

PEYTON JONES

CHURCH PLANTOLOGY

**THE ART AND SCIENCE
OF PLANTING CHURCHES**

Few people can talk about church planting the way Peyton does. He is the quintessentially reflective practitioner who has pretty much tried all the innovative ideas that he articulately proposes in this book. In my opinion, *Church Plantology* is destined to become essential reading for anyone interested in church planting in Western, post-Christian cultural contexts. This book is an expression of who Peyton Jones is—*outstanding!*

Alan Hirsch, author of numerous award-winning books on missional movement, leadership, and spirituality; founder of Movement Leaders Collective, Forge Mission Training Network, and the 5Q Collective

From one of our Exponential family members comes a road map for multiplication that starts with a strong, principle-centered foundation. To accomplish level 5, movements-based multiplication, planters must value and prioritize multiplication from day one. Strategic gurus tell us to “start with the end in mind,” and this is what Peyton Jones outlines in this comprehensive book on planting. Like all the books in the Exponential series, *Church Plantology* will help shift the number of churches that multiply for years to come.

Todd Wilson, president and CEO of Exponential

In *Church Plantology*, Peyton Jones provides an incredibly comprehensive resource on all the significant topics surrounding church planting. If you are a church planter or a network leader who works with planters, this book is an absolute must-read. Don't plant a church without first digesting the insights in this book and allowing them to shape the way you plant churches.

Brad Brisco, author of *Missional Essentials* and *Covocational Church Planting*

Peyton Jones has delivered a master class in the art and science of church planting. *Church Plantology* is packed with light-bulb moments that help planters and their teams recognize their unique wiring and gifting and understand why they do what they do and feel what they feel. But Peyton doesn't leave it at theory; he walks the planter through the all-too-messy but absolutely crucial stages and challenges they'll encounter in the planting process. Thoroughly biblical, imminently practical, and engagingly readable, *Church Plantology* is destined to become the go-to source for both the philosophy and practicality of church planting for this generation.

Tom Bennardo, executive director of the Synergy Church Planting Network, author of *The Honest Guide to Church Planting*

Peyton Jones brings first-century biblical insights to bear on twenty-first century church planting challenges, illustrated with practical examples and seasoned with wisdom. Recalibrate your church planting compass by reading *Church Plantology*!

Craig Ott, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School,
coauthor of *Global Church Planting*

By returning to the New Testament for the purpose of fierce integration, Peyton has written a book that feels remarkably modern, even new. His best book yet, *Church Plantology* is both fresh and rooted, a gift to the church.

Brian Sanders, founder of the Underground, author
of *Underground Church* and *Microchurches*

Peyton Jones's latest book, *Church Plantology*, is the intersection of biblical truth, best missionary practices, and church history. This book is a church planting textbook with everything you need to know about how to start a new church. If you're considering planting a church, this is a must-read book.

Dave Ferguson, lead pastor of Community Christian
Church, coauthor of *B.L.E.S.S.: 5 Everyday Ways
to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*

Leaders of church planting organizations often decry how impractical seminary training is for church planters and missionaries. There are few church planting textbooks that encapsulate what it looks like to plant churches in the twenty-first century. Even fewer are the ones that tie together theology with actual theory and practice. But I assure you that none have the candid, creative, and down-to-earth writing style of Peyton Jones. *Church Plantology* is robust for the guild and practical for the field!

Daniel Yang, director of the Send Institute

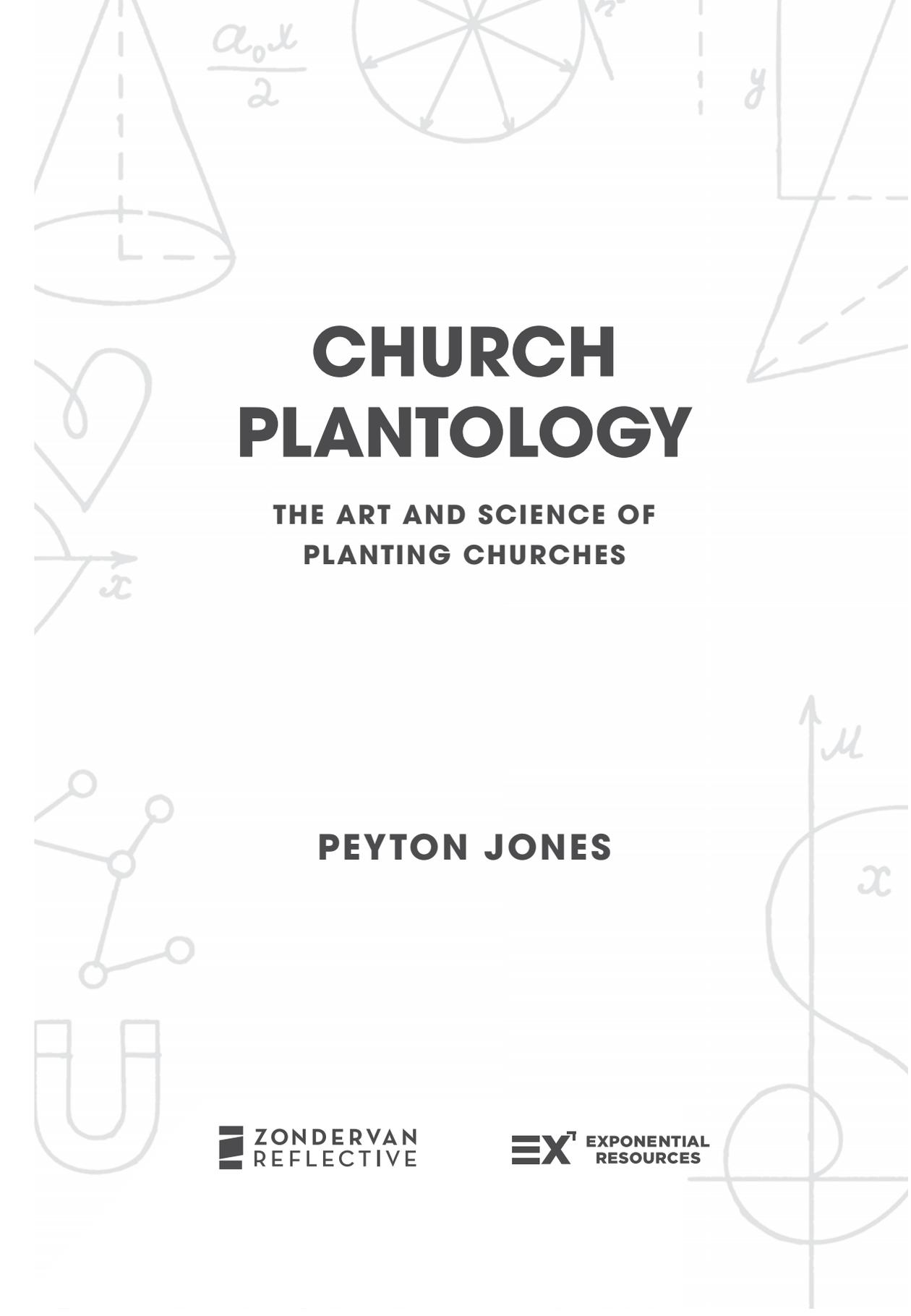
Many of the books and resources on church planting were written for a different time and a different place in history. If you are looking for a fresh introduction to church planting for today's world, *Church Plantology* is that book!

