

Evangelizing the Church Plant: Part 1

Pre-class Preparation:

Maulphers, *Planting Growing Churches*, 207-226

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Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 191-197

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Stetzer, *Planting New Churches*, 181-202

- When it comes to church planting, the first thing that may come to your mind is evangelism . . . winning people to faith in Christ. It may surprise you to know that all church planters do not have an evangelistic passion. In this session we're going to learn about the importance of evangelism and the church plant. We're going to talk about a strategy for evangelism that you can implement in your new church plant. Let's begin with this clip and see if it speaks to your heart . . .

Video: Church planting and evangelism.

The forefront of ministry is right there in evangelism. Here's a guy with cerebral palsy and yet nothing stops him from the calling to share Christ. Do you ever find yourself complaining about having to go out and make visits? Remember that God uses evangelism. And God uses the church as His missionary to the world. The Scripture says: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14 NASB). This is one of many tasks (but it is the central task) in the work of church planting. So let's talk about evangelism and how to keep that evangelistic focus in place. We've discussed how churches tend to lose



their evangelistic fervor as time goes by, but that need not be the case. So let's consider some useful principles in the area of . . .

Evangelism

⊕ Evangelism must be intentional.

- Evangelism doesn't just happen coincidentally. It requires intentionality. Real evangelism takes place as you plan and prioritize it in your church. Neither does evangelism take place simply because you teach it to your people. We like to think that if we train them they will go. The reality is that if there is no intentional structure and strategy for evangelism in your church and if there's no exhortation and encouragement from the leadership, then evangelism is neglected. If people aren't reaching out then they are simply "spiritual sponges." They come to church, they sit, they listen, and eventually they sour like a sponge does. And it can happen in a new church too. People who come and join are excited about the new church and so they are inviting their Christian friends. What the new church actually needs is for them to reach out to their non-Christian friends. Otherwise we're just swapping fish from one tank to another. The work of the church is to go out and reach the lost which will only occur if evangelism is intentional. Secondly . . .

⊕ Evangelism must permeate the church.

- It ought not to be promoted as an option in which people may participate; rather, it should be preached as a central endeavor of the church itself. One thing that helps develop a spirit of evangelism in when . . .

Lay people know their testimonies. Some churches ask their people to do this in their training or instruction time so they can learn to verbally share what God has done for them. This gets the idea in their minds that they have a story worth sharing that may be useful in leading someone to faith in Christ. In addition, make sure that . . .

Every service includes the plan of salvation. That doesn't mean you should preach an evangelistic message in every service. In fact, that can be counterproductive to a church if that is all they hear. You need to include teaching on the deeper truths of the faith in addition to evangelism. However, you can include the plan of salvation in your preaching, touching on it at different points. You can also use the end of the message to call for people to make commitments. You might say, "If you're wondering how all of this applies to your life, let me first tell

you that it begins with a commitment of your life to Jesus Christ . . .” You explain repentance and faith and then you call for commitment and let God’s Holy Spirit work. You can do that in less than a minute as you conclude your message. And you can do it in every service. Be creative and relevant to the subject you’ve presented. As a way to wrap it up you can lead them in a prayer of commitment, asking them to pray along with you if they want Christ in their lives. Again, it isn’t necessary to have a salvation sermon every Sunday,, but be sure to present it briefly at some point every time you preach. In addition there should be . .

A means to respond at each service. In some churches there is a public invitation where people walk down the aisle to indicate a commitment they are making to Christ. Some are surprised to discover that this is a relatively new method in the church. The invitation is about 150 years old and it has gained popularity among churches over the years. Other churches use other methods. In some church plants, guests are encouraged to fill out a card to indicate any type of commitments they’ve made, giving them an opportunity to respond and follow through in discipleship, baptism, and church membership. A means to respond at each service will help the church planter to know if people want more information. The response cards are an important way to plan a follow-up visit with the people who have made decisions. It’s all a part of making sure that evangelism is permeating you new church plant. In addition . . .

