and scatter culture, the weekly sermon is nothing more

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *And : The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 165.

than a half time speech. It is not the most important thing a church does; it is not the most important hour on Sunday; and it is not the main vehicle for church growth, though our attraction and extractational COS driven efforts make it as such. Instead of gathering for a worship service and then getting back to my life, the MC gathers for a half time speech once per month and then scatters together, living out faith within its zip code on the Holy Spirit's dance floor.

At Oikos we live this out more intentionally the more we grow into what an MC church plant is. When I schedule things for our MC, I deliberately only make one Sunday per month similar to a traditional worship service The other three Sundays are spent in social times for the body and service times for the zip code. Mike Breen calls that gathering a “red hot center” and indicates that it is there where the church gets its torches lit to go out into the darkness with.<sup>8</sup> Now Oikos has a long way to *grow*, but I believe we have our intentions and culture set on the right path. Every aspect of what we do can be better focused, but that's not the point. The point is that the underpinning contains a gather and scatter mentality so that we all always know what we are truly about.

### **Conclusion**

With the foundational underpinnings I have discussed above, a church plant can set itself up for sustained ministry doing exactly what Jesus wants it to do: discipling all people of all nations. That is the great command of Christ and that is the true focus of the church. Operating through DOS, being missional, being an *oikos*, keeping things light,

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<sup>8</sup> Mike Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements* (pawleys Island, NC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), 183-198.

and keeping the mentality of scattering at the front frees the church up to dance with the Holy Spirit in his work.

Recently I had the opportunity to talk to a pastor who is trying to bring missional communities into their ministry. He talked to me about how they were getting ready to launch them in a matter of a few months and as he described their process all I could think was that they were merely starting a new program that would fade away over time. Nothing was being replaced, people's schedules were not being lessened, and culture was not being changed. They are just adding a new program to the already overwhelmed ministry. Being missional is not a program and not a new thing for people to attend. Being missional is a lifestyle, a culture, a way of living. It is not something that can be added to a COS church, but rather the COS church needs to become something completely different. That's the beauty in church planting, there is nothing to change and everything to be had in building a fresh new culture from the start. If it is done right with the underpinnings I've discussed, the new body of Christ can be on its way to being the true church in its community and has the best chance of reaching people in the gap.



CHAPTER FIVE:  
THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

*Every age knows the temptation to forget that the gospel is ever new. We try to contain the new wine of the Gospel in old wineskins—outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, cracking institutions, old habits. But with time the old wineskins begin to bind the Gospel.*

*Then they must burst, and the power of the Gospel pour forth once more.*

-Howard Snyder<sup>1</sup>

In 2013, during an informal interview with a superintendent of a conference and denomination I was moving into, the topic of resources came up. I was searching for a culture of church planting to be a part of; however, the superintendent was/is an experienced church planter himself and, understanding the demands of such, wanted to make sure that I was not a pastor merely searching for a paycheck. I could tell my answer surprised him and relieved him all at the same time for I said, “I’m not looking for a paycheck and nor am I looking for money for my church plant. I’m not looking for a building, equipment, or anything else. I’m simply in search of a tribe with a church planting culture that’s supportive and nourishing of its church plant pastors and church plants from the top down. I have a good bi-vocational income and my church plant is very self-sufficient because we are a lightweight missional community.” His eyes widened and tension fell right off his shoulders as I spoke. He was open, willing, and

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<sup>1</sup> Snyder, 15-16.

became excited as I shared that I was also in search of a church planting culture that was open and willing to experiment with new ways planting new churches. This experience confirmed something I had been hearing and believing for some time: denominations were tired of losing resources and hundreds of thousands of dollars on new startups and, frankly, do not even have those kinds of resources in today's economy. I and my vision/mission were a welcome breath of fresh air to this superintendent.

Howard Snyder's words at the beginning of this chapter hit the sustainability nail on the head perfectly; it is time for the church to burst out of its old wineskins for the power of the gospel to exponentially take off through new churches. In talking about categories of church, Snyder defines the "Body Church" in such a way that it sounds like today's MC. In fact, it is a great picture of an MC that sets a very sustainable path for church planting.

This type is closest to the New Testament experience. It holds no property and needs none. It arranges its worship gatherings according to available space in homes, schools, rented halls or other facilities. Its structure is organic, based on a network of small groups bound together by large-group corporate worship experiences. Such a church can live and grow indefinitely, having a deep impact on society through a continuous process of cell division and multiplication.<sup>2</sup>

With no issues surrounding finances, buildings, or properties, weighty leadership structures, and more, the church plant is free to be organic, hence becoming much like the New Testament church of old but in today's world. Snyder's picture of the Body Church is a scary likeness to my own personal vision for my church plant: Multiple missional communities meeting all over our city in community places and spaces, on mission and serving together, that also come together once per month for a giant worship celebration and half time speech.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

I really believe that the key to missional church planting in the future is in developing a sustainable way of doing so. Some of the greatest issues in church planting come within church structure, church finances, church ministry, and church staff families. Inside each of those issues resides the potential for a church plant to fail from having an overwhelming structure that is top heavy and hierarchical. A potential to fail from not having enough money to sustain extractive methods and programming which requires intense high quality showmanship. A potential to fail from having too much ministry to do too fast, which overwhelms the small church planting team quickly, leaving them burnt out and tired. And potential to fail simply because of too much burden on pastoral families which leads to burnout, resentment, resignation, and even breakdown of the family. These four items are the ones I've zeroed in on to focus with in this chapter because they seem to be the biggest traps church planters fall into that, in turn, missional church planting can help avoid. Sustainable missional church planting is what the future needs. Not only do I believe it will close the gap on the sixty percent but it provides a much easier journey into the new church plant for everyone involved. The MC lightens the load, decreases the burden, and creates an atmosphere for true ministry focus on discipleship, incarnational living, and servanthood. In the pages to come, I will begin to unpack the following four items in no particular order: sustainable structure, sustainable finances, sustainable family, and sustainable ministry. With each of those I will also bring some of my own experiences in church planting from my current missional-community-based church plant, Oikos Church, which I have mentioned a few times and will talk about even more in the closing chapter of this dissertation.

## Sustainable Structure

A common issue to sustainability in church planting comes within structure. When we work to create a centralized hierarchical structure, much like an older existing extractional ministry, we set ourselves up for struggles right off the bat. Being more centralized creates all sorts of administrative headaches and leadership needs. I've already discussed some of this in chapter four under "Lightweight and Low Maintenance," so I will not repeat much of what I've already stated. Basically, missional community church planting uses a decentralized ministry structure versus a centralized one. It's more flat, more spread out, and much simpler. The sustainability is there because there is not much to have to support from the top down and frankly, there really is not much of a top. In *Church 3.0*, Neil Cole notes that the advantages of a decentralized church are that it has no senior leader in charge, no headquarters, a flat structure with distributed power, it is flexible, groups are self-funded, and groups communicate directly with each other.<sup>3</sup> All of these items make church planting that much simpler and easier on the church planter as well as denominations or networks. When a church plant leader has to function too much like a business leader/overseer, the really work of ministry gets neglected.

In a missional-community-based church plant, all of the structure is unnecessary because the MC is flat, having leadership and ministry distributed among the people. The MC shares in the worship gathering and in the meeting spaces. It shares in the duties of food and gathering organization. It shares in serving within the community. It looks at children and youth ministry as a community-based raising and all children are brought in

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<sup>3</sup> Neil Cole and Network Leadership, *Church 3.0 : Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 131.

to everything the MC does. Since an MC is not built around a property, programming, or an hour on Sunday, it does not need all of the structural support in place. The MC is free flowing and organic. This reduction in structure frees up the church to be a true church and provides it with self-sustaining freedom.