Winfield Bevins, director of church planting at
Asbury Seminary, author of *Marks of a Movement*

Since I'm a dedicated disciple-maker and church-multiplier, it was nearly impossible to find "family" with church growth ministry peers, until I encountered Exponential, that is. One of my first Exponential friends was Peyton Jones. He is, however, a disruptor. Read this book cautiously because you won't be the same afterward—and that's a good thing!

Ralph Moore, founder of Hope Chapel churches

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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF
PLANTING CHURCHES

PEYTON JONES

 ZONDERVAN
REFLECTIVE

 EX^T EXPONENTIAL
RESOURCES

ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE

Church Plantology

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*To my first and consistent church planting partner through
the years, my wife Andrea, who reminds me of something
Ginger Rogers said regarding her dancing partnership
with Fred Astaire, "Just remember that everything
Fred did, I did backwards, and in high heels."*

Bilbo Baggins:

You can promise that I will come back?

Gandalf:

No. And if you do, you will not be the same.

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FOREWORD

Ministry has its foundation in theology with Jesus as the cornerstone. Yet the framing of ministry—the beliefs and activities that give shape and formation to how a church will evangelize and disciple in a particular context—involves both science *and* art.

Science be helpful to any church planter. I wrote my PhD dissertation examining 602 church planters and looking at their work over four years, asking questions to determine which factors affected attendance, conversions, becoming self-sufficient, and more. Those findings provided useful insights to develop more effective tools and trainings for church planting.

Here's an example of what I learned. At that time, people debated whether attending church planting boot camps made any difference. The planters surveyed were recent seminary grads—half of whom went to boot camp after finishing their three-year degree. We compared those who went to the boot camp to those who did not, and comparing planters with the same training—minus the three-day boot camp—revealed a clear statistical difference. The churches with planters who attended the boot camps showed significant growth and vitality compared to those without that experience. This suggested that while a seminary degree is important, laying a necessary theological foundation for gospel ministry, those three days of focused training at boot camp answered a number of specific (and practical) questions for the planters that helped them thrive.

Many church planters send out mailers or create Facebook ads. But what's the typical response to a mailer? If I send out fifty thousand, how many people will likely attend or check out my website? What percentage of people will click on my Facebook ads? Research can show you what results to anticipate. These are all examples of how science can help church planters. And the science of research isn't the only science useful to church planters. Social science can help as well. Early in the twentieth century, Arthur Flake taught what was called Flake's Formula, or "Flake's Five." He laid out five simple principles for the Sunday school that helped thousands of churches grow. Later, the church

growth movement focused on missiology under Donald McGavran. Over time, as the movement became more westernized, it engaged more of the social sciences. Eventually it led to methodological mania, overemphasizing the science to the point where there was a formula for everything.

Science is an aspect of common grace. It is neither bad nor sinful to utilize science, and formulas and strategies have helped many planters become more effective at ministry. I understand why some believe we shouldn't use such tools, describing it as sheer pragmatism (as if pragmatism was bad in and of itself). But the real problem is when science trumps theology. When churches and church planters rely more on the sciences than the Savior, they worship the created rather than the Creator. That's a problem.

If used correctly, science and research can help us, and in this book you will find some of the most current and helpful science to aid you in church planting. Peyton Jones lays out the facts, and facts are our friends—whether we like what they tell us or not. His handling of the research will help you see both the grim realities we face and the latent opportunities we dare not miss. He uses research to help us better understand how the early church grew exponentially and how that same growth could happen today.

But science will take us only so far. Peyton also unpacks how planting is an art. This book pushes the reader back to the first century, to a time when planting was driven more by the Spirit than science. I've seen people who were effective at planting a church in one location, but when they went to a new place, they struggled. This is where the art—the nonmechanistic, nonscientific aspect of planting—comes into play. And much of the art of planting is about developing our ability to join in what the Spirit of God is sovereignly working. Here Peyton leans on the example of Paul, who awaited divine opportunities in his own church planting work.

Peyton writes, "Plantology involves the overlap of biblical principles, best missionary experience and practice, and church history." Church planting today must recapture both the science and the art of planting. Your dependency on the power of the gospel, the Word, and the work of the Spirit can overcome some of the weaknesses in your strategy. Learning to rely on the Holy Spirit is one of the glaring truths of Acts, and this reliance allows a planter to be molded by the Lord into the person God can use most effectively.

When we overemphasize the science, we risk turning ministry into a trade show: "The Fifty Tools to Plant a Church" or "Here's How to Do a Mailer." Resources can be good and helpful, but "Instachurch: Just Add Water" doesn't work. Cultivating the art of planting—by answering the call, understanding our giftedness, recognizing the wind of the Spirit, and prayerfully depending

on the Spirit's empowerment—means that we are in tune with where God is moving and what he is doing. Like Isaiah, we exclaim: "Here I am! send me." We hunger to be part of God's mission in the world.

I'm a researcher who relies on the science. But as you will read in these pages, effective church planting means trusting the promptings of the Holy Spirit, walking in obedience, and living in a missional way. As Peyton writes, "God is more concerned with what he can do in his servants than what he will ever do through them." He reminds us that God's math is different. We sow and we reap; God gives the increase. It's easy to get caught up in using the tools and forget to rely on the Spirit. But we can do both! We can walk and chew gum at the same time!

Jesus said we are to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. In wisdom we use the best resources and information available to us while innocently, like a child, depending by faith on the Lord to guide and bless our service to him. And this book will help you do that.

Ed Stetzer

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, Exponential, the largest library of multiplication resources in the world, gathered the heads of the biggest church planting networks and denominations to discuss the current crisis of the American church as reflected in two independent studies conducted on church growth. Eighty percent of churches in America are plateaued or in decline. Out of the 20% left, only 7% grew by planting new congregations to carry the torch into the future. So 93% of the church is no longer reproducing itself. The church in America is in trouble.

The youth have already leaked out of the 16% of attractional churches that grow by adding numbers to the megachurch. However, that's not the most disturbing statistic. Although 4% were reproducing churches (meaning they'd planted a church or a handful of churches), they could only locate one example of a church operating at an exponential *level-5 multiplication*. Exponential has introduced the paradigm of church multiplication on a scale of 1 to 5.¹ Level 5 is the level of multiplication. Level 5 churches are multiplying on multiple strands out to at least the fourth generation, meaning you plant a church that plants a church, that plants a church, that plants a church. Level 1 churches are subtracting (or shrinking), level 2 churches have plateaued, and level 3 churches are growing by addition.

Level 1—A church that is in decline (symbolized by a – sign)

Level 2—A church that has plateaued (symbolized by an = sign)

Level 3—A church that is growing by addition, or merely increasing in size (symbolized by + sign)

Level 4—A church that has reproduced by planting a campus or church (symbolized by a / sign)

1. Todd Wilson, *Multipliers: Leading Beyond Addition* (Centerville, VA: Exponential, 2019), 21–23.

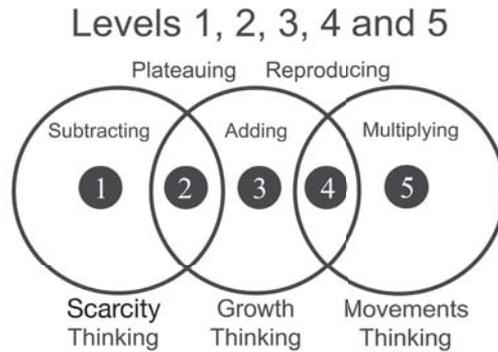
Level 5—A church that has multiplied to the fourth generation (symbolized by a x sign)

Sadly, 80% of the churches in America are at level 1 and 2, either shrinking or plateaued. At the moment, 16% of the churches in America are growing by addition. Level 3 churches reached a zenith during the church growth movement but have also experienced self-limiting growth barriers due to the model itself. Level 4 churches reproduce either by multisite or church planting, but their growth is not yet multiplication. Only 7% of US churches currently reproduce.