Evangelism must be progressive

- This scale helps us to understand that people come to Christ by progression. As we look at it we discover some basic ideas about how to approach evangelism. The Engle Scale begins with . . .

⊕ **The Engel Scale¹**

- -7 No Awareness of Christianity
- -6 Awareness of the Existence of Christianity
- -5 Some Knowledge of the Gospel
- -4 Understanding of the Fundamentals of the Gospel
- -3 Grasp of the Personal Implications
- -2 Recognition of Personal Need
- -1 Challenge and Decision to Receive Christ
- Conversion

- +1 Evaluation of the Decision
- +2 Incorporation into a Fellowship of Christians
- +3 Active Propagators of the Gospel



- In North America today many people get stuck between -5 and -4. They have some knowledge of the Gospel but as Allan Walker said it is merely an “echo of an echo of an echo of truth.” What little knowledge they have is wrong. They understand a few basics of the faith but when confronted with the fundamentals of the faith: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ they are confronted with a stumbling block. The cross is offensive to many and it takes a work of God’s Holy Spirit and the witness of believers to take them to the place of understanding and commitment. You can be aware of Christianity and have some knowledge of the Gospel—perhaps you even understand some of the fundamentals and see your personal need, but still not make a decision to receive Christ. Some people will even acknowledge that if death came suddenly they would spend an eternity in hell, and yet they still refuse to commit to Christ. They have some knowledge but not the desire to leave the old life for a new life in Christ.

As we consider the scale, occasionally we see people who will jump from -7 all the way to making a commitment for Christ. Those who do are more likely to leave the faith than those who walk through the process and consider all the implications. Jesus asked the question: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost” (Luke 14:28 NKJV). It is a good thing for people to work through these stages so that their faith is one that is thought through and carefully considered. Going through this process is “counting the cost...”

One hundred years ago most people were at -4 or -3 and would be able to understand a presentation of the Gospel and then make a decision. Today, most people are higher up on the scale. There is a higher degree of biblical illiteracy in our culture today. But as people understand and commit to Christ, they then begin to climb the other end of the scale. They begin to consider and think through their decision. As they grow spiritually, they begin to understand the implications of their faith. Through the process of discipleship and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, their habits and hang-ups begin to change. Part of the process takes them into a fellowship of believers where they find their place. And eventually they become active propa-



gators of the Gospel. The Engle Scale helps us to understand how the whole process of conversion and growth takes place.

In North America today, we are finding more and more variations on the Engle Scale. In our post-modern culture it is common to see the +2 (Incorporation into a fellowship of Christians) and place it next to -3 (Grasp of the Personal Implications). In an emerging postmodern generation there is a sort of two-conversion process. The first conversion is not saving in nature but more of a conversion to community. In this generation people are more inclined to participate in a Christian community, even for long periods of time, to observe and see if it is real before they make a commitment to Christ. They understand some of the fundamentals but need to see for themselves if the faith is valid. The process for them is first a conversion to community followed by a conversion to Christ. As so our lives ought to be marked by the presence of Christ so that they might see Him in us and follow Him in faith. If they experience a conversion to community and see that our faith in Christ has made little difference in the ways we live, then they will reject the teachings of Christ and drop out of the community. So this process/strategy of evangelism has the dual benefit of helping unbelievers have a better understanding of what a follower of Christ is when they do commit to Christ—thereby making them more viable believers from the ‘get-go’. And secondly, it can be a greater motivation to existing Christians to be more authentic and contagious in their faith in Christ.

Now let’s take a look at . . .

⊕ Things that Kill Evangelism.

- It isn’t unusual for situations and circumstances to creep into a church that will have a detrimental effect on its evangelistic spirit. These include . . .
 - **Large Group Panic.**
 - When a church grows rapidly, doubling and even tripling after the first public service, church members begin to get very nervous about it. They may say things like, “We really need to slow down Pastor and work with those we have.” As a pastor you should listen to their concerns, agree that it looks like a problem, and then ask, “What can you do to help us out with those who have come?” And those who are concerned then become a part of the solution. Something else that kills evangelism is . . .