Decentralizing my church plant, Oikos Church, was a huge step not only for our church but for myself as well. Nonetheless, the more we got rid of leadership hierarchy (not that there was too much to begin with), building focus, financial budgets, services and programs, business meetings, and more, the more we could focus on being a church of the New Testament. I do believe there was a point when I was doing more church structure stuff than I was doing ministry. Meetings and leadership trumped discipleship and hanging out with people. The pressure to perform, to lead, and to put forth high quality programing was tiring and always left me sort of empty inside. Moving away from all of that was a big moment for us. I stopped trying to lead business meetings, stopped all of the focus on a worship service, and ended the vision of meeting in a church building. We moved out of the rented space we were in and began meeting in the family room of my house. Our meetings became more organic and free flowing, with simple worship and discussion-based teaching. Suddenly, the church became everyone's extended family rather than a service attended once a week.

It did not come without some growing pains, though. I remember shortly after we left the rented space in a church building to meet in my home, we lost a few people. Three key people with leadership qualities, I might add. Slowly and one by one they gravitated to a big extractional church in our area, seeking out all of the attraction therein. Two of them even disappeared completely without word; they just up and left. The final

straw came a few months later when our worship leader decided to leave to become a part of an existing big extractional church. This person seemed to be one of our most committed people, but it was not so. I remember being ready to quit at that point. I was devastated, I had poured myself into these people and they loved to hear my vision for MC church planting, but when the rubber met the road, they vanished. However, I remained firm in my passion to plant churches via missional communities, waded and worked through my pride and grief, and kept plugging away at decentralizing our church to free it up for more organic ministry. In the end, I would never want to have done anything different. I'm excited about the journey Oikos is on and the potential lying ahead to birth new MCs. The people we have today love being there, love the family feel, and love to invite friends to come check it out. Even my sixteen-year-old son's buddies have told me they love coming over on the weekends because it means they get to attend our MC. I know we are on the right path and the sustainability of our ministry now is far greater than it was before we started decentralizing.

### **Sustainable Finances**

One of the greatest challenges for denominations today is the high financial burden associated with starting new ministries. In a more traditional church planting model such as a "launch model," the main goals are to raise a large amount of funds, obtain a good facility, and attract hundreds of people right off the bat by orchestrating a large professional and high-quality service or event.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Searcy and Thomas.

In their research on denominational church planting in the United States, Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird share from their findings that the average financial base needed to begin a new church is between \$75,000 and \$125,000, and for church planting networks this number is \$172,200.<sup>5</sup> If I could just play with those figures for a moment: In order for a denomination with a church planting vision to plant five churches in a year they would need approximately \$375,000 to \$625,000 to do so, just to get them started. Simply stated, that kind of cash on hand has dwindled away over time in today's economy and denominational leaders are weary of pouring out more money into church planting when so many end up failing, and rightly so. NAMB reports that after four years, only a little more than 60% of new church plants are still functioning.<sup>6</sup> That means that on the average with five churches planted, denominations are possibly losing \$150,000 to \$250,000 and for networks that number is over \$350,000. Sadly, this financial fear is a major cause for many to shy away from church planting all together because there is no concrete way to guarantee a positive return on the investment. However, in a missional-community-based church planting model, the financial resources needed to begin can literally be next to nothing.

In *Church 3.0* Neil Cole takes a close look at finances and tithing in the church. Basically what he finds is that the Old Testament church had more of a centralized structure with a giving routine to support religious leaders, buildings, and more. But in the New Testament he is hard-pressed to find anything about tithing whatsoever.

If tithing is not prescribed in the New Testament, why is it in our churches? I believe that the reason we emphasize tithing is because we look in our Bibles for

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<sup>5</sup> Stetzer and Bird, "The State of Church Planting in the United States : Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities," 24-30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2.

teachings concerning the support of our buildings and our professional leaders and do not find much in the NT. We did the next best thing; we turned to the Old Testament. There we found centralized religious institutions that had leaders to support, buildings to maintain, and a financial system that made it all possible—called tithing.<sup>7</sup>

The problem I find today is not that tithing is wrong or right but that more and more people are asking the questions “What are we actually giving to? Are we really giving money to support salaries, programs, and buildings and properties? Is that really where the giving needs to go to?” And denominations are scared to give hundreds or thousands of dollars to church planters to support their salaries and buildings when in the end, so many end up failing. Again, I am not trying to call tithing right or wrong here; instead, I’m trying to bring up the questions that make us truly evaluate what we are doing and what we are asking people to give to. In my ministry experience, people want to give towards real needs in people’s lives and in making a difference in their community.

Financial sustainability is a huge plus factor in MC church planting. There are no salaries to pay, no insurance to cover, no mortgage payments or rent payments, no property maintenance fees, no program fees, no equipment fees, and the list goes on and on. By growing the church through the MC in homes and community places, the cost of church planting is reduced greatly and when people tithe to the church they truly feel as though they are participating in the growth of God’s kingdom rather than a manmade kingdom. Now this takes a missionally focused pastor willing to be bi-vocational and active in the community, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. It takes a discipleship operating system with a focus on minding the gap. And it takes a culture with an underpinning that sets the stage for this kind of ministry. When it is done right,

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<sup>7</sup>Cole, *Church 3.0 : Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, 244.



there's really no upfront cost to a denomination or anyone else, which creates an excitement for all who are involved and a willingness of them to help along the way on a need-by-need basis if there actually is a need for maybe a piece of sound equipment, Bibles, or whatever. Ultimately, it is a beautiful picture of a self-sustaining church plant.

At Oikos, we have become a self-sustaining ministry without the help of denominational funds or any need for huge financial campaigns. In the very beginning when we met in a church building, I paid our rent by cutting the grass, plowing snow, cleaning the building, and overseeing the property management and administration. From the start of our church plant, I have been a bi-vocational pastor working part-time jobs here and there to make ends meet and only receiving a small stipend from the church, which didn't last too long as I chose to end that. Today we do not have any administrative expenses, staff salary expenses, property or maintenance expenses, nor any other expenses typically associated with an organized church. We spend a small amount on discipleship training and basically the rest of our finances goes directly into ministry efforts. Whenever a great need arises, I bring it to the church's attention and they always give what is needed. We never take an offering and pretty much never talk about giving money, though we do have an offering box in the house where some people regularly give, but it is giving out of their own heart and based on the Holy Spirit's nudge in their lives. We have very little to no overhead and whatever our needs are for our weekly gatherings is covered by everyone in the church doing their part, for everyone brings food and supplies any other needs we have as a church body. We are free from any financial debt whatsoever and it is a freedom we love having, for I remember the days of being in a church that was strapped by a mortgage payment of over ten thousand dollars per month.

Financial sustainability frees us up at Oikos to relax and be the church in our community. There's no pressure to produce numbers, no pressure to achieve a certain budget giving level, and our success or failure is not driven by the availability of money. Oikos is free from that burden and able to therefore sustain a slow, organic, discipleship-centered ministry and it is an absolutely wonderful place to be as a church plant ministry.