At levels 1 and 2 the message is *Please stay*.

At levels 3 and 4 the message is *Please come*.

At level 5 the faith community is a launchpad saying *Please GO!*



Jerusalem qualified as a multiplying church, just as Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome eventually would in the first century. In forty years, the early church turned the world upside down, so why does the number of multiplying churches now register at one?

In order to have kingdom expansion on the level of the first century, you need multiplying churches, but to have those, you need multiplying leaders. That's where the whole thing bottlenecks. The solution to the problem facing the Western church was to identify level-5 multiplying leaders in order to observe what they did and pass down that knowledge to the next generation.

The problem was that when the Exponential team sent out scouts to locate as many level-5 churches as they could, they returned empty handed. They then lowered their expectations to finding only twenty-five level-5 multiplying leaders. When that turned out to be a fruitless endeavor, they searched for ten. After not being able to locate even five level-5 multipliers after scouring American churches, they found only one.

His name was Ralph Moore, and he'd planted a number of churches from California to Hawaii over a long and fruitful ministry. So far, after discipling three leaders at a time for over fifty years, the current tally of church plants going back to Ralph is 2,730 churches at the time of this writing. The number continues to increase.

The most shocking thing was not how many churches Ralph multiplied, but that in the entire US, there was only one contender. The majority of church structures do not allow for the development of level-5 leaders. For all the leadership development information planters read in book after book, they're missing what made the first-century church planters excel. For somebody who is devoted to the advancement of the church, the next part is hard to say, but for someone devoted to the preservation of the status quo, it is even harder to hear. Today's model of church aims at building upward, whereas the first-century church was wired to expand outward. As form follows function, today's leaders graduate seminary proficient in discoursing upon what the apostles did thousands of years ago as chronicled in the pages of Acts, but they are unable to *do* nearly any of it.

How was the greatest church planter able to plant at breakneck speed so that he could boast "I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel" from Jerusalem to Macedonia (Rom. 15:19 ESV)? How can we recapture that momentum and make sure that there isn't just one movement of multiplication in America, but an army of movement makers? The answers to these questions are simple, but we cannot accomplish the goal by continuing to engage in ministry as usual. The types of leaders who will catalyze movements must detonate their cushy ministries, and hit the self-destruct button on the status quo if they are to become the type of movements we frequently talk about yet rarely see. Few are willing to pay the price that Paul, Wesley, or Zinzendorf did, and therefore, we fail to put into practice what we desire. Church planting is costly. Level-5 multiplication is costlier still.

I have trained church planters for over fifteen years, and I have grown along the way. I would like to apologize to my first trainees. I didn't know then what I know now. To those reading this book, I'm sorry that I still don't know everything planters need to learn, for my journey has not yet come to an end. Michelangelo is rumored to have signed a sketch he was working on at age eighty-seven with the inscription "*Ancora Imparo*," translated into English as "I'm still learning."

Therefore,
Ancora Imparo,

WHAT IS CHURCH PLANTOLOGY?

Rip it out!

—JOHN KEATING

In the classic film *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays Mr. John Keating, a first-year literature teacher at Welton Academy, a hundred-year-old Ivy League prep school for young men. The four pillars of Welton are chanted in unison at their first assembly, “Tradition! Honor! Discipline! Excellence!”

On the second day of class, Mr. Keating asks one of the students to read an excerpt from their textbook *Understanding Poetry* by Dr. J. Evans Pritchard, Ph.D. explaining meter, rhyme, and figures of speech. Pritchard suggests a system for plotting “a poem’s score for perfection” using horizontal and vertical graphs to reveal whether the poem is “truly great.”

Mr. Keating interrupts the student, shocking the class with the following monologue:

Excrement.

That’s what I think of Mr. J. Evans Pritchard.

We’re not laying pipe.

We’re talking about poetry.

How can you describe poetry like American Bandstand?

“Oh, I like Byron. I give him a 42, but I can’t dance to it.”

Now, I want you to rip out that page.

The students look up at him in disbelief, then look around at each other to gauge the appropriate reaction. Keating continues:

Go on!
 Rip out the entire page.
 You heard me. Rip it out.
 [He raises his voice] Rip it out! Go on.
 Rip it out!

As you read this textbook, I want to hear the sound of ripping. Much of what has passed as church planting instruction doesn't make the grade when boots hit the ground. Much of what is taught on planting in seminaries and classrooms could be likened to studying poetry with J. Evans Pritchard's metric versus being carried away by the passion of the apostles when planting churches.

Mr. Keating urges the students to keep ripping straight through the entire introduction:

"Keep ripping, gentlemen! This is a battle. A war. And the casualties could be your hearts and souls. . . . Be gone Mr. J. Evans Pritchard!"

I would like to see much of the church planting curriculum that has been taught to planters move to the history department to be studied as what church planters used to do. Keating assures the students, "It's not the Bible. You're not gonna go to hell for this."

Finally, he looks at them with that gleam in his eyes, "Now, my class, you will learn to think for yourselves again."¹ Much of what we believe about church planting is because we've inherited a system that is built on something that no longer works: the church growth movement. Even as the church is sinking in the West, it continues to cling to this failed movement like a lifesaving ring made of iron. Much of what is called church planting is really church growth packaged as an ecclesial business startup.

According to data from Pew Research studies conducted in 2012 to 2019, only 65% of people polled in America identify as Christians. In 1990, 85% identified as Christian; this statistic marks a 20% decline in thirty years. Perhaps even more concerning is that from 1990 to 2001, the number dropped 4% in eleven years, maintaining a similar drop of 3% from 2001 to 2012, but plummeting by a drastic 12% during the last seven years. If this trend continues, the Christian population of 167 million in this country will continue to drop drastically.²

1. *Dead Poets Society*, produced by Steven Haft, directed by Peter Weir (Touchstone, 1989).

2. "American Religious Identification Survey," CUNY Graduate Center, https://web.archive.org/web/20110709082644/http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm; "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America's changing religious

Against this backdrop, Lifeway Research conducted a study in 2014 concluding, “More than 4,000 new churches opened their doors in 2014, outpacing the 3,700 that closed, according to estimates from the Nashville-based research organization based on input from 34 denominational statisticians.”³ Although I don’t question the quantitative figures they received, I question whether the qualitative data ruled out the possibility of multiple denominations claiming the same church plants in reporting their data. Every year, networks and denominations report that they’ve planted a certain number of churches, but many of these new church plants may be a part of multiple denominations. When multiple denominations fund the same planter, they slap their sponsorship sticker on the church plant like a NASCAR race car. If more than one network or denomination reports the same church plant, the figures of churches planted become skewed and unreliable.