■ Discipleship Needs.

- Some people have concerns during growth spurts of becoming “a mile wide and an inch deep.” The wise pastor will recruit these concerned individuals to become a part of the solution to a legitimate problem. It is true that we can get so excited over numerical growth that sometimes we may neglect spiritual growth. But in the church it is not an “either/or” proposition but a “both/and” effort. There should be balance both in numerical and spiritual growth. People concerned about discipleship needs may actually have a passion and the giftedness to lead a ministry that takes new converts through discipleship. But pastors have to be careful not to take offence when the call comes to grow deeper. Sometimes this may be a masked term for an agenda where they want something more established and traditional in the church. On the other hand, it may be a legitimate desire and need for more in-depth Bible study. This can be a real problem, especially if for the first six months your services are going to focus on seekers. There should be different venues where people can grow deeper. Many churches use LIFE classes that speak to the different purposes or key values of the church. These classes can then branch off and offer other classes under each purpose or key value in order to provide deeper Bible study and spiritual enrichment. Some churches use the Sunday morning service as a seeker service and then have an exegetical Bible book study on Wednesday nights. There are a variety of methods that can be used to develop the spiritual depth of the congregation without slowing down evangelistic efforts. Another situation that kills evangelism is . . .

■ Leadership Busyness.

- If the church planter is devoting a large block of his time to administrative duties, evangelism begins to suffer. If you accept the previous encouragement to set aside fifteen hours a week in evangelism and it's your priority, don't be surprised if many people start coming to your church because of your efforts. All these new people will require attention. And the busyness of trying to help them and meet their needs can bog you down and drain your evangelistic zeal. Many of the people who come to your first service because they've received a telephone or direct mail invitation will often be needy people. Often there is some situation or crisis in their lives that has led them to come. Consequently, you are going to have to do a lot of ministry. The busyness of ministry can keep you from your focus of reaching the lost in your new church plant. Another evangelism killer is . . .

■ Hi-jacked Vision.

- This is virtually a certainty in every new church plant. The church will go through a time when things are not going well. Every church experiences those times when it slows down. In addition, God may take your church in a direction that was not expected. As we mentioned before, you may begin reaching people you weren't targeting. Good, well meaning people will come to you with an agenda that differs from

the one God gave you when you planted the church. These people will try to hi-jack the vision of the church plant. It may be done nicely or harshly, but you avoid it by planning ahead. Make sure you have cast the vision and done it regularly.

But even then there will be some who won't like everyone that God leads to your church.

A new middle-class church plant in Mississippi experienced a vision hi-jacking when it began to reach lower-class people in its area. The pastor was approached by a group in the church that didn't care for the influx of "those kinds of people." Even though he had cast the vision repeatedly and the leaders seemed to be on board, when the church began reaching people outside of their cultural comfort zone, it resulted in an open rebellion. Because the vision was hi-jacked, eventually a split occurred and the church died a couple of years later. God removed His hand of blessing and the people stopped their evangelistic outreach.

So when someone or a group comes to your asking you to reconsider strategy or goals, it's your job to keep them focused and biblically purposed by explaining to them what God is doing. Help them to see the larger picture of what God is doing in saving the lost. Recast the vision frequently. And help them to see the importance of being patient in times when things are slow. Another evangelism killer is . . .

■ Establishment Pressures.

- The pressures of being an established church can take the focus off of evangelism. So rather than funneling resources and manpower to an evangelistic rally, the nursery or the youth program capture the focus and the finances. It is a natural part of the process for these various demands to compete. Your task as a church planter is to resist the temptation to become so focused internally that you lose your evangelistic passion. Now let's move to . . .

⊕ Methods of Evangelism:²

- There are many methods of doing evangelism that can be taught to and modeled before the growing core group. Some will appear obvious to them, others will perhaps be new ideas. The key is to understand that all are based on the same basic principle of being ready and willing to "give an account of the faith." So you could use . . .

