

# 3 Step

## Enlisting Missional Partners

by John Shepherd

*“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3, NIV).*

The process of enlisting missional planters can be daunting. Most church planting leaders would report that the most important factor in the success or failure of the plant is the church planter. Leadership is the *sine qua non* (beginning element) of the church plant—the essential element that is necessary for all others.

Should this surprise us? Absolutely not! Throughout Scripture, God calls men and women for His purposes. Great things happen through these great leaders. The stories in Scripture are stories of a perfect God working through imperfect men and women. The apostle Paul is an example of a church planting leader. Paul is not the only model of a church planter—Peter planted churches in Asia Minor, for example. However, we will use Paul as a model for enlisting missionary planters.

The Bible reveals that God uses two primary means for selecting leaders. First, God Himself chooses the leader. Some examples where God directly invited individuals to join Him in His redemptive mission were: Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4), Moses (Ex. 3:1-4:17), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-13), and Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Second, God uses certain spiritual leaders to identify those through whom He desires to work to accomplish His mission in the world. Some of the leaders God used to identify other leaders through whom He was going to work were: Jethro advising his son-in-law (Ex. 18), Samuel anointing David (1 Sam. 16:1-13), Jesus selecting the twelve (Luke 6:12-16), the Jerusalem church selecting seven deacons (Acts 6:1-7), and Paul selecting traveling partners who would eventually start new churches. Some of Paul’s companions included Timothy (Acts 16:1-5), Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-26), and Erastus (Acts 19:21-22).

Defining leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena. Hundreds of books and magazines are published each year on the subject of leadership, yet there seems to be no universally

accepted understanding of what a leader is or does. Without clearly understanding their role, leaders are doomed to failure. Likewise, without a clear picture of what church planters should be and do, those involved in their assessment and selection process are destined to make costly mistakes without some clarity from the outset.

### What Is Leadership?

Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus report that they have discovered over 850 different definitions of leadership.<sup>1</sup> Is it any wonder that today's leaders are so uncertain about how they measure up? There are simply too many criteria to meet. Three definitions demonstrate the diversity of opinions about and insights into leadership. Leadership is a person's ability to influence others. The key task of Christian leadership is influencing God's people toward God's purposes. A Christian leader is called by God to lead, and is one who leads through a Christlike character and demonstrates the competencies that allows effective leadership to take place. Each of these definitions bring a different perspective on the leadership function. However, what each of them lacks is the aspect of results or consequences of a leader's actions. Leaders without followers are not leaders. Similarly, in order to be a church planter, one must be able to gather and lead a team of people to plant a church. And one cannot effectively plant a church without first and foremost being a spiritual leader.

So, what is spiritual leadership? In its purest form, spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda. This brief definition incorporates several principles from the previous definitions, but it also contains five distinct elements that church planters must understand and practice if they want to be effective spiritual leaders.

The church planter's first and most fundamental task is "to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be."<sup>2</sup> That is influence. When church planters have done their jobs effectively, the people around them have encountered God and obeyed Him. Second, church planters "depend on the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> The paradox for church planters is that God calls them to do something that ultimately only He can do. They seek to influence people toward God's will, all the while understanding that only the Holy Spirit through them can accomplish the task. Third, church planters "are accountable to God."<sup>4</sup> Spiritual leaders are responsible for influencing people to do God's will. Until they do this, church planters have not fulfilled their role as spiritual leaders. Fourth, church planters "influence all people, not just God's people."<sup>5</sup> Church planters must be able to connect with nonbelievers and believers alike if they are working to plant a church.

The fifth aspect is that church planters "work from God's agenda."<sup>6</sup> Many times the greatest obstacle to effective church planting is church planters pursuing their own agendas (or the agendas of denominational leaders) rather than God's. God is constantly working around the world to advance His kingdom and to achieve His purposes. God does not build a church planter's kingdom but needs to build His own kingdom through those who feel His leading to start new churches. Thus, the key to effective church planting and spiritual leadership is for the planter to discern and act on God's will for them, their new church, and their community.

With an understanding of how spiritual leadership is measured (results or fruit), the writers of Scripture as well as present-day authors address four key elements to effective spiritual leadership. They are:

1. A leader's call
2. A leader's character
3. A leader's competencies
4. The consequences of their leadership.

### Enlisting Missional Planters

Enlisting missional church planters is a two-step process. First, the task is to encourage Christians to consider participation in church planting. These Christians might be the lead church planters. Others might be core team members or staff. This process includes creating a climate for church planting, raising the awareness of believers and churches, and teaching the biblical principles of church multiplication.

The second part of enlisting missional planters includes the determination of roles. Central to the enlistment process is the idea that not all will be lead church planters. Not everyone is called or gifted in such a way to be the lead planter. However, they may be geared to serve on a team, be part of a core group, or perhaps be involved in a parent church. Everyone can be involved in church planting but not everyone can plant a church. Thus, enlisting missional church planters involves casting a vision for church multiplication, both to potential lead planters and to others interested in determining their fit in planting churches.