Despite Paul stating, “Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others” (2 Corinthians 10:15), it is still standard practice to throw money at a planter boasting credit for their work. Church history, however, demonstrates that the church often thrives when it appears to be failing. In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch summarized Kraemer, who claimed that the church was born in crisis and in danger of being swallowed up, and that, in this tension, it “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission.” The problem, Bosch says, is that the church is so seldom aware of the danger under which it lives, “And for many centuries the church has suffered very little and has been led to believe that it is a success.” Any “success” that the church has seemed to enjoy in any century has been an abnormal period for it, and therefore provided an illusion

landscape,” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace>; “Nones’ On the Rise,” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise>.

3. Lisa Cannon Green, “New Churches Draw Those Who Previously Didn’t Attend,” Lifeway Research, December 8, 2015, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/12/08/new-churches-draw-those-who-previously-didnt-attend>. This is part of a continuing downward spiral that has been continuing since the 1950s in America. Ed Stetzer reports that 80–85 percent of American churches are on the downside of their life cycle, 3,500 to 4,000 churches close each year, and the number of unchurched has almost doubled from 1990 to 2004. He reported that in 1900, there were twenty-eight churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 1950, there were seventeen churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 2000, there were twelve churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 2011, there were eleven churches for every 10,000 Americans. The research also showed that in the hundred years between 1900 and 2000, “the number of churches increased just over 50 percent while the population of the country has almost quadrupled.” Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 9.

of what success was, but in the current post-modern crisis, Bosch exclaims, “Now, at long last, we are ‘back to normal’ . . . and we know it!”⁴

CHURCH PLANTING VERSUS CHURCH STARTING

Much of what we call church planting in North America is actually church starting. The first difference between starting a church and planting one is that church starting begins with the church itself as its goal. This goal of starting a church can be translated to renting a large space, gathering a large crowd into it, and reaching “critical mass” so that the church can sustain financial stability and provide a paycheck. When boiled down to basics, what has been accomplished is a “pop-up” church that appears on Sundays and disappears the other six days of the week. In other words, church starting amounts to little more than starting a Sunday service.

Here are the six crucial steps to church starting:

1. Raise funds (usually hundreds of thousands of dollars).
2. Recruit enough people to ensure critical mass.
3. Brainstorm a catchy church name (branding is crucial).
4. Design a sexy logo (branding is everything).
5. Rent a building.
6. Advertise, blast, and promote on social media and hope it’s enough to fill the building on launch day.

4. David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 2.

The full quote:

It is, rather, normal for Christians to live in a situation of crisis. It should never have been different. In a volume written in preparation for the 1938 Tambaram conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC), Kraemer (1947:24) formulated this as follows, “Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.” This ought to be the case, Kraemer argued, because of “the abiding tension between (the church’s) essential nature and its empirical condition” (:24f). Why is it, then, that we are so seldom aware of this element of crisis and tension in the church? Because, Kraemer added, the church “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission” (:26). And for many centuries the church has suffered very little and has been led to believe that it is a success. Like its Lord, the church—if it is faithful to its being—will, however, always be controversial, a “sign that will be spoken against” (Lk 2:34). That there were so many centuries of crisis-free existence “for the church was therefore an abnormality.” Now, at long last, we are “back to normal” . . . and we know it! And if the atmosphere of crisislessness still lingers on in many parts of the West, this is simply the result of a dangerous delusion. Let us also know that to encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the church. The Japanese character for “crisis” is a combination of the characters for “danger” and “opportunity” (or “promise”); crisis is therefore not the end of opportunity but in reality only its beginning (Koyama 1980:4), the point where danger and opportunity meet, where the future is in the balance and where events can go either way.

Renting a building, creating a website, designing a logo, and inviting people to a phantom church that exists only in our minds is an unusual practice. I'm not against raising funds or recruiting launch teams. Both can be helpful if your goal is church starting, but they aren't as necessary in church planting as we've been taught by our own ranks of "J. Evans Pritchard" experts. Much of our fundraising and attempts at reaching critical mass mask the truth that we have attempted to strip all risk out of the endeavor in order to ensure "success." But if "success" is measured by filling a room, we aren't defining it the way Jesus or Paul did. Jesus emptied them on purpose and sent the crowds packing. Church starters may have "success" in filling a room, but at the cost of even greater loss.

- What if gathering crowds occurs at the cost of mission?
- What if the large amount of expense it takes to start a church comes at the expense of making disciples?

If we invest everything in a Sunday service at the expense of mission, then everyone loses, particularly those outside the church. The church is in its current rut because we've learned to "do church" in a way that ensures no one ever really has to engage with the gospel at all.

This is more than mere semantics. Church starts have stripped out the need to make disciples who, in turn, make disciples. At its very foundation, church starting undermines the very thing that makes church planting successful.

Further, I would contend that church starting is what is failing today, whereas church planting will continue to thrive for years to come. The amount of investment one must put into church starting is both financially excessive and heavy in terms of human resources with very little ROI. Church planting, on the other hand, can be cheap or even free.

Compare the field practices of church starting today with effective missionary church planting throughout history:

Church Starting	Church Planting
Choose a sexy church name.	Begin with intense prayer.
Design a sexy church logo.	Focus on bringing the gospel to the lost.
Gather a group of Christians together.	Enter the rhythms of the community.
Create a leadership team.	Make disciples.
Market like mad.	Pick a fight with something.
Attain critical mass.	Move on and await divine opportunities.

REFORMISSION

Why does this church starting model look so different from what Paul did? Paul never rolled up on a community with his hip church name, sexy logo, rental agreement, and flashy website and called it church planting. Nor could anyone remotely conceive of him participating in that method of operation. In that case, why would we?

In *Church Planting in the Secular West*, Stefan Paas identifies the church growth movement as the scientific stream in evangelical church planting theory that comes from the Western emphasis on “empirically tested methods and developing research programs” that view numerical growth pragmatically.⁵ If it produced results (i.e., church growth success), it should be adopted. The founders and advocates of this movement were largely concerned with church growth as produced by evangelism, and they unhitched church structure from the rig. As a consequence, discipleship all but vanished; unlike generations before that had gone to “community churches” that were small, yet intimate, a new generation emerged that preferred large, impersonal church systems that enabled mass attendance but not disciple making.

In *Jurassic Park*, chaos theorist Dr. Malcolm observed that, often, innovation in form overtakes sustainability in function, remarking, “Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn’t stop to think if they should.”⁶ Ever the realist, Malcolm also quipped, “Change is like death. You don’t know what it looks like until you’re standing at the gates.” Proven by church history, what was produced from this shifting of gears was a church that exhibited, according to Jim Packard, “a faith 3,000 miles wide, but 1 inch deep.”⁷

Science only establishes the veracity of a theory after experimentation demonstrates it to be reproducible and predictable. Statistics demonstrate that our “scientific theory” of church planting based on results no longer produces the results from the church growth movement of the ’80s and ’90s. In any scientific experiment the environmental conditions must be right, and what worked during the age of modernism petered out over the advent of postmodernism. Churches operating in the church growth paradigm are reported by denominational leaders to be over 90 percent in decline. Rather than attempting to reproduce the effects of the church growth movement, leaders should be seeking

5. Stefan Paas discusses the church growth movement as a scientific approach to church planting in *Church Planting in the Secular West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 37–39.

6. *Jurassic Park*, produced by Kathleen Kennedy, directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1983).