### **Sustainable Families**

Another reason, and an important one, that missional community church planting is more sustainable is due to the much lower demand on the pastor and pastoral family. It is true that one of the reasons church plants fail is due to the burnout of the pastor and/or family. For example, in their book titled *Pastors At Greater Risk*, H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman point out some alarming stats about pastors: “90% work more than 46 hours per week, 80% believe that pastoral ministry negatively affects their families, 75% report they've had at least one significant stress-related crisis in their ministry, 90% feel inadequately trained to cope with the demands of ministry.”<sup>8</sup> In a response by London to a question from Jim Dobson, who asked what the main difficulties of the average pastor are, London said, “Their most pressing problems relate to time, money, and family.”<sup>9</sup> Those are just a few of the alarming circumstances people in ministry face and you add all of that to a new church plant and therein exists an environment, or setup even, for family meltdowns

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<sup>8</sup> H. B. London, Neil B. Wiseman, and H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, Rev. ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light, 2003), 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

The duties of church planting can easily overwhelm a pastor and their family. Pastor planter goes into his new calling with full force, excited to make a difference in the kingdom and excited to build a new kind of church. He has a vision, has studied demographics, has a planting plan, and is ready to begin recruiting people to the new ministry. He assures his family that once the ship is up and floating, his time away will decrease and, until then, everyone needs to be patient because this is God's calling. Pastor Planter works 45 to 50 hours a week and sometimes more during times of big events and is putting everything he can into his worship services and administrating. With the staff being basically just himself and a handful of volunteers, he does everything from secretarial work, to creating media and organizing worship, to meeting with people, counseling people, and leading meetings. The services must be a high-quality, full-blown multimedia experience. They must be something that people will want to attend so Planter puts everything he can into the services. The big launch is exciting and over a hundred people attend. Everything is off and running at full pace, including Pastor Planter. But one day, Planter begins to feel tired. People call on him non-stop, it seems. Everyone needs something from him and now there's a building to maintain, mortgage to pay, bills to pay, meetings to lead, and more services to orchestrate. The heavy load he carries begins to take its toll on him and with more people attending, there are many more things to do. Eventually, Planter finds himself burnt out, tired, and overworked. His family is feeling it, too, with his wife frustrated that he's gone all the time as well as kids being sad they do not get much time with their father. Planter's health is suffering, his emotional state is fragile, his marriage is failing, and his family is crumbling... all because of a church plant. But God called him to this... right?

Planter's story is familiar to me and I'm sure many pastors across the country. I recall times in my own ministry when I was overworked and burnt out because there was always something more to do. In an MC-focused church planting effort, the traditional pastoral duties are spread out amongst more people or are simply eliminated during the new ministry's infancy. This empowers the men and woman planting churches with the ability to sustain a healthy lifestyle and family life while beginning the new body of Christ. It also gives them the ability to truly minister to people and shepherd them rather than being religious business leaders. One of the many reasons there is such a failure of discipleship in the church today is because true discipleship requires time and capacity that traditional church leaders never seem to have.

At Oikos we are set up to be an easy burden on the pastor, me. Without all of the heavy burdens of traditional church operating systems, I am freed up to shepherd people and spend extra time with my children. This is especially important for me because I am a single full-time father of three children, who are with me 100% of the time. One of the great beauties of the MC church plant for me as the pastor is that I almost never have to leave my children to go do ministry. They can almost always be with me while I minister, serving together alongside of me being disciplined by me. Of course there are the occasional private conversations that I need to have with people I counsel and provide spiritual direction to in which my children are not present, but that demand is nowhere near as high as it is in the traditional church. And my children do not resent the church plant but rather they love it! They have ownership in it, participate in the MC weekly, and always look forward to it gathering. My youngest, Chloe, at age 11, is our best greeter with her bubbly personality, warm hugs, and contagious smile. My middle child, Faith, at

age 13, is our children's Bible study leader; she loves to teach children younger than herself. Every time we sit down for our teaching/discussion during a worship gathering, Faith takes the children and toddlers to a different room and teaches them Bible stories and she absolutely loves it. And my sixteen-year-old, Noah, who is a musician like myself, plays the djembe in our acoustic worship set gathered around the fireplace. All three of my children are active family members in our body of Christ and our family is a healthy one that is not hindered or affected negatively by the church plant.

Without the heavy burden of structure, administration, programming, property management, and more, my family can better sustain through the church planting efforts and see it as a positive part of our lives rather than something interferes or takes dad away all the time. The MC church plant frees me up to be a better father as well as a better pastor and the pace and pattern is much more sustainable. I do not have weekly or monthly business meetings to lead. I do not have any traditional office hours, for my office is the community I live in. I do not have heavy-laden extractational worship services to coordinate or big sermons to write. Some pastors put fifteen-plus hours a week into just crafting their puffed up sermons. For Oikos, I might spend two to four hours at most preparing a discussion and most of the time it is only about one to two hours' prep time. I'll selfishly admit it: I'm sold out to missional community church planting if for no other reason than because it is so easy on me and my family. This kind of ministry is something we can sustain.

## **Sustainable Ministry**

I've heard it said that the job of a pastor is twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred sixty five days a year. And in my ministry career before missional church planting, I would agree completely. Pastors live in a fishbowl and for whatever reason, people believe they have access to their pastor whenever they want. In the traditional church, it is also an unwritten rule that the pastor and their family must be at every single function within the church. And when it comes to any ministerial duties, it must be the pastor who is there, who visits, who performs, who ministers, etc. Put all of this on a church planting pastor and it is a surprise that more church planters are not mental basket cases with broken families. In a traditional church plant that is extractional with a church operating system, the pressure to build and sustain worship services, weekly programs, and more programs can be overwhelming. I can think of a friend in ministry who started an extractional church plant and a year later he was overworked, over-stressed, tired, and burnt out. He went from excited and happy to constantly tired, walking around with bags under his eyes. The work of ministry was not sustainable as he could not keep up with all the demands of ministry on his own and when you're a church plant, the pastor must do all of it because the church cannot financially afford a big staff. The ministry efforts my friend was trying to sustain were unreasonable and unhealthy. And it was not only he that was suffering but also the volunteer leaders were as well. These people had families, worked forty hours a week in their careers, and then were expected to give and lead multiple ministries in the church. And they had to, right? This is what the church does and people just need to sacrifice themselves for it, right? I remember the confession my friend gave concerning his church planting experience:

I'm so tired. I work all day at the office and do not have any energy anymore, and I dread having to be gone from home three to four nights a week and sometimes more. My wife is unhappy, my children miss me, and I feel like I could just sleep all day. People who started this church plant with me are dropping like flies. They are getting burnt out and even leaving the church, which puts more on me to do. I cannot handle this anymore.

The pastor cannot do it all and if he or she is expected to the ministry will fail.

Volunteers can only handle so much as well. Church was never meant to rise and fall on leadership; what a ridiculous thing to say in the church. Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 12 how the church is supposed to function. In verse twenty-seven he says that you (all people) are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. In Paul's speech in this chapter, he is telling all people in the church that all people in the church have a part to play in the body of Christ. In verse fourteen he says, "Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many." There is not just one single person making the body work but many individual people doing their part to make the body work.

One of the beauties of missional community church planting is the sustainable ministry, because in an MC, all people do their part in the body of Christ. People in the MC are not attenders; they are participators. They are not observers but rather are doers. They are not fans of Jesus but rather are followers of Jesus. In the MC church plant, ministry is sustainable because ministry is shared with all people who are empowered to do their part and, also, ministry is different from traditional church programming as people do not have to leave their homes and lives to "go to church."

At Oikos, our ministry efforts are lightweight for two big reasons. First, because we do not do programming: we live life together. We do not create programs for people to attend; we join each other in our daily living and serve together right where we already are. Missional community is not a program, it is a church lifestyle. It is a way of living

and being in our community and discipleship happens best when side-by-side in daily life. Second, because what we do together is shared by all. Different people head up things at different times and there is never ever any pressure for everyone to be at everything, including the pastor. For example, this year we had a serving opportunity for the NICU at our local hospital. Our MC made up thirty-five gift bags for families stuck in the NICU over the holidays and also plates of cookies for the nursing staff. The key: someone else from our MC organized it, not me, and on the day of assembling the bags and delivering, I was at a symphony. When the body of Christ functions as the body of Christ, everything gets done that needs to get done.