■ Mass Evangelism.

- Public preaching of the gospel, as Paul did in the synagogues or on Mars Hill. This is most obvious in our present context in Billy Graham Crusades or use of television to distribute the gospel

widely. It is most effective when used in conjunction with other, more personal methodologies.

In the Graham crusades today there is an effort to plant churches, working with local denominations and many of the prospects are channeled to new church plants. So mass evangelism is a method to consider. Another method is . . .

■ Cell-Group Evangelism.

- The early church made use of this model – based on small groups in homes – and its effectiveness continues today. In small groups of persons related by blood or interests the gospel can be communicated interactively. Another method to consider is . . .

■ Personal Evangelism.

- This is the direct one-to-one sharing of the gospel that has been often termed "witnessing" by evangelicals. It can take place through various interactions, such as . . .

■ Visitation Evangelism.

- The intentional "house-to-house" witness that takes the church to the world, rather than waiting for it to come to the church.

■ Extemporaneous Evangelism.

- Taking advantage of unexpected encounters with persons in spiritual need.

■ Servanthood Evangelism.

- Offering compassionate, caring help to persons in need in the name of Christ Jesus. These are things the new church can do that will actually soften a community's heart for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Service projects show people that you actually care. Consider cleaning up a local cemetery as a means of honoring those who have died. One church went around town distributing light bulbs which had information about their church and Christ on the package. They went door to door sharing the light bulbs and the light of Christ. Other churches have gone door to door distributing batteries for smoke detectors when Daylight Savings Time comes around. That is the time recommended for changing the batteries. On the battery cover was

■

information about the church and power for living through Jesus Christ.

Servant evangelism familiarizes the people of the community with the church in a kind-hearted way.

■ Friendship Evangelism.

- Sharing with friends met outside of Christian contexts the value of the gospel in your personal life. Many Christians (especially pastors) have no friends outside of the Christian context. It takes an intentional effort to make friends with people outside of our comfort zone, but we need to. We don't just make friends with these people with the sole purpose of converting them. Some of our friends may require a long time before they come to Christ so we persevere. It's about genuine relationships that lead to a relationship with Christ. Another method of personal evangelism is . . .

■ Indirect, or "Subtle" Evangelism.

- Sharing your personal identification with Christ through symbols or signs, such as wearing a cross or decorating your house with symbols of your faith. This can prompt questions that can open the door to witness. Another way to share your faith is through . . .

■ Literary Evangelism.

- Words have been effectively used since the first century to communicate the gospel with non-believers. While tract evangelism can be effective, a more personal "literary" approach might be personal letters or cards. There are many great books that you might share with people who are open to the claims of Christ. And whether we use personal evangelism, mass evangelism, or cell group evangelism, it must all be...

■ Contextual Evangelism.

- Whatever methodology of evangelism we might adopt, it must be contextualized to fit our own cultural situation. All forms of evangelism we use need to be related to the culture if they are to be most effective. For instance . . .

In an African context, many missionaries find great success using mass evangelism. Large rallies are held with preachers and musicians. At some point during the crusade they may show

the Jesus film on a large screen out in the middle of an area where there is no electricity. Using a generator and a video projector, the tribal people see and hear the life of Jesus depicted on the large screen in their native language. In that context, this method of evangelism is very effective. But try and use the same methodology in Japan and it simply won't work. We tend to think that because crusades work in one area they will work in every area. But that's not the case. What works everywhere is the Gospel. But the methods must change to fit the cultural context. In Japan what works is relational evangelism. The context determines the method chosen.

The message never changes, nor does our obligation to share the message. If you are in an affluent Anglo community and people resist your efforts to share Christ, it may offend you that they aren't interested. But that does not take away your responsibility to share the Good News of how Christ died for our sins. He gave His all and He expects no less of us. We are to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5) in a culturally appropriate manner. If the focus of our teaching and preaching is centered around steps to a better marriage or raising children in today's world, then we've missed the heart of what we're to preach. We may make better people but if we don't share Christ we've failed in the task of church planting—and you have failed to give them what will sustain their being better people. Our ultimate task is evangelism. Jesus commanded His followers: "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:45 NIV). Whatever method you decide to use, remember that the content of our message is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The contextual nature of effective evangelism leads to our next discussion:

■ Focusing on the Lost.