7. James Houston, Bruce Hindmarsh, and Steve L. Porter, “A Faith 3,000 Miles Wide, But 1 Inch Deep,” Biola University Center for Christian Thought: The Table, November 25, 2013, <https://cct.biola.edu/a-faith-3-000-miles-wide-but-1-inch-deep-james-houston-and-bruce-hindmarsh/>.

to reproduce the predictable results of implementing first-century practices. Without first-century practices, we will never witness first-century results.

In modern times, church planting practices have largely been calibrated to the metrics of the church growth movement, and the mission of the church is in dire need of reformation. The dictionary defines “reformation” as “to shape again.” It is a return to the principles established when the revolution first happened. In ages past, there have been periods of reformation when some of the apostolic roles revived and the methods of the early church re-emerged. God raised up dreamers like Zinzendorf, Wesley, and others who embodied the spirit of innovation Thomas Edison had displayed as he invented the light bulb after he repeatedly exhorted his crew, “There’s a better way, boys, find it!”⁸

The need for a reformation in mission has been consistently noted by missionaries who’ve returned from the field after many years immersed in it. Roland Allen, an Anglican missionary to China, returned home to England and published his groundbreaking work *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*⁹ Over one hundred years later, the book remains in print, appreciated as a standard missionary text by today’s leading missiologists. Allen believed that we in the church had “shut our eyes to the profound teaching and practical wisdom of the Pauline method.”¹⁰

While many are careful to ensure orthodoxy in accordance with the doctrinal message of Paul, few are concerned with the actual practices Paul modeled in his missional orthopraxis that was born out of his theology. Lesslie Newbigin, another returning missionary, sought to connect the two.

Missionaries like Allen, Newbigin, and others returned to the West as changed individuals but, more important, as individuals convinced that the church needed to change—specifically, to re-embrace the principles of the first century. When I wrote my first book, *Church Zero*, I quickly realized, through the help of my editor, that I was not alone among those who returned from the field convinced that the church’s only way to advance again was to return to New Testament principles. My editor had also worked on Jim Peterson’s book *Church Without Walls* thirty years earlier and told me that reading my book was like experiencing editorial déjà-vu.¹¹ We were mission practitioners, and we returned to the West with the same message: The church must reform and recover its first-century revolutionary principles of mission. Only then can we advance again, instead of retreating.

8. Advertisement for McGraw-Edison Company, *Newsweek* vol. 50 (December 23, 1957), 28.

9. Michael Pocock, “Paul’s Strategy: Determinative for Today?” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 147.

10. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2006), 119.

11. Jim Peterson, *Church Without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992).

Why the connection to the New Testament from all of these missionary practitioners? The answer is simple, yet commonly overlooked. The entire New Testament was written exclusively by missionary practitioners. Therefore, the New Testament is a missionary book. When missionaries read the New Testament, their practitioner lenses bring missional practices into focus. Practitioners seem to read a different Bible than theorists. Ben Franklin said, “An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory.”

New Testament scholar of Pauline mission Eckhart Schnabel responds to the tendency by missiologists to ignore the New Testament model of mission: “The skepticism regarding information in the book of Acts seems, at least occasionally, to find an explanation in the fact that the university theologians are not familiar with missionary realities from personal experience; they have not seen antagonistic or indifferent people being converted to the Christian faith, or they have not been part of a team that planted a new local church. And it seems that often they have not attempted to at least gather relevant information on such matters.”¹² Perhaps one cannot properly understand the nuances and subtleties of the New Testament in context unless engaged on mission.¹³

Allen and the aforementioned missiologists were right: Each generation must examine the practices of mission during their generation to determine whether they’ve drifted from the methods and practices, and therefore the spirit, of the early church.

Therefore, in order to get an accurate definition of church planting, we must turn to the actions of the early church to get a baseline. Alan Hirsch opens his book *The Forgotten Ways* by probing the secret of exponential growth from 25,000 Christians in AD 100 to 20 million Christians by AD 310.¹⁴ Entire civilizations have lost certain technologies instead of advancing in them, just as the modern church has forgotten the ancient tactics of kingdom advancement employed by the apostles. As Roland Allen challenged, “Either we must drag down Paul from his pedestal as the great missionary, or we must acknowledge that there is that quality of universality in his work.”¹⁵ If his work contains “that quality of universality,” then there are principles and practices that can be applied to—and

12. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 24.

13. This has been the encouraging thing about the resurgence of young people who delved deeply into theology yet also combined it with missional practice. Groups such as Acts 29, Tim Challies’s blog, John Piper’s *Don’t Waste Your Life* address to a crowd of young people numbering 40,000, and the work of South Eastern Seminary have been well documented in Collin Hansen’s book *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

14. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 17.

15. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: God’s Plan for Missions According to Paul* (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko, 2017), viii.

trained into—modern church planters. Unfortunately, we will never have “how to plant a church in five easy steps” laid out for us from the pages of Scripture. Ott and Wilson observed that although we can’t repeat the events and methods exactly, due to our situation being different, “we do seek to continue in the same trajectory, in continuity with the dynamic of mission as depicted in Acts.”¹⁶

THE SCIENCE OF REDISCOVERY

Inventors take credit for what they’ve created. Scientists make discoveries. The pioneers of the scientific method didn’t see themselves as inventing anything. Johannes Kepler is credited with saying, “Science is the process of thinking God’s thoughts after him.” Isaac Newton echoed Kepler, saying, “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”¹⁷ Rather than their science positioning them to invent new theories, their belief that everything had an intelligent design positioned them to “rediscover” what God had hidden. Thus, properly understood, a discovery is uncovering something that was already there. In church planting, so-called discoveries are actually just a process of rediscovering God’s original design.

To me, church planting has always felt this way, like we are rediscovering what somebody else designed. Despite having been a part of intentional church planting in Hungary, New Zealand, and Huntington Beach, I accidentally started a church in a Starbucks in South Wales in 2005.

There were three principles at work on my church-planting journey that I retroactively discovered were also in Acts:

1. Paul infiltrated the marketplace. (I was bivocationally working as a barista at the Starbucks.)
2. Paul’s ministry was often infiltrating a public venue where people were already gathered: “He went to the synagogue, as was his custom.”
3. Paul had learned to master gospel discussion as he “reasoned with the Jews concerning Jesus.”

At first, planting out of a Starbucks sounds sexy and new; the more I ventured out in seemingly innovative practices, though, the more the Scriptures humbled me by showing me that there was nothing new under the sun. The apostles

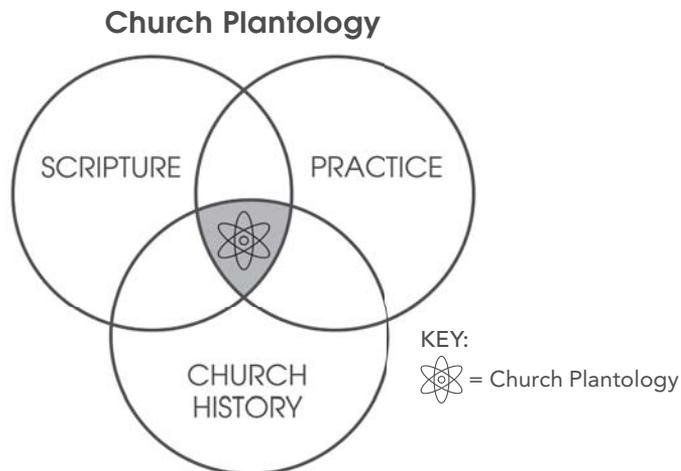
16. Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 49–50.