There are two types of leaders in a church planting context: The catalytic church planter and the founding pastor/church planter. The primary role of the catalytic church planter is to initiate multiple congregations in multiple contexts. By God's design, the catalytic planter is more missional in nature and is passionate about being a missionary planter if he tends to be best suited for mapping various expressions of church.

While catalytic church planters are ideal for the initial phase of a new church, they tend to become counter-productive if left to develop and grow the new congregation. The founding pastor does what is necessary to get a new church started, but tends to do his best when developing and growing the congregation. Often times a founding pastor plants a more institutional church in that it is characterized by staff, budgets, and buildings. Both types of church planters are important in the North American context.

### His Call

The apostle Paul was a prolific writer, brilliant theologian, and perhaps the greatest church planting missionary in the history of Christianity. However, if you were sitting on the church planting committee of the Antioch church and considering Paul for his first church planting assignment would the decision have been an easy one? What attributes did Paul possess that would have made his selection to serve as a church planter a no-brainer for the committee? Let's look closely at his call to ministry, his character, his leadership competencies, and the consequences of his leadership.

Paul did not start out his life wanting to be a missionary. In fact, before he met Christ, Saul of Tarsus was a power-hungry religious zealot determined to eradicate Christians, and ultimately Christianity, from the

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face of the earth. The more Saul tried to stop the spread of Christianity the more he ended up advancing the purposes of God. Sadly for Saul, God was at work all around him but he had missed God completely. God began to penetrate his heart nonetheless. Perhaps, the event that most piqued Saul's conscience was the stoning of Stephen. As Saul later stormed toward Damascus, he could not erase the memory of how Stephen had died while he held the cloaks of those who had murdered him (Acts 7:59). Perhaps, the words of Stephen kept ringing in his ears: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60). The Lord finally brought Saul to a screeching halt when he met Him face-to-face on the road to Damascus. This almost instantaneous, life-changing encounter with the resurrected Christ (Acts 9, 22, and 26) changed Saul and ultimately the course of church history forever.

After Paul's dramatic conversion, he was convinced that he had received an unmistakable call from God to a particular ministry—"to carry God's name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul understood that the purpose for which he had been created and called (Rom. 8:28) was to take the gospel into new territories to unreached peoples (Rom. 1:1-5; 15:20). Since there were no local churches established in the places where he would be serving, a supernatural byproduct of his efforts would be the establishment of new congregations. According to John Worcester, Paul "combined quick strike evangelism with church planting. The wedding of these two powerful methodologies made a rapid impact and established reproducing churches that continued to make an impact for generations."<sup>7</sup>

Understanding one's call to a particular ministry was of utmost importance to Paul, as evidenced by the number of times (45) he used some form of the word "call." From my own church planting experience and the experiences of hundreds of other planters I have interacted with, no attribute is more essential to the success of the planter and, in turn, the church plant than an unwavering sense that God has called you to plant a church in a particular place at a particular time. Often, waves of disappointment come crashing down on you, and there is no logical reason to carry on. The one constant that will keep a planter from quitting more than any other is the certainty of a divine call.

If you are going to enlist missional church planters, it is important to understand that they must be certain of their own call. Often pastors, staff, and laypeople in established churches are anxious in a way that they feel they should go out and plant a church. Often, that is a frustration rather than a calling of God. A call involves direction of the Lord to do a certain thing (plant a church), in a certain place (in Vancouver, for example), among a certain people (blue-collar workers), at a certain time. Paul's call was to Hellenistic Gentiles near Jewish synagogues in areas not yet reached. Every planter needs a similar clarity of call.

## His Character

Church planters, like other devoted followers of Christ, have historically lived by a distinctively Christian code of ethics. Character is the most important part of any church planter. It will make or break his ministry and determine the consequences of his leadership. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the apostle lists several qualities that need to be present in Christian leaders. Paul like other Christian leaders, demonstrated a way of treating people and completing tasks that reflected the character of Christ. To be an effective Christian and church planter, we must adopt the servant-leader mentality and lifestyle of Jesus. Paul wrote, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant

... He humbled Himself. . .” (Phil. 2:5:8). As Paul obeyed God, Christ’s character was formed in him through the sufferings he endured, some of which he listed in 2 Corinthians 11. Clearly, the perseverance he learned led to his Christlikeness. “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

## His Competencies

For anyone who truly feels called to a church planting ministry, a study of the life and ministry of Paul is a must. In fact, Paul invites the readers of his letters to “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NCV). What was it about Paul’s life and ministry that made him an example worth following? What competencies and characteristics of “Paul the Planter” can enrich the life and ministry of church planters today?

Charles Ridley sought to define what makes a church planter successful. He studied church planters from several denominations and found that church planters tended to share certain characteristics. As such, he developed an assessment tool to help church planters (and those who enlist them) to determine if they have church planting potential. The Selection Interviewing for Church Planters has been shown to be effective. According to one study of 600 church planters, those who have participated in a Selection Interviewing for Church Planters lead churches that are substantially larger than those who have not been assessed.<sup>8</sup> All other factors being equal, including an assessment in the enlistment process is good stewardship of kingdom resources.