At Okios, our monthly gatherings, monthly rhythm, look something like this: twice a month we specifically meet for worship and teaching, once per month we meet for purely social activities like movie nights, board game nights, and BBQs, and then once per month we meet in an out-based activity or service opportunity. Now this is very free-flowing and organic, for some months it looks a little different. And when we add extra gatherings, we do not add to the schedule but rather we replace something with something. For example, if we have a serving opportunity on a Saturday night, we do not meet on Sunday morning. Or sometimes Sunday mornings turn into Sunday evening BBQs with the fire pit lit up in the back yard. The real beauty: at all of these things we do, ministry is happening amidst the lives of all the people. Discipleship occurs, worship happens, biblical teaching happens, prayer happens, eating together occurs, needs are discovered and met, friendships are built and new friends invited, neighbors come over and mingle with us, people at the park stop by to hang out with us, and so much more. If you think about it, it kind of sounds like something out of Acts 2, doesn't it?



## Conclusion

I really do not think church was ever meant to be so difficult. Jesus Christ makes our lives easier, for he brings everything down to love: loving God and then loving people. The first church planters set forth an organic example based off Jesus' discipleship methods that was free-flowing, simple, and reproducible by anyone. Frank Viola writes:

In the same way, whenever sin-scarred mortals try to create a church the same way we would start a business corporation, we are defying the organic principle of church life. An organic church is one that is naturally produced when a group of people have encountered Jesus Christ in reality, and the DNA of the church is free to work without hindrance.<sup>10</sup>

The real DNA of the church is found in the Acts of the Apostles and today, I think it is translated best through the missional community. I love how Viola brings out the fact that the church's DNA is free from hindrances in an organic church. Is not this a great way to sum up this chapter: Missional community church planting frees up the true DNA of the church from the hindrances of extractive-based religious organizations. In an MC, the church is free to dance.

MC-based church planting provides an opportunity for a church plant to be self-sustaining as well as something new that reaches into the gap and pulls out people from the gap's clutches. In an MC, pastors are not burnt out and their families remain positively influenced by the church plant. Ministry efforts are sustainable because all the people take part in leading and finances are not a burden due to the low financial strain. And the structure is lightweight and easy to maintain. As I survey the New Testament, I

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<sup>10</sup> Viola, 32.

simply cannot find reason for the church to be any different today than it was back then. But we, especially in North America, have turned church into a religious business and made church planting something that only a select few can actually do. Missional community puts ministry back into the hands of the people in the body, it puts discipleship back into the hands of the people in the body, and it puts true Jesus-followership back into the lives of the people in the body. Church is not a stadium event but rather a daily lived together lifestyle.

CHAPTER SIX:  
MISSIONAL PASTOR PRE-REQUISITES

*The New Testament notion of leadership is rooted in a functional mind-set. It portrays authority in terms of how things work organically. That is, it focuses on the expression of spiritual life. Leadership in the New Testament places a high premium on the unique gifting, spiritual maturity, and sacrificial service of each member. It lays stress on functions, not offices. It emphasizes tasks rather than titles. Its main concern lies in activities like pastor-ing, elder-ing, prophesy-ing, oversee-ing, apostle-ing, etc.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Frank Viola*

I remember the very first time the following question gripped my heart: Do I have a life worth imitating? “For immersion to happen we must give people access to our everyday lives. That is why it is critical that we have a life worth imitating! We are inviting people into our lives and asking them to imitate the parts of our life that look like Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> I was sitting at a 3DM learning community listening to a speaker share how discipleship at its core is about imitating someone’s life—about pulling out the parts of Jesus found in a mentor and applying them to one’s life. It means that the mentor, or disciple-er, must have a life worth imitating. I sat in a chair in a room filled with people but suddenly felt alone as I looked at myself and wondered if other people could learn about Jesus from my life. I wondered if the example I was living in pastoral ministry was

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<sup>1</sup> Viola, 154.

<sup>2</sup> Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 40.

an example that anyone could do. Was my life replicable? Could someone else do what I was doing? Could a disciple handle my pace, my lifestyle, and my stress, and would they find Jesus in it? To put it better, the thought that drove me to tears was this: *“Am I a disciple of Christ who is replicating the life of Christ in my own life and can more disciples be then replicated from my life?”* The honest answer I had to put forth was, no way. I was too much of an institutional pastor, a business pastor, and entrepreneurial pastor, a driven by numbers and results pastor, and an overworked, tired, stressed out all the time pastor trying to be a superstar. Snyder writes “What if the problem is not really the lack of superstars? What if something is deeply wrong with the traditional concept of ministry in the church? Is the problem really a lack of ecclesiastical superstars? Or do we have unbiblical notions of what the church really is?”<sup>3</sup> I was asking the following question of myself in that moment: do I have the Bible right on what it means to be a shepherd? Do I understand what pastoring is truly about? What I knew right then and there was that for me to become a missional pastor, I had to completely change who I was and how I was living. I had to find that life worth imitating by finding it first in Christ and it launched me on a journey of un-learning what it meant to be a pastor becoming a missional pastor.

I should be clear here that I do not fully agree with Dan Kimball and the emerging church movement however, I do agree with Dan Kimball’s thoughts here on leadership today:

Leadership in the emerging church is no longer about focusing on strategies, core values, mission statements, or church-growth principals. It is about leaders’ first

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<sup>3</sup> Snyder, 75-76.

becoming disciples of Jesus with prayerful, missional hearts that are broken for the emerging culture. All the rest will flow from this, not the other way around.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of my disagreeing on Kimball's stance in the emerging church, that is well spoken about leadership. Leadership will always be a clear necessity in the church, for the Apostles were some of the greatest leaders of all time. But what today's contemporary church has turned leadership into has simply tipped the scales away from the New Testament model of leadership, eldership, and shepherding in my opinion. It has taken church leaders from apostolic, missional, discipling warriors to business-driven, numbers-driven, and results-driven suits. And I cannot be clearer about the following statement: the contemporary leadership model of today's institutional church will simply not work in missional community church planting. It takes a completely different mindset, completely different financial engine, completely different discipleship focus, completely different lifestyle, and completely different leadership approach. To be a missional pastor planting church through missional communities he or she needs a life that is worth imitating—and a life worth imitating comes from Christ only and the examples set by the first church planters ever.

Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple *must* deny themselves and *take up their cross* and *follow me*”. (Luke 9:23; emphasis added) His words indicate a whole new way of living for those who would chase after him and know him more, and even more so for those who would lead in his example. For three years, he took the disciples through a process of unlearning, teaching them how to imitate himself. Later, the Apostle Paul

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<sup>4</sup> To be clear again, the emerging church movement has been, in my opinion, a fad that is quickly fading away. I do not align myself with the emerging church yet even so, I want to be as well read as I can. Kimball has some great things to say including this quote on leadership and it is for this reason that I used the quote. For a full read of his material for this quote please see: Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church : Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 248.

wrote in his letter to the Corinthians that they should follow his example as he follows Christ's example (1 Corinthians 11:1). It is not difficult to see the major transformation the disciples went through, and the transformation they would lead people into through their mission-driven church planting ways. What I believe it takes today to be a missional-community-driven church planter is a whole different set of ground rules that goes against the grain of traditional ministry activities and lifestyle. Most pastors entering church planting ministry aren't going to like it... especially the part about NOT getting an income from the church. (More to explain on that later.) But the fact is that for the future and for reaching the people stuck in the gap, we must be different, we must go against the grain, we must challenge the rules more, and we must plant mission driven churches that multiply Disciples of Christ.

In coming pages, I've brought forth what I feel are the five important pre-requisites for every missional community church planter who is reaching into the gap with a discipleship operating system. (These ingredients are not written in any particular order) The first is an untraditional mindset, for church planters cannot continue to think the way they always have. The second is that a missional church planter must be like Paul and have a tent making profession. One simply cannot expect a missional community church plant to fully support the pastor and his or her family. Third is that a missional church planter must have a capacity for discipleship in their lives. They must have room for disciples to share in their day-to-day living. Fourth, a missional church planter must see the community as their office and not some secluded office space somewhere. And fifth, a missional church planter must be low-church and high-relational. What that means is that relationships with people come first.