17. Isaac Newton, *Delphi Collected Works of Sir Isaac Newton* (Hastings, East Sussex, UK: Delphi, 2016).

had mastered church in public spaces millennia before I did. Stripped of my illusions of originality, I discovered my faith in Scripture had been weak. Studying the missional practices in Acts led me to study the missional practices in the Epistles, and this finally led me to understand the practices of Jesus in the Gospels. From the Gospels, I gleaned the principles that Paul modeled to those he trained. We should not leave planters to discover New Testament mission retroactively on their own. We should train them to approach mission with a New Testament mindset before they begin. Plantology is the study of mission as modeled by Jesus and the apostles that results in church planting. As I progressed in my understanding of church in public space, I came to discover that the Anabaptists, Moravians, Methodists, and many throughout the world today continue to embrace ministry in public spaces.

Plantology involves the overlap of biblical principles, best missionary experience and practice, and church history. Where these three overlap, it is reasonable to conclude the discovery of timeless principles. Plantology avoids the pragmatism of the church growth movement that based its approach only on results but robbed the church of other valuable assets. If it is practical but not biblical, it does not qualify as a timeless plantology principle.

If the principles of plantology are timeless principles, then we should be able to trace the re-emergence of them throughout church history when the kingdom catapulted forward in catalytic expansion, before they were suppressed by Constantine. Therefore, throughout this book, we'll attempt to trace the overlapping of these three lenses like a microscope to bring the first-century plantology principles into focus. The rediscovery of these principles is intended to serve as a sort of Church Planting 101 for this generation to build upon as they discover more.



Church planting has suffered from philosophies of ministry that insist that one circle should be adhered to at the expense of the others.

- **Biblicism**—a legalistic adherence to one biblical truth at the expense of others.
- **Antiquarianism**—an adherence to the practices of historical periods for the sake of their antiquity.
- **Pragmatism**—an adherence to practices that produce results regardless of other factors.

Movement historian Steve Addison chronicles multiple movements throughout history across the globe. At the beginning of his book *Movements that Change the World*, Addison summarizes the principles that Roland Allen attributed to spontaneous kingdom expansion:

- When new converts immediately tell their story to those who know them.
- When, from the beginning, evangelism is the work of those within the culture.
- When true doctrine results from the true experience of the power of Christ rather than mere intellectual instruction.
- When the church is self-supporting and provides for its own leaders and facilities.
- When new churches are given the freedom to learn by experience and are supported but not controlled.¹⁸

Addison demonstrates these principles present in all movements that began in Acts, re-emerged throughout history, and are still applied by movement makers today. Plantology is the application of first-century apostolic church planting principles in Acts, church history, and contemporary missionary practice.

EXPERIMENTATION WITH REPRODUCIBLE RESULTS

Aubrey Malphurs defines church planting as “An exhausting but exciting venture of faith, the planned process of starting and growing local churches

18. Steve Addison, *Movements That Change the World: Five Keys to Spreading the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 93.

based on Jesus's promise to build his church and in obedience to his Great Commission."¹⁹

While this is an excellent description of what church planting feels like to the planter, and what planters think they are doing, it doesn't truly define church planting in its essence. In order to define what church planting is, we will also have to define what church planting is not, and for that, we will have to return to Mr. Keating's lesson of "Rip, Shred, Tear" before we get to an adequate definition.

J. D. Payne's definition of biblical church planting in *The Challenge of the Great Commission* is a useful way to begin this book. He wrote, "Biblical church planting follows the way modeled by Jesus and imitated by the Apostolic Church for global disciple-making. It is a methodology and strategy for bringing in the harvest, raising up leaders from the harvest, and sending leaders to work in the harvest fields."²⁰

Science only establishes the veracity of a theory after experimentation demonstrates it to be reproducible and predictable. What if what was done in the New Testament is the basic pattern that many later experiments in ministry have helped practitioners rediscover in times of the church's greatest advancement? What if there was a study of the science of church planting? Where would you go for your data? Wouldn't you look at the first planters, the subsequent planters throughout history, and then examine that data against the modern practice of planting?

The first lesson of church plantology is that planting a church should never be our focus. Christ never commanded his disciples to plant churches, because it's not what He wanted them to focus on. Focusing on the church to be planted leads to church starting, whereas focusing on the Great Commission itself leads to church planting. One of the biggest criticisms leveled at the resurgence of church planting books and conferences is that God never commanded us to plant churches. What did he command? Let's carefully examine what the Twelve were commanded by Christ to do:

- Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).

19. Aubrey Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 22.

20. Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless, eds., *The Challenge of the Great Commission* (Bemidji: Pinnacle Publishing, 2005), 107–108.

- He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15).
- He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47).
- Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

If you boil down all four of those recordings of the same conversation, you come up with five things he wanted them to focus on.

- Make disciples.
- Baptize them in the name of the triune God.
- Teach them to obey Christ’s commands.
- Go to all nations.
- Preach.

Yet every time these things are done, church plants are left in our wake. Church planting is what inevitably happens when you focus on these things, yet you can start a church *without accomplishing any of them*. Therefore, any focus on the church itself is misplaced and a hallmark of church starting. We are not called to plant churches, but to make disciples. Ralph Moore once remarked to me in conversation, “If you plant churches, discipleship may or may not happen. Yet if you devote yourself to making disciples, churches will inevitably be planted.”

Much of what the church growth movement teaches leaders to do isn’t found in the book of Acts, and conversely, most leaders at the helms of America’s largest churches still can’t do much of what we read about in Acts either. How many leaders of large churches can you think of who are making disciples and evangelizing their community outside of the pulpit?

The issue is clear: What modern planters usually mean by church planting is very different from what it meant to the first-century missionaries. Eckhart Schnabel quoted Ferdinand Hahn, saying, “The early church was a missionary church. The proclamation, the teaching, all activities of the early Christians had a missionary dimension. The fact that it is not possible to find a defined concept of ‘missions’ in the New Testament does not alter the fact that early Christianity was controlled by the missionary task in their entire existence and in all their activities.”²¹

21. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 5.

George Whitefield, who was used to stoke the fires of the same movement spent weeks in agony attempting to discern his calling. Before him was the choice to go to Gloucester or continue studying Divinity at the University. After finding no help from asking ministers' advice, he wrote: "The remainder of the fortnight I spent in reading the several missions of the prophets and apostles, and wrestled with God to give me grace to follow their good examples."²² Those two weeks proved a turning point that brought in the great evangelical awakening, as Whitefield determined to live, minister, and die if need be, like the first century apostles.

John Wesley, at the forefront of the great evangelical awakening, advanced the kingdom by a return to the methods of what he termed "primitive Christianity," a return to the practices of the apostles. The results of his experimentation were remarkable. Within forty years, 10 percent of England's populace claimed to be Methodists. Wesley's mission statement to the American Methodists included "to reform the continent and spread scriptural holiness over these lands."²³

He tirelessly traversed fields and roads, travelling over 250,000 miles on horseback; he preached 40,000 sermons and wrote over 400 publications.²⁴ In 1768, Wesley established circuits for his circuit riders—apostolic preachers bent on discipleship—to travel in pursuit of his mission. By his death, there were 115 circuits and 300 preachers carrying out his work. By 1840, the circuits numbered 399, and the number of preachers was 492 in the UK, and 2,000 in America.²⁵ Today, over 20 million Methodists trace their spiritual heritage back to Wesley's ministry. He was the closest thing the church has ever had to the apostle Paul. First-century methods produced first-century results.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

In the study of physics, there is the law of cause and effect. Every action has an opposite and equal reaction. In Church plantology, the law of cause and effect can also explain the connection between what we focus on and what happens. Church planting is not the *cause* of anything in the New Testament, but rather the *effect* of carrying out the Great Commission. It's the difference

22. Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (Azle, TX: Need of the Times, 1995), 43.