The assessment is a four-hour interview with a potential church planter and his spouse, if applicable. A trained assessor probes the personality and temperament of the couple and provides a report on their potential as church planters. The purpose of assessment is to develop and implement a process that will enable our partners to select those who are called by God to plant churches and have proven through past experiences, behaviors that clearly indicate they are capable of planting a multiplying church.

The selection process involves four main components:

**Discovery Tools.** The *Discovery Tools* booklet provides a potential church planting candidate with a self-assessment. It helps the potential planter look at spiritual gifts, personality type, passions, work habits, and more. This and all of our resources are free of charge.

**Pre-assessment Interview** with a state convention partner. This meeting helps both candidate and sponsor to verify the calling of the individual to the best of his ability and discernment. The same interview also appraises character issues and talks about the right “fit” for the church planting field and for the potential planter.

**Assessment** with state convention leaders. The *Church Planter Assessment* aids in finding one’s competency for the church planting task.

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**Final Interview.** This interview addresses location and supervisory relationships and seeks to establish the chemistry of the relationships involved. At this step, important issues of sponsorship, plans, and other issues are addressed. If the church plant is to receive funding, these issues are also addressed at this point.

The importance of this process cannot be understated. The assessor training manual points out three reasons why selection is important. First, it means good stewardship of resources. Assessment reduces the risk of poorly investing God's resources. Second, good selection means better results with potential planters. Finally, good assessment means reducing negative impact on the planter, the planter's family, the parent church, the association, and on the community itself.

During the four-hour interview, the assessor asks open-ended questions related to 13 key categories. The categories are based on Charles Ridley's and Robert Logan's Church Planter Performance Profile, though the assessment materials adjust some of the category titles.<sup>9</sup>

The categories are:

- Visioning capacity
- Intrinsically motivated
- Creates ownership
- Relates to lost people and non-churched believers
- Spousal cooperation
- Effectively builds relationships
- Committed to church (kingdom) growth
- Responsive to community
- Utilizes giftedness of others
- Flexible and adaptable
- Builds group cohesiveness
- Resilience
- Exercises faith

Assessors may also investigate two additional categories: financial responsibility and capacity for socio-cultural adaptability.<sup>10</sup>

Following this intensive interview as the assessor tries to discern each area with the individual or couple, he or she prepares a report. In the report, the assessor assigns a score between one and five to each area. A score of one means the candidate is definitely not qualified. A score of three means some relevant behavior is present, and a score of five means that plenty of relevant behavior is present. In addition to the score, the assessor includes comments relating to the score.<sup>11</sup> Ideally, the comments are developmental in nature, with suggestions for future growth and training. In his or her summary, the assessor recommends one of five things: that the candidate be a lead church planter, a church planting team member, a catalytic church

planter, that the candidate not be recommended, or he be redirected to another ministry option.

The *Church Planter Assessment* is a valuable tool for several reasons. First, it has been shown to be highly accurate. Through extensive use, results have shown that the 13 factors involved in the assessment are critical to a church planter's success. Another reason for the success of the assessment tool is the qualification and training of assessors. Most assessors have some church planting and ministry experience. They pray about their interviews and seek to build a potential church planter up, not disqualify them from ministry. Finally, the assessors are trained extensively.

Resources such as Ridley and Logan's *Training for Selection Interviewing* provide foundations. The Mentoring Team of the Church Planting Group of NAMB uses a two-stage training with a set of three videos containing five hours of training for Level Two.

The purpose of the assessment process is to find the right people. Throughout this guide, we have been looking at Paul as our model. Thus, we are looking for planters with some similarities to Paul. The assessment process helps find those people.

### Starting Points for Enlisting Missional Planters

- Discovery Tools* self-assessment
- Pre-assessment by state partner
- The *Church Planter Assessment*
- Final interview

#### Additional Resources

1. Visit [www.ChurchPlantingVillage.net](http://www.ChurchPlantingVillage.net) for additional resources on "Enlisting Missional Planters."
2. *Discovery Tools* may be ordered, free, by e-mail at [CPGresources@namb.net](mailto:CPGresources@namb.net).
3. For consultation for enlisting missional planters contact the Recruitment Team of the Church Plant Group, NAMB.

#### Books for further Reading

Ridley, Charles R. *How to Select Church Planters*. Pasadena: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988.

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21 Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992.

Mannoia, Kevin. *Church Planting: The Next Generation*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Light and Life Communication, 1994.

Nevius, John L. *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1958.

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### Notes

1. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) p. 4.
2. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), p. 20.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
7. John Worcester, "A Study of the Apostle Paul?" Available at <http://www.churchplanting.net/resources/>. Accessed August 1, 2002. Permission given.
8. Ed Stetzer, *The Impact of the Church Planting Process and Other Selected Factors on the Attendance of Southern Baptist Church Plants*, Phd. Diss., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003.
9. See Charles R. Ridley and Robert E. Logan, *Training for Selection Interviewing, Participant's Manual* (Alpharetta, Ga.: North American Mission Board, SBC), n.d. See pp. 92-96, especially.
10. *Assessment Training, Level One* (Alpharetta, Ga., North American Mission Board, SBC), pp. 15-18.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.