### **Untraditional Mindset**

Missional-community-driven church planting takes a whole new way of thinking, especially if your background is similar to what mine is in the more traditional extractational church. It takes a willingness to stare into the marrow and let go of most of what you thought it meant to be one of Jesus' pastors, for "a pastor is a shepherd, not a CEO."<sup>5</sup> As much as modern-day leadership in the church likes to compare itself to business, a pastor cannot think like a CEO and be a missional community church planter. The MC is not a numbers-based religious organization; it is a relational- based discipleship engine. The MC leader cares less about conversion decisions and more about the relational journey into Christ. The MC leader cares less about attendance and more about spiritual formation. The MC leader cares less about modern context or contemporary flare and more about meeting people where they are. The MC leader thinks like an apostle rather than a CEO, lives more like a disciple and less like a rich Pharisee, and he or she puts more care and concern into the overall spiritual development of the people following them. With these things in mind, the MC leader cannot be bogged down with COS-based ministry efforts, for they will truly detour them from the mission.

Rather than trying to figure out a way to put this into my own words I thought it best to give this list as I found it in Neil Cole's book. He goes on to list ten important mindsets that an organic leader must always keep:

1. Keep the focus on biblical principles.
2. Lead, don't manage.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 132.

3. Make it about volunteers, not employees.
4. Be proactive, not protective.
5. Focus on mission, not money.
6. Remember that leaders are servants.
7. It is all about the presence of Christ, not programs, policies, and precedence.
8. Stay at the margins, not the mainstream.
9. Remember that it is all about multiplication, not addition.
10. Keep structure flat and lean.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to the mindset of a missional leader, we simply cannot deny these facts.

My favorite part in the movie “Secondhand Lions” comes when Hub gives his *what every man needs to know* speech to some wayward teenage boys and then to his nephew.

Thinking about Cole’s list here, if I could give a speech now to upcoming missional leaders today, it would be called my *what every missional leader needs to know* speech and as we sit down at a table with a couple of ice cold root beers, it might go something like this: You, missional leader, you must always adhere to biblical principles and not stray away into lofty modern leadership principals. The New Testament lays out the foundations to the early church and the adventure it took in planting itself all over the land. Why on earth would you *ever* look to anything different? Know in the depths of your heart that a missional leader is not a manager, so be freed to lead others as you follow Christ. Do not tell them what to do, do not instruct them how to live, do not tell them they have to be saved, and do not bark out orders to volunteers, but rather pave the way for them by your life—showing them. They are not your followers, your fan base,

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<sup>6</sup> Cole and Leadership, 87-89.



your pay check, or your employees, but your brothers and sisters in the family of God on God's mission. If anything, they are like your nieces and nephews and you have the opportunity to be the coolest uncle they've ever had. A missional leader is evermore looking into the future at what is coming, always discerning the times and being ready for the changes to come just as Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-5. Stay on mission and do not get sidetracked by money or the luxurious life that could come from great wealth. Ministry is not about earning a paycheck; it is about changing lives. The mission is the discipleship of all nations of people all over the world. Never forget that. Now, you are a servant and not a boss. You do not get to stand and watch, but rather, you get your hands dirtiest as you lead the way in mission. Christ's presence is most important in everything you and your ministry does, for, without Him, this all is meaningless. Stay in the margins with real people. Hang out with them in the nooks and crannies of your zip code. Help them to see Jesus everywhere and help them to do the same in multiplying that in their lives. Remember, you are not adding numbers to your ministry success story. You are multiplying disciples into the kingdom. The glory is God's! The praise is His! And lastly, be careful how you work, for it is not all about you. Distribute the leadership, empower others above yourself, let others do the work of ministry, teach them to preach and to lead, and keep things simple. I do not believe that Jesus ever meant for this to be hard and overwhelming, for he took care of that part for us. We... well, we just simply have to follow him.

## Tent Makers

Just to get this out up front: yes, the church helped support the Apostles as they went about their journeys. There was nothing wrong with that then and there's nothing wrong with it now. A church helping to support its pastor is good, but is it necessary and does it have to mean a huge pay check? As I read the New Testament, I'm convinced that the Apostles never expected the church to fully fund their entire lifestyle and Paul the tent maker exemplified this wonderfully. Paul said, "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions" (Acts 20:34). All throughout his ministry, Paul made tents on the side for income and for connection to even more people. My favorite story of this is in Acts 18, when Paul met Aquila and Pricilla while in Corinth. The scripture says that because he was a tent maker, as they were, he stayed with them and worked with them and taught in the synagogue there every Sabbath (Acts 18:2-4).

A little further down, in verse ten, we read that Paul stayed there in that capacity for a whole year. Now, here's what is important: Paul used tent making as a means for income but also as one of his many tools for connecting with people in the nooks and crannies of every zip code he went to. There are two major gold nuggets there; he received income to help support himself and it was a connection to real life people in his zipcode. Bob Roberts writes, "I had been struggling with how to best connect with the society – and now it was clear. Let people use the most natural avenue to reach others – through their jobs."<sup>7</sup> I'm convinced that any person setting out to be a missional community church planter must come to grips with being bi-vocational, for it keeps us

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<sup>7</sup> Bob Roberts, *Glocalization : How Followers of Jesus Engage the New Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 78.

grounded with people, it gives us income, and it frees up more of the church's resources to be used for real ministry.

In my church planting journey, I set out to be bi-vocational from the get go. In the beginning it was merely about an income but today it is all about ministry opportunity and keeping more finances in the church. Nonetheless, figuring out what that looked like was difficult to say the least. I had to depend on the diverse background that I have, the opportunities before me, and also the passion to work in such a way that I could be free to do some ministry each week. My first go at this was in working in community mental health in a group home taking care of three adult men who are developmentally disabled. I used to call it a church planter's dream job, for I slept at the house overnight. Yes, I got paid to sleep. (Well, only so long as the guys slept!) My hours were 11pm – 9am and my duties included battening down the hatches at night and then getting the guys ready for their day in the morning. It was wonderful as it left me time for ministry each day, time for my family, and time for school work. This worked well for about a year and a half until I finally realized that the sleep wasn't all that good, the job was not giving me a people connection to the community, and I was becoming a very tired and passionless person. It was then that I started looking for new work that would give me some of the same opportunities for income and free time for ministry and has led me to what I do today. Currently, I'm a school bus driver and school bus mechanic. I get paid a handsome wage and work anywhere from 4 to 6 hours a day all depending on the context of the day. I'm also an adjunct professor in an adult undergraduate program at Spring Arbor University. This gives me the opportunity to use my teaching gift and passion while also giving me a very flexible, one-night-a-week schedule. Here is the real beauty about these

jobs, though: they give me income, they leave me with time for family and ministry, they keep me on my kids' schedule, and, most importantly, they keep me imbedded in the nooks and crannies of my zip code working alongside real people every day... and I absolutely love it! I take no income from my church plant aside from the occasional gift or some help in the summer months when school is out. And it is my personal goal to always keep it that way, no matter how big our network of missional communities gets. The church can help me, but, the majority of what might be my salary will stay in the church bank accounts and used for MCs affecting their communities.

Now, I understand this is not easy. My diverse background with an automotive degree with seven years at General Motors, a business degree, and two ministry degrees plus IT certifications and time spent as a systems engineer makes it rather easy for me to find many different jobs. But therein lies the key: A missional church planter must always realize that they need a tent making business that lets them do ministry and earn income. A missional leader needs to have the training and background to work strange jobs, different jobs, weird hours jobs, and still meet their personal needs as well as ministry needs. If I could, I would advise every single college student headed into ministry to avoid seminary and first get a good base degree that gives them a skill set to see them throughout life. Then go get a theological education and training because one of the issues with bi-vocational ministry is that most people cannot make a living off restaurant or retail wages. The missional leader needs to be creative, needs to think outside of the box, and needs to have God's call always before them, for he will provide an opportunity for an amazing bi-vocational career.