23. John Hucks, *John Wesley and Eighteenth Century Methodist Movement: A Model for Effective Leadership* (San Diego: Point Loma Nazarene University, 2003), 27.

24. Hucks, *John Wesley*, 10.

25. Hucks, *John Wesley*, 27.

between starting a church *for* evangelism, versus starting a church *from* evangelism.²⁶ The focus on church starting is a component of our twenty-first century church-centric approach based on Western Christendom that has gotten us into the current problems the church faces. The church still sees itself as the center, the hub of all activity, and as we've seen, the frontier was the focus of the apostles.

The proclamation of Jesus as Lord is central to the book of Acts. Church planting is not. As Schnabel observes in his two-volume tome on early Christian mission, "The oral proclamation of the gospel is the central action of missionary work."²⁷

David Peterson, in his scholarship on Acts, observes, "The growth of the word is clearly coextensive with the growth of the church. Luke uses the verb to 'grow' in connection with the 'word' . . . recalling Jesus's parable about the seed of the word of God being sown in good soil and yielding an amazing crop."²⁸ He cites the following passages as evidence.

- 6:7—"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."
- 12:24—"But the word of God continued to spread and flourish."
- 19:20—"In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

Therefore, when Acts chronicles the progress of kingdom expansion, it's not measured in terms of churches planted. Acts never summarizes Paul's activity in any town by saying something to the effect of, "And a church was planted in Corinth." Instead, the summary passages²⁹ closing each section of the book focus on the number of disciples made:

- "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (2:47).
- "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" (5:14).

26. Jeff Christopherson and Mac Lake, *Kingdom First: Starting Churches that Shape Movements* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015).

27. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 977.

28. David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 33.

29. Including those listed above by Peterson that were omitted from this list to avoid needless repetition.

- “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (6:7).
- “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21).
- “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (11:24).
- “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (16:5).

To truly define church planting, start by answering one of the first questions I ask planters as part of their training assignments: “If you were not allowed to start a Sunday service, describe what your church looks like.” Once you can answer that question, you’re beginning to crack the code to defining what church planting is. This book works from a central premise: If at any time you’re focused on the church you’re going to plant, you’re focused on the wrong thing.

Our call is to preach the gospel. Jesus said that building the church was actually his job, declaring, “On this rock, *I* will build my church” (Matt. 16:18 ESV, emphasis mine). Many church planting books quote this passage but fail to point out that planting churches is what *God* does, while we engage in the Great Commission. Paul reinforces this concept by stating that he and Apollos engaged in gospel work, leaving the results to God: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6 ESV). Further, when Jesus sent out the seventy-two, he was teaching them to focus on the cause; he focused them on mission. Jesus didn’t ask them to plant congregations during either mission trip; he gave instructions that focused them on mission itself. When church starting becomes the mission, the real mission has been lost.

Here is the pattern that Paul repeatedly followed:

- sowing the gospel
- watering it with a sustained presence and a gospel lifestyle
- reaping converts
- discipling them for greater multiplication

PAUL’S PRACTICES

Consider Paul’s practice of church planting on his first missionary journey on Cyprus after leaving Antioch in Acts chapter 13.

1. INTENSE DEPENDENCE—13:1–3—Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark engage in fasting and prayer to entreat God to go ahead of them and be the first one there.
2. SUPERNATURAL WITNESS—13:4–12—The preaching of the gospel is followed with signs and wonders that affirm the message.
3. RHYTHMIC PRESENCE—13:15—They entered into the rhythms of the community, joining the gathering in the synagogue. Later, they adapted to cultural hubs such as Mars Hill and everyday marketplace ministry.
4. OBLIGATORY PREACHING—13:16–48—“We had to speak the word of God to you first.” This is emphasized by verse 46 and is supported by Paul’s affirmation elsewhere that “I am innocent of the blood of all” (Acts 20:26) and “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.” (1 Cor. 9:16)
5. STRATEGIC CONTROVERSY—13:49–50—Paul and Barnabas upset the local authorities who, in turn, expelled them from the city. Nevertheless, the word of God spread.
6. APOSTOLIC AGILITY—13:51–52—Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark possess the ability to reposition themselves, move on, and, as they engage in their mission, the disciples left behind continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit and continue the work.

Chapter 13 transitions to 14, when Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium and proclaim Christ, and the exact same six elements are present but in a different order:

1. INTENSE DEPENDENCE—13:52
2. RHYTHMIC PRESENCE—14:1
3. OBLIGATORY PREACHING—14:1
4. SUPERNATURAL PRESENCE—14:3
5. STRATEGIC CONTROVERSY—14:2, 5
6. APOSTOLIC AGILITY—14:6

As a word of caution, this is not *the* definitive sequence to implement in church planting. When we observe Paul’s tactics, they are ever-changing, making it difficult to observe a definitive “Pauline sequence.” Just when we’ve mastered the elements of Paul’s first missionary journey, he begins his second mission, and his tactics on that journey are very different. Michael Pocock

observes, “Whenever we treat a Pauline practice as a pattern, we immediately find examples where he did not follow that plan.”³⁰

We must remember that Luke, the author of Acts, was himself a missionary practitioner, and he chronicled what Paul did at that time. Typical of all New Testament narratives, Acts is transparent in demonstrating Paul’s mistakes as much as his successes. Much of what occurred on Paul’s first missionary journey was chalked up as mistakes Paul chose not to replicate in his later ministry, nor should we.

However, Luke’s intention was to transfer to the readers of his narrative the same principles he’d witnessed Paul passing to the elders established in each church plant. Contrast Paul’s practices with how planters are trained today, and the chasm between our practices and first-century principles widens. The principles we can draw from the Acts of the Apostles are timeless and, therefore, can be applied to any and every situation that a planter may face. Perhaps, as Luke penned his masterpiece, he wasn’t even aware of what we now know to be true: that a post-Christian world is not so different from a pre-Christian world, and therefore the principles applied to reach each one are not dissimilar.

Consider how the two are similar:

Let’s briefly examine the intersection of the first and twenty-first centuries to find common ground. Like society today, the first century in the Roman Empire was a blend of religions in a unified political system that had loosely thrown them together. Faiths, values, and cultural customs blended due to the trade routes connecting the world, similar to the way the Internet brings us new goods and information. Among the educated was a deep skepticism of religion—in spite of the social norms of public Roman worship and competing world religions—complete with the ensuing confusion, cynicism, and distrust of religion in general. Philosophy was elevated above religious dogma among the educated, but masked deep primitive superstitions below the surface among the general populace. Despite intellectual ascension over religious beliefs in Western society, the underlying pervasive belief in aliens, fear of ghosts, and acceptance of karma live in contradiction to the claims of science. Thus the inconsistency of our core beliefs betrays that we still fear what we don’t understand even while we unconvincingly claim to understand everything. Superstition remains the underside of our intellectual achievements because our souls intrinsically know something

30. Michael Pocock, “Paul’s Strategy: Determinative for Today?” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 147.

that rationalism cannot prove and won't be dismissed: the knowledge that we are not alone in the universe.³¹

Pre-Christian*	Post-Christian
Competing religions due to open trade routes	Competing religions due to globalism
Philosophy elevated above religious dogma	Science elevated above religious dogma
Superstitious belief in ghosts, devils, and curses	Superstitious belief in ghosts, demons, and aliens
Belief in moral retribution	Belief in cosmic justice or karma
The belief that we are not alone in the universe	The belief that we are not alone in the universe
Absence of exclusivism in religion	Relativism: Pick what works for you
The emperor was a God.	The state is put in the place of God and the church.