... not excluding.

- If you feel the leadership of God to a local area, what is next?

What is the scope of your focus? Are you pinpointing a social class or stratum, a people group, a language group, a profession, a city, etc.?

Be careful not to exclude other groups that may come into your new church. You may target baby-boomers and end up reach a large number of senior adults too. They may not be a part of your focus group but they may enjoy being a part of your church where they can be around young adults and children. So you expand out from the focus group. What you need to determine is . . .

⊕ Who Lives Here?

■ Draw a final focus area map.

- You're asking, "What is the area on which I would like to focus my efforts?" That includes boundaries. For instance, if you're location in on an interstate highway just outside a city, you would draw boundary lines of people you could effectively reach based upon where you are. If you're on the edge of the city in a suburban context you probably won't reach people two or three miles into the city but you may reach people ten to twelve miles out of the city. That's because suburban people will drive to a church that is a similar distance and direction as they drive to their work and entertainment. If you are on the edge of their regular drive they will come to your church. It works differently in an urban context. Most of these churches tend to reach in a circular pattern within a few miles of their location. In addition there are urban boundaries such as socio-economic boundaries, road and highway boundaries, and ethnic boundaries that will determine in that focus area who they will reach. So you need to look at your focus area and ask, "What type of person lives here and what type of person am I trying to reach?" And from there we expand out. Then we need to . . .

■ Research demographics.

- We discover the age, household size, education, median income, housing type, ethnicity, and a variety of other factors that will help in the process of church planting. Be very careful to avoid making "the average mistake" in demographics. For instance, if you look for the average age in a community and discover it to be 35-40 year old people, that average may come from a large group of younger people and a large group of older people. In the middle of those two groups is the average of 35-40 year olds. But there may be very few of them in the area. The average age may be a minority age. So be careful not to make "the average mistake." In that area you need to look more specifically to certain locations and carefully determine who lives there.

In this day of church planting, more and more church planters are focusing on upwardly mobile middle-class suburbanites. And there is inherently nothing wrong with that strategy if that is God's calling. If that is where God has called you, that is where you should go. Remember however, that God also has a special burden for the cities of North America. Recall the scene of Jesus as He looked over the city of Jerusalem and He wept. Jesus had a special burden for that city. So as you consider and pray over an area in which to serve, also consider the cities of North America.

New churches tend to attract people from a lower economic strata. So if you plan to plant a church in an affluent area, you are more likely to reach those people on the lower level of affluence. Sometimes this comes as a surprise to a church planter. Their expectation is to reach whoever is there, but generally it doesn't work that way. Usually people on the lower end of the economic strata of a given area will attend the new church plant. Over time the church begins to look like its neighborhood (as it should). So the planter focusing in on "Rich Roger" may actually be called by God to focus in on "Average Al." It's a matter of defining what God has called you to do. And to do that effectively you need to . . .

- **Understand the "average" person of your subgroup.**

- This idea came to the forefront when Rick Warren published *The Purpose Driven Church*. In that book he talks about "Saddleback Sam." There's a picture of Saddleback Sam where he is depicted as being satisfied with this life, his job, his leisure activities, and he gave a basic description of his interests. And that's a good approach to defining your target group. When you do this you will need to gather demographic, financial, socio-economic, and cultural information. In addition you need to study the spiritual and ecclesiological patterns of the area. Where do they go to church? Are there church buildings in the area that are more like museums than houses of worship? Is it a Catholic area where people have stopped attending the church? One thing you'll discover is a greater openness by the people when you try to understand them before you try to reach them. Watch this clip as we think about how church planters understand an area and then fish for men . . .