### Capacity for Discipleship

If the missional leader doesn't have capacity in their life for discipleship then they are truly missing the point about missional community ministry. A missional leader doesn't teach information to people and then return to their agenda and business. A missional leader has space in their life for people to join them in their own Jesus-followership and they show them what Jesus looks like in their life. Every person that is disciplined "needs to see how information becomes knowledge and is incarnated in the everyday life of another person. They then apprentice themselves to a person (missional leader), learning not only the information but also how to do what he or she does."<sup>8</sup> (Parenthesis added) An apprentice spend a lot of time with their mentor and their mentor has a lot of time to give, and gives willingly. Bonhoeffer writes that "when we are called to follow Christ we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person".<sup>9</sup> If each of us are called to that exclusive attachment to Christ, how do we see what that looks like unless we can spend time with a teacher who is living that exclusive attachment out in their lives? Without the capacity for discipleship in the life of a missional leader, discipleship is cheapened down to information given through lofty words.

Neil Cole writes: "The Gospel flies best on the wings of relationships."<sup>10</sup> Jesus was a relationship master. He did not set up weekly meetings at the local coffee shop for discipleship, he invited people into his life with the directive to come and follow him. And the church planting apostles did not set up one hour lunch meetings to talk about a

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<sup>8</sup> Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Cole, *Organic Church : Growing Faith Where Life Happens*, 162.

discipleship book but rather, they entered into people's lives and gave their time to them. Discipleship does not happen accidentally or naturally following a decision to follow Christ. It happens intentionally through relationship by a missional leader giving space in their lives to those he or she is discipling.

Played out in my life and the people at Oikos this just looks like regular ol' life except we do it together. It wasn't as though I had to do brain surgery on my schedule but rather, I needed to start inviting people into my everyday life more often. It looks like having more people to my home for dinner, and when I go shopping I find someone to take with me. If I have a long drive and am returning soon I invite a person to go along with me because it is a great time to talk. When I meet with people I do not carve out extra time in my schedule, I just have them to what I'm already doing, like watching my son or daughters lacrosse game. We can sit there and try to learn something about the game and have faith talks at the same time. Plus, in all of these things, people get to see me living out my exclusive attachment to Jesus in my everyday life. They get to see it happen in real time, rather than a story given from a pulpit. If I ever go golfing, I take someone. If I go out to lunch, I take someone. If my family goes to the park or out to a movie we invite someone. When my kids have band concerts I invite someone. When I meet with and counsel people I invite a disciple to join me to watch and listen if it is appropriate. In essence, I make space for people in my life. In his book titled "Organic Outreach for Ordinary People", Kevin Harney talks about Jesus making space for people:

Jesus lived with balance in his life. He made time to be alone with the Father, even when he was busy (Mark 1:35). He was careful to make space to train and equip his followers for ministry. He taught the masses as he traveled and preached. Yet he was always available to connect with the broken, the outcast, and the spiritually hungry. He made space for people in his schedule. He didn't

see them as a disruption or an annoyance, but as the very reason he came to this earth.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus constantly invited people into his life to glean from him, to learn from him, and to be molded by him.

A missional leader must have capacity for discipleship and it doesn't take doing much different in our lives or schedules. Sure, there's the occasional one on one meeting for even Jesus pulled one, two, or three aside alone at times in his ministry. But for the most part, he just invited people to join him in what he was already doing in his life and long they way, they learned more about incarnating him in their lives. It is not rocket science, its simply inviting people into our lives. For me, this happens in my neighborhood as well when I meet with my neighbor by the mailbox for a chat and my son is with me watching and learning how I connect with the people around me. And when I have a neighborhood party at my house I make sure to invite a couple people who I am discipling so that they can see me in action, learn from me, and ask me questions later. The honest truth is that everyone already has a capacity to disciple others the same way Jesus did. It just requires looking at things less through a church-lens and more from a missional/incarnational lens. This ir a pre-requisite for missional community church planters.

### **Your Zip Code is Your Office**

I'll never forget a particular day a couple years ago when I met with a pastor of a church I was coming in to help. It was once a traditional thriving body of Christ that had

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People : Sharing the Good News Naturally* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 136-137.

been whittled down to 23 people through strife, turmoil, and very poor leadership. The pastor was tired, worn out, and hanging on for retirement during the last few years. When my superintendent called me and asked me to take over there on an interim basis because I lived close by, I was honored to help. One day, I met with the outgoing pastor just to gain some understanding on the church and its facilities and one of the things he said still makes the angry hairs stand up on the back of my neck today. He said, “Now Brandon, I always keep the doors locked and the blinds closed because if you do not, people will constantly bug you. It just drives me crazy! They just will not leave you alone! Here at the building I would keep everything shut and then I would go home and do the same. Brandon, you’ll want to do this too or the people will just drive you crazy.” My mouth hit the floor and I blinked my eyes in silence. There were so many choice things to say in that moment; however, I merely said “thanks for the advice,” and as soon as he left I opened up every blind I could find and unlocked all the doors. It is no wonder the church was in the state it was when I got there; it wasn’t even close to reaching the forty percent let alone the sixty percent out in the gap.

That retiring pastor had completely lost touch with what pastoring is all about... it is all about people, being with people, and discipling people. Like Sweet said in the quote I mentioned earlier, Jesus was known for his relational ability. So not only should we roll up the blinds and unlock the doors, but we should go on into the neighborhood and shout, “Here I am!” In *The Message*, John 1:14 starts out in this way: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” It doesn’t say Jesus went to his sheltered office to prepare a magnificent multimedia sermon. It says he went to where the people are to be with them. Now indeed there are times to sit at a desk to study, pray, write, and



focus on the Lord, but that should only be for those brief times; even Jesus got away alone from time to time. The point is that a missional leader makes their office out where people are at local coffee shops, cafes, pie shops, restaurants, park benches, schools, librarys, and more. A missional leader's office is out in the nooks and crannies of their zip code, right where people are. A missional leader's office is out in the gap.

For me here at Oikos, I have a small desk in my home for study. The rest of the time, I am somewhere in the community with my laptop and books looking forward to being interrupted by someone. One of my favorite things to do is go get pie. In the movie "Men in Black," agents J and K are stressed over a major problem and K's plan is to go have pie. He relaxes, goes to the neighbor café, and says, "Just trust the pie." Here in my little town of DeWitt, Michigan we have a nationally known pie shop that I love to visit called "Sweetielicious." It is a wonderful place to have a slice of amazing dessert, meet wonderful people, and trust the pie, for it seems like every time I go there for pie, something wonderful happens, from the people I meet to personal revelation. I also frequent two different coffee shops and several restaurants. I know the staff by name at these places and they know me. I can also be found at the library or at the park downtown on a bench. Yes, I have lots to do but I just choose to do it out in my neighborhood where people are because some of the most wonderful conversations and God-opportunities come when I do. A missional community church planter must be present in the community and not hidden away behind a desk. Jesus did not have an executive office that I am aware of, for his office was wherever people were at and that is exactly what a missional church planter needs to do.