*N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 150–51.

Therefore, as we face the current challenges a post-Christian society presents, we must increasingly look back to a pre-Christian society for answers. Reggie McNeal observes, “In the last decades of the twentieth century, a new leadership genus began appearing on the North American church scene. This leadership type is what I and others have dubbed ‘apostolic leadership.’ This connotation seems appropriate primarily because the challenges to church leaders in the emerging twenty-first century parallel those that faced leaders in the first Christian century (commonly called the apostolic era). These include religious pluralism, globalism, and the collapse of institutional religion, accompanied by an increased interest in personal spiritual development.”³²

FUTURING

Therefore, in order to reach a post-Christian world with the gospel, we must study how the pre-Christian church reached theirs. In his ground-breaking work *Futuring: the Exploration of the Future World Future Society*, Edward

31. Peyton Jones, *Reaching the Unreached: Becoming Raiders of the Lost Art* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 33.

32. Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 125.

Cornish states, “Futuring can be thought of as the art of converting knowledge of the past into knowledge of the future.”³³ It is the science behind predicting world trends and patterns in order to make a better future. In sociology, the practice is useful for equipping society for what is coming next, despite the challenge that we are, in fact, 99.999 percent ignorant of what comes next. Nevertheless, what comes next is inevitable. The church was unprepared for post-modernism when it impacted society, as it most likely remains unprepared for what’s coming after it. Yet God did not leave us without a map, so to speak.

Likening the practice of navigating an uncharted future to the famous explorers of the past, Corning describes the poor maps and tools that some of the most famous exploration expeditions had to work from. Describing the crude, vague, and untrustworthy maps that Captain Lewis of the famed Lewis and Clark expedition studied, he writes,

At the time, maps had almost no information about most of the territory that the expedition would be exploring; but, whatever there was, Lewis got hold of it. By the time the expedition set out, he knew all there was to know about the Missouri River and what lay West of it. This error-prone knowledge enabled Lewis to make excellent preparations for the journey, with the great result that the Lewis and Clark expedition become one of the great triumphs of American history.³⁴

He concludes, “Use poor information when necessary.”³⁵

Acts may at times look like a crude map. Church history and the periods of kingdom advancement, such as the evangelical awakening under Wesley or the Jesus movement, may at times seem crude, naïve, and primitive. Every generation suffers from what Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called “chronological snobbery,” the view that subsequent generations are superior to their predecessors. But it is important to remember with humility that, although they had their collective blind spots, other generations have gotten right what we have gotten wrong.

For example, Lewis and Clark did not possess the cloud-based satellite maps that we possess on our mobile phones. Even if we could have delivered such

33. Edward Cornish, *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future* (Bethesda: World Future Society, 2004), 134.

34. Hucks, *Futuring*, 2–3.

35. Hucks, *Futuring*, 3.

technology to them prior to their journey, without roads or airplanes, they still would have had to navigate the journey personally, climbing ice sheets in the Rocky Mountains, braving native hostility, and evading grizzly bears. We have superior technology, yet we still couldn't traverse the wild country as skillfully because we weren't the explorers they were. A phone in the hand is no substitute for grit on the ground. Having the information on a satellite map would not be enough to open the transcontinental passage. We may have better maps, but not better pioneers.

BETTER PIONEERS

If we are to follow these trailblazers to learn how to pioneer into our post-Christian culture, what principles did they utilize to pioneer on a pre-Christian mission? What principles did they pass on to the churches they left behind? What were the principles of church plantology that revolutionized their world and are necessary to reform ours?

1. They planted churches instead of starting churches.
2. They modeled their ministry after Jesus's apostolic model.
3. They rejected top-down leadership and embodied Christ on mission together.
4. They resisted stationary entrenchment and formed apostolic strike teams.
5. They forsook pragmatism but listened to hear God's heart for the community.
6. They refused to enable solo performers, but rather chose to equip team mobilizers.
7. They shunned bravado in favor of the Spirit's empowerment.
8. They didn't compartmentalize evangelism but lived as sent.
9. They sacrificed full funding for apostolically agile mobility.
10. They didn't build upward but spread outward.

The result of all this was kingdom expansion, or God's original intent to cover the earth with his glory, through his people. Incidentally, these ten church plantology principles make up the breakdown of this entire book. If you peruse the table of contents, you will notice that each section unpacks one of these principles. This list was not picked arbitrarily but emerged from Scripture, church history, and missionary practices that can be applied universally today.

REDISCOVERING FIRST-CENTURY PRACTICE

On the first day of class, without warning them, Mr. Keating strolls straight out of the classroom. His head appears back in the doorway for a moment, and before disappearing again, Keating says, “Well, come on!”

Keating parades them before a glass case full of trophies and class photos dating back to the 1800s. He presses them to lean in, telling them:

They’re not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts, full of hormones just like you. Invincible just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they’re destined for great things, just like many of you. Their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see, gentlemen, those boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen. Do you hear it? *Carpe*. Hear it? *Carpe*. *Carpe diem*. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.³⁶

This book will ask you to peer at the pictures taken of the first-century apostles and ask you to listen to them. If you’re open to it, the apostles felt the same things you do. They were unsure, wondering how they got picked for Jesus’s team. They felt full of doubts and faith in equal measure. But they have much to say to us. If you’ll lean in a little bit further, and strain yourselves to hear, you’ll hear them whisper:

Carpe Diem. Seize the day, planters. Make your lives extraordinary.



REFLECT

- Are you more interested in church planting or church starting?
- Imagine that you are from another culture: European, Asian, African, or South American. You visit a new North American church plant. What do you see? What are some similarities and differences between a new North American church plant and a first-century church plant?
- Imagine that you have a time machine and travel back to the first century to visit a church that Paul planted, such as the church at Ephesus.

36. *Dead Poets Society*, produced by Steven Haft, directed by Peter Weir (Touchstone, 1989).

What do you see? What are some similarities and differences between that church and a twenty-first century North American church plant?



DISCUSS

- Why is the distinction between church planting and church starting important for church planters to understand? What are the implications?
- What are your plans for church planting? What is your role in church planting?
- The author argues that there are three Pauline principles of church planting:
 1. infiltrating the marketplace
 2. infiltrating public gathering places
 3. effective discussions about the gospel

How do you see these being implemented in your plans for church planting?



CHALLENGE

- The author argues that effective church planting will look very different from the common conception of starting new churches. How prepared are you to violate cultural norms? What will it take to pursue church planting from a biblical perspective as opposed to the way it's been portrayed in your denomination, seminary, or fellowship?



REDISCOVERING FIRST-CENTURY-STYLE MINISTRY

*From Church Starting to
Church Planting*