Video: Reaching people in the Miami area

In our culture and even in our emerging postmodern age, there is an openness that people have towards spiritual things. On the other hand, they seem to be rejecting the church. Great numbers of people are not interested in the established church. In the early 1990s there was a brief increase in church attendance in North America, but it was quickly lost. Effective evangelism comes from the call of Jesus for us to be "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Let me share with you some fishing guidelines written by Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church*:

⊕ **5 Fishing Guidelines³**

- **Know what you are fishing for.**

- You've got to know what kind of people you're fishing for. A real fisherman knows about what kinds of fish are biting in a given area. If you fish for crappie it requires different equipment

than catfish. Fishing for bass is different than fishing for salmon. In addition, he knows the best time of the day for fishing. A real fisherman knows fish. And the church planter must know the facts about who he is trying to reach. In addition you must . . .

- **Go where the fish are biting.**

- A real fisherman knows exactly where the fish bite. He knows how to maneuver a boat up into the brush and weeds where the fish are feeding. Where are the fish biting in our world? Sometimes they're biting in the spirituality section of Barnes & Noble. They are biting at self-help and support groups. These are places where the church planter can connect along a common interest. So you've got to go where the fish are biting.

- **Learn to think like a fish.**

- A real fisherman knows that some fish prefer still water to running water. Some hide in weeds while others prefer to go under rocks. Some prefer minnows with others want blood bait. You've got to understand how they think. As seminary and Bible college graduates, we tend to lose the ability to understand lost and unchurched people. We have come to understand the deeper things of Christ's atonement and His sacrificial death on the cross for our sin and it moves us to profound emotion and gratitude. And so we think others will express that same sense of gratefulness when they see their sin in the light of a holy God, drawing them to repentance. But they don't. They don't think like you. Rick Warren used the example of church advertisement designed to reach the community:

Take a church ad that announces "Preaching the Inerrant Word of God!" Such a statement certainly doesn't appeal to unbelievers. Personally, I consider the inerrancy of Scripture to be a non-negotiable belief, but the unchurched don't even understand the term. And for the church planter it is critical to be able to understand how the people think. You may mistakenly make the assumption that lost people are miserable without Christ. You may think they will rush to accept what you want to share. But the fact is, it doesn't usually work that way. The lost world generally sees itself as happy—at least happier than those who practice Christianity. Our task is to understand how they think and draw them to a greater depth in the thought processes, thinking about the broader issues of sin and death, and heaven and hell, and God's great love for mankind.

■ **Catch fish on their terms.**

- A real fisherman will go fishing at times that are uncomfortable to catch a fish. They get up very early and travel down bumpy, dusty dirt road to get to the fishing hole. If you're serious about fishing you will go to any lengths to catch a fish. They don't come to you; you must go to them! And that's the challenge for the church planter. What are the terms of the fish in our culture? Today's fish are looking for personal meaning. They want to come to know God better. And these are beginning points from which we can work with them and lead them to faith in Christ. Whatever their terms may be, eventually we always bring them to the cross. Another thing a good fisherman knows is that you . .

■ **Use more than one hook.⁴**

- Rick Warren wrote: Where I grew up, using more than one hook was called "trotline fishing." It consisted of attaching multiple hooks to a single fishing line. The concept was that the more hooks you have in the water, the more fish you're likely to catch.

Church planters discover the idea of multiple hooks in reaching a community. A telephone invitation followed up by a direct mail campaign and a large billboard in front of the church location are all multiple hooks to draw the fish. This is why it is critical to understand any potential areas of connection to the people in your community. Follow the fishing guidelines and your church plant should be filled with fish.

The ultimate focus of every church is to reach the whole world for Christ. The way we do that is to . . .

Look for receptive/responsive people: transitional and under pressure.

- These people are looking for answers and peace in their lives. From there we develop an evangelistic strategy to reach them. Look at this clip . . .

Video: Finding and reaching needs

In our next session we're going to speak more specifically on how the new church plant reaches needs, finds points of contact and connection, while reaching out to lost people with a well planned strategy for evangelism.