### Low Church – High Relational

Christians like to spend a lot of time talking about what Jesus did and taught. How he challenged authority and how he set in play the New Covenant. But what we do not spend enough time looking at is that fact that Jesus was a relational genius. “Jesus was a relationship revolutionary.”<sup>12</sup> Sweet also goes on to say, “Jesus was not known and talked about for his principles. Jesus was known and talked about for his relationships.”<sup>13</sup> The man did not hang out with the Pharisees in their grand building and conference rooms. I believe that Jesus did not function out of a church operating system (high church) but rather out of a discipleship operating system (high relational). Churchianity was not his thing; people were. Jesus was the ultimate low-church, high-relational person who ever lived. He was where people were and he was establishing relationships with average Joes all the time. In *Speaking of Jesus*, Carl Medearis talks about people following Jesus and what the key was to following him. “The key to following Jesus is by beginning to see him as another person. The way he came to us... The really neat thing about accepting Jesus as a person is that it makes our experience with him real. Living with a real person forces us to live honestly. Like in a friendship.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus was a real person walking with real people. He laughed with them, he cried with them, he touched them, he hugged them, he was angry with them, he was sad with them, he grieved with them, and he shared life alongside of them.

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<sup>12</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful : Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus : The Art of Not-Evangelism* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 140-141.

A missional community church planter must be willing to lower the COS in their life and ministry so that they can raise the relationship factor. They must be willing to say no to heavy structure, fancy services, board meetings, committees, speaking engagements, and more, and to be willing to spend time with people. I do not mean hanging out with the congregation at the church potluck or thanksgiving dinner. And I do not mean brushing shoulders with newcomers on Sunday mornings or hanging out with people at the building. I mean out in the community where people live every day. I mean hanging out with them in their context, at their events, in their special moments, etc. I mean being with them, laughing with them, crying with them, grieving with them, hugging them, touching them, being sad with them, and in everything sharing life with them. Relationships must drive a missional leader because relationships are the key to discipleship. Without relationship, there's no opportunity for teaching, for discipleship.

At Oikos, we value relationships above most everything else. The family feel we have is not just a feeling of family; it is a reality about who we are. People visit us and they talk about the warmth and friendships. When we are out in the community, people talk about our kindness and thoughtfulness. Being relational is a major part of our church, for the relationship is the platform for connection and for discipleship. Relationships are the beginning of discipleship, not a conversion decision. From the first hello and the opportunity for someone to see our exclusive attachment to Jesus lived out in our lives, discipleship has begun and the decision comes later. We find more and more today that people in the gap do not want a sermon and nor do they want to feel guilted into a decision. What people in the gap want today is authenticity and relationship. People want to know we care about them by how we enter into their lives through friendships. The bus

garage I work at is one of the greatest relational playgrounds currently in my life. I have so much opportunity there to serve people, befriend people, smile at people, and help make their day better. When that happens, relationships form and people start asking me questions. They start inviting conversations from me and at that point the Holy Spirit takes over and begins watering seeds. One thing I know for sure is you cannot get any of that when just hanging out a churchy building or stuffy office.

### **Conclusion**

I remember the moment I fell in love with missional community ministry—I was going straight home and applying it right away. I was going to jump right in feet first and start missional communities in my church and I was going to build a missional ministry. Little did I know how difficult it was going to be to make that a reality and the biggest roadblock in the way was me. I had so much unlearning to do to become a missional community church planting pastor and it took me a couple years to walk through it. Along the way, my COS background kept creeping in and affecting how I led and I made some of the mistakes that many people do, leading the missional community to become nothing more than a new program that fades away when another new program comes along. For a church to become a missional ministry, it must endure a complete culture change from COS to DOS. And for a pastor to become a missional leader, he or she must endure a total remodeling—they must get back on the potter’s wheel. Jeremiah’s experience sums it up best:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed in into another pot, shaping it as

seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.” (Jeremiah 18:1-6)

There came a point in my journey to becoming a missional leader when I realized that I was marred clay in the Lord’s hands and needed to be worked into something new. Truth: the pre-requisites that I’ve discussed in the chapter are the same ones that I had to work through during my own transformation. None of it was easy and all of it was necessary.

Reaching the sixty percent caught in the gap requires a new form of ministry and the truth is that the sixty percent is growing while the forty percent still attracted to attraction-COS-based ministry is decreasing. Soon it will be the 70/30 principle. And here’s the real catch: are we going to let the seventy percent flounder about in the gap or are we going to innovate the church with the discipleship operating system and plant new churches through the vehicle of missional community? My belief is that the latter is a must; the church must change and, for that to happen, leaders must change.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### FINAL THOUGHTS: MOVING FORWARD

*God does not merely send the church in mission. God already is in mission, and the church must join him. This also means, then, that the church does not simply have a missions department, it should wholly exist to be a mission.<sup>1</sup>*

-Timothy Keller

I believe that the sixty percent in the gap are looking for a new church, for it does not seem to be that they are losing interest in Jesus, but just in today's church as we know it. I do not mean a relocating to a new ministry, but rather, they are looking for something new and fresh altogether. I believe they are looking for something genuine without flair and showmanship. I believe they are looking for authentic biblical community with people minus all of the attendance driven programs. I believe they are tired of going to church and are looking for ways to live the church and be the church and are looking for someone to show them what that looks like. I believe they are tired of feeling guilty or lectured at by Sunday sermons and are looking for someone to just teach the truth and reality of scripture. I believe they are looking for someone to walk this journey of life with them and, along the way, help them to see Jesus at work in their lives and all around them and helping them to know how to get involved in that work. And I believe all of these things about the sixty percent because I was once there.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church : Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 251.

Howard Snyder wrote the following in 1975: “Someone has said the problem of the present is that the future is not what it used to be. It’s true! We are now living under the pressure of the future in a way that has never before been true during the history of man’s pilgrimage on planet earth.”<sup>2</sup> I think I could say that today we are now living under the pressure of the future in a way that has never been felt before. And the pressure of the future is the pressure of the declining church. If the sixty percent is growing, then somebody had better wake up before it is too late. The dots I connect show me a picture of God’s people wandering around looking for the church and not looking in our current church buildings. It is time for a new season of church planting and it is time to do so through missional community with the discipleship operating system.

I believe the missional community church plant is the future of the church to come. While extractational COS-driven methods still work and still grow big churches, it is working less and less over time. Without something coming alongside to pick up the gap, the decline will continue and churches will close. While it is not impossible to turn an existing cruise liner (church) around, it is extremely difficult and it is why I am a church planter: establishing a new culture from the get-go is much more effective. If it is done right, a missional-community-based church plant with a culture of discipleship provides the fresh new church that I believe the sixty percent are looking for. I have found this to be true in my own MC church plant as every time a new family joins Oikos, they describe those things as what draws them in.

Talk to the people at Oikos and they will not tell you they worship with us because of their attraction to an incredible worship experience. They will not tell you that

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<sup>2</sup> Snyder, 187.

they had a conversion experience here and they will not tell you the facilities are amazing. Ask them why they come and it will not be about programming, bible studies, or any one pastor or person. Ask them to tell you why they come and they will say it is because we are a family. The most recent people to come to Oikos is a younger couple with a young daughter. They were invited by another couple in our church who, through a connection at work, discovered that they were looking for something different. They do not know it but they were caught in the gap. What they enjoy about Oikos is that we are an authentic family who lives together, worships together, prays together, serves together, and more. We are a small missional-community-focused on discipleship, relationships, and incarnational living, and it's what they are most interested in. When it comes to the bigger, more traditional and extractive church, they were simply tired of it. But their story is not the only one...for the rest of the people at Oikos come for the same reasons and someday many more people will as well, as they search for help climbing out of the gap.

A good question in this closing chapter is: What might my church plant look like seven to ten years from now? My vision is for a flat and wide church that is made up of a network of missional communities spanning over many zip codes. I dream of the day when Oikos Church has 25+ MC's meeting regularly in homes, coffee shops, café's, schools, parks, and wherever else in their community. Every month they all have predictable patterns and rhythms: Twice per month they meet together for worship, prayer, thanksgiving, and sharing meals. At least once per month they meet to serve in their mission focus in their zip code and also once per month all of the MC's will come together in a school or community building for a celebration gathering. This big gathering



is not a seeker sensitive attractional extractional event but rather, it is specifically for the church and is about celebrating what God is doing through the MC's followed with a re-lighting of the fire by the half time speech before they are all sent back out on mission. Though there may come a day when Oikos needs an office space for administrative tasks, I do not see an owned property nor a building in its future. All of the staff are bi-vocational never receiving a full salary from the church and as much of the tithe and offerings as possible are put right back into the MC's serving efforts. The overall mission of Oikos will always be the discipleship of all people and absolutely everything it does must be filtered through this lens of discipleship. Therein lies the beauty of missional community and the life on life sharing that happens. I look forward to this day when people are not added but rather disciples are multiplied, when senior pastors and executive leaders aren't as necessary because ministry is back in the hands of the church, and when people as far out as Oikos can reach are growing in a relationship with Jesus for he is the true reason for all of this. He is the true attraction.

The phrase of the future for the church is: mind the gap. For if we do not, people who have grown weary of the church will continue to fall in and without the help of a fresh new expression coming together to get them out, they may never find a way out. Culture is changing, people are changing, and the winds of that change is blowing now. The church simply cannot stand by and think it is just a passing phase while continuing to do business as usual. The cart is broken, the horse is on its last leg, and it is high time for a new vehicle.

This dissertation is not done but has only just begun for I am merely beginning my MC church planting journey. This journey is one with a great dream for a new church

that is one body, yet scattered all over the city. I dream of the day when our ministry has multiple missional communities meeting all over our city and surrounding areas. I'm talking about twenty-five or more communities of believers on mission together in their local context. I dream of those communities coming together once per month in school gyms, community centers, and city parks for large worship gatherings that refuel the body for their work in Christ. That huge gathering will be focused on worship along with a half time speech, not a service and sermon; it is a half time speech because all that is happening is a firing up of the team as they head back out into their communities on mission. I dream of twenty five or more missional communities serving on mission every single month. That means our church will have three hundred mission-driven service opportunities in one year. I dream of these missional communities infiltrating their zip codes meeting in homes, coffee shops, community centers, and more as they pray together, eat together, worship together, and provide for the needs of each other. I dream of these missional communities reaching people in the gap, discipling them, and creating movements of discipleship-driven multiplication. And I dream ultimately of these missional communities drawing people back into the body of Christ, building the kingdom of God.

It is high time to mind the gap. It is high time for a change. It is high time for the church to be the church, the sons and daughters of God centered in on his mission.

## APPENDIX A – The Experts’ Voices

<b>Thoughts on being missional from a few experts.</b>						
<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Alan Hirsch</b>	Missional Church	A sent church, a going church, a movement of God through people sent spreading the message of Jesus.	Is more about communal living and sustained discipleship.	Tends to be open, shared, flat structure, low cost, low admin.	More open, apostolic leadership	Refurbished buildings and public spaces.
<b>Michael Frost</b>	Missional Church	A sent church, a going church, a movement of God through people sent to bring healing to brokenness.	Communal living and sustained discipleship.	Open, shared, flat structure, low cost, low admin.	More open, apostolic leadership	No preference on location for an MC's meetings.
<b>Neil Cole</b>	Organic Church	The presence of Jesus among His people called out as a spiritual family to pursue His mission.	Planting Gospel DNA is utmost importance. Building relationships via discipleship.	Shared, distributed leadership, low cost and low admin.	NO specific clergy or leader in place.	Coffee houses, campuses, businesses, homes, etc...
<b>Reggie McNeal</b>	Missional Communities	People are the church, spending time together in organic ways in homes and community places.	Mission, community, people development,	Non-hierarchical, flat structure, shared leadership, low cost and low admin.	Not clergy dependent, non-hierarchical, shared leadership to many.	Homes, coffee shops, parks, schools, etc...
<b>Ed Stetzer</b>	Missional Church	Church living on mission and being part of the culture that's trying to be reached.	Intentional and deliberate about reaching others.	More hierarchical and traditional, higher cost and time in admin and marketing.	Clergy lead with other staff.	Church buildings, rented spaces, Community centers, and more.
<b>3DM</b>	Missional Communities	Groups of 20-40 people forming an extended family on mission together.	Discipleship and mission.	Organized & organic, lightweight, low admin, & low cost.	Usually lead by a trained host in their home, who's accountable to a church leadership.	Family homes and community places.
<b>Alan Roxburgh &amp; Scott Boren</b>	Missional Church	Imbedded in the neighborhoods, building relationships, organic living, sharing life together.	Being where people are, making connections, growing together in Christ.	Unpredictable where life happens, lightweight & low maintenance.	Usually lead by a person(s) in their home who is accountable to a church leadership.	Homes, subdivisions, public spaces.

## APPENDIX B – Why I’ve Chosen Missional Communities

My journey into missional community church planting started several years ago when I began following the Spirit’s lead into church planning ministry. When I started, I was not a passionate missional community leader but rather, a leader brought up in the traditional extractional church with a mindset of building a giant traditional extractional church, a COS church. The launch model consumed me as I went hunting for the meeting space, worship band, contemporary decorations, hi-tech media presentations, elaborate sermons and more. Everything I did was focused on getting people to want to come see our version of church in hopes that giving would increase along with attendance so that salaries could be paid and a building/property acquired. The difficult part was that deep down inside, none of it sat well with me yet I ignored this feeling and brushed it off until I started discovering discipleship focused missional communities.

I’ll never forget the Exponential conference I attended for church planting folks where I came across information on missional community and discipleship based ministry. The short story is that following that conference for the next two years I went through a process of unlearning everything I thought I believed to be true about pastoring and about building a church. The extractional church began to put a very sour taste in my mouth while the missional church began to light a very new fire in my heart. Then there was a particular moment: the church I had previously served in was struggling financially, ministry and staff had to be reduced so that the new building mortgage could be paid. Another traditional ministry I was a part of was declining and crying out about needing to get more people in the building with more giving so that the bills could be

paid. I began to ask the question; What is church really all about? And then I heard about another church that canceled its 7.2 million dollar building project and sold its property so as to put the money back into ministry in the city rather than itself. It pushed me into an unlearning journey and this unlearning was not easy. We fell flat on our face a few times. As we changed, people left our ministry in search of an extractive ministry. We made many mistakes and tried a few experiments. We left the church building we were meeting in and moved into my house... and lost a few more people. During this time I hit the bottom of the barrel and contemplated quitting. I was hurt by people who disappeared, hurt by people who decided to leave, and questioning my calling into church planting ministry. However at the same time, our culture started to change and a few new people came along, I started to see some light. New relationships were blooming through my bi-vocational work. People were starting to get and own the vision of missional community. We transformed into a family that shared life together and lived on mission together. We slowly built a discipling culture amidst our missional community and we even changed our name to Oikos Church to reflect our family values. New people began joining our family gatherings in search of that church-family. Our gatherings are now more like family reunions than church meetings. And the turning point came during a camping trip our whole MC was invited on when one of the children told their neighbors that they were going camping with their family. I took a lot of unlearning and it took a difficult path but through it all I eventually found my passion and excitement in church planting. While I am not trying to call any other form of ministry bad or wrong, I know without a doubt that this is the ministry life for me. I love being a tent maker-pastor. I love empowering all people to do ministry. I love life-on-life discipleship and mentoring.

And I love having the freedom to live in community with people and spend much less time dealing with event prep and administrative headaches. Though we're not there yet and ten years seems like an eternity away, I truly feel that what we are doing today better reflects Jesus great commission to go and make disciples of all people. One day we will be a vast network of missional communities built by disciple multiplication. The moment of stepping back to see it will be one of the most exciting days of my future!

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