15

The Personal Life of Church Planters

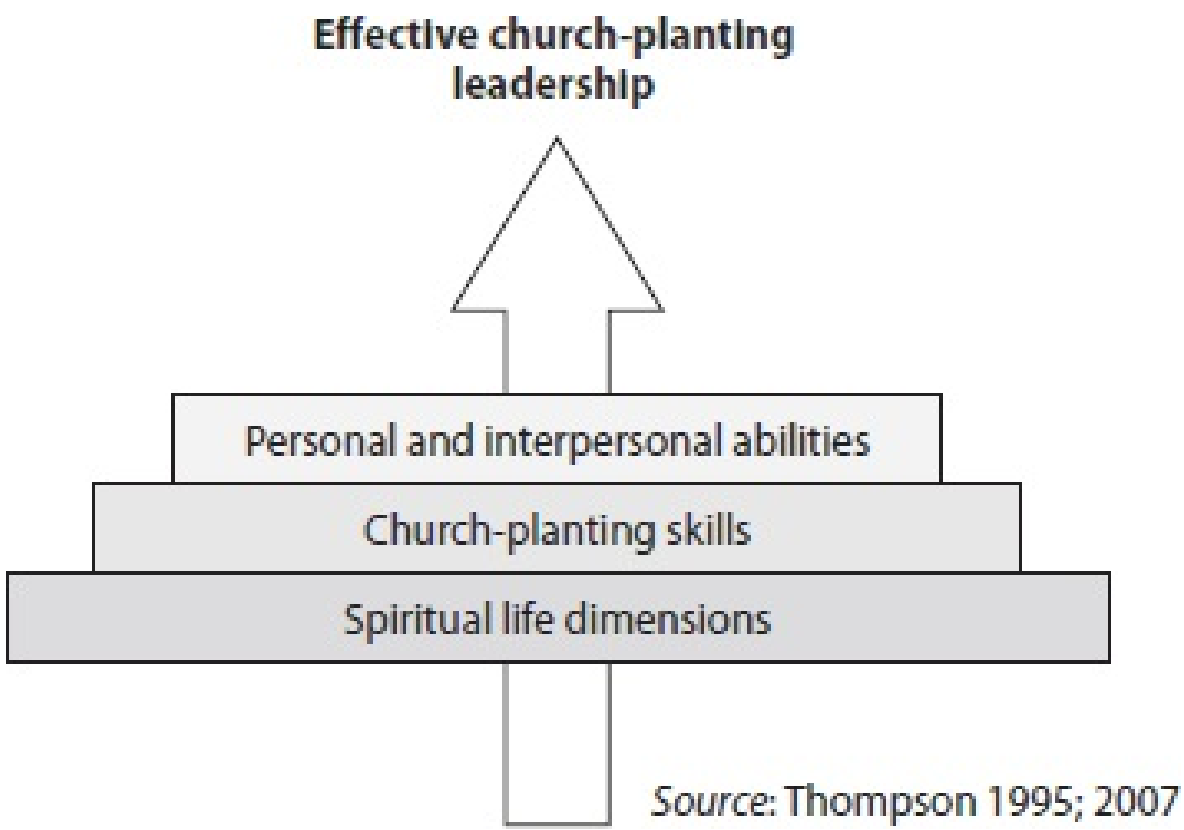
Church planting is an exciting—but often exhausting—venture of faith that touches every part of the lives of church planters. A study of 528 mission agencies found that nearly three quarters of all missionary attrition was due to preventable causes. About one quarter of that preventable attrition had diverse personal causes, 13 percent related to marriage and family, and 6 to 9 percent resulted from team problems (Brierly 1997, 89). The obvious conclusion: mission work in general and church planting in particular have a very high degree of impact on one's personal, marital, and family life. Furthermore, many church planters, being highly task oriented, have a tendency to overlook personal challenges and neglect some dimensions of their personal lives. Most church-planting books fail to address the personal dimensions of church planting, but our observation is that planters are just as likely to fall short because of personal inadequacies or an inability to work on a team as they are because of a flawed strategy. Jay Pinney, Quebec coordinator for Church Planting Canada, writes:

> While there are a growing number of rich resources which relate to the methodology of church planting, little is focused directly upon the church planters and the stresses which they and their families undergo as they attempt to plant churches. Though the church planter himself is an essential component

of the church plant, the planter's personal and spiritual life has yet to receive adequate attention in current literature and training. In addition, while the whole concept of coaching is now in the spotlight and enjoying a great deal of attention in both Christian and secular circles, there are surprisingly few tools available to help coaches to effect change in the area of the planter's personal and family life. (2006, 8)

Figure 15.1

Key Factors Resulting in Effective Church Planting Leadership



We devote this chapter to personal dimensions and the next chapter to teams. Resources for further study are found in sidebar 15.3 at the end of this chapter.

Church Planter Competencies

Church planters need special preparation, and studies have been done in North America to determine which competencies make church planters effective (e.g., Graham 1987; Ridley 1988; Thompson 1995 and 2007; Hertzberg 2008; Hertzberg and Lonsway 2008).

General Competencies

Figure 15.1 illustrates three broad categories for which adequate preparation is essential, based on the research of J. Allen Thompson:[1] spiritual life dimensions, church-planting skills (including knowledge), and personal and interpersonal abilities. These are listed in order of priority and importance. Although Thompson did his research primarily in North America, these three basic categories also surface in the profile of an effective apostolic cross-cultural church planter (Taylor and Hoke 2003).

Table 15.1 compares the findings of Thompson with those of Charles Ridley, showing much overlap in the specific competencies they find most important. The *personal* competencies in table 15.1 should be considered important whatever the planting approach, even though the *skill requirements* will vary with the church planter role (pastoral, apostolic, or catalytic) and people group to be reached. We will discuss additional skills and competencies that apostolic and cross-cultural planters need.

Table 15.1
Church Planter Competencies:
A Comparison between the Findings of Ridley and Thompson

Church Planter Competencies according to Ridley (1988)	Church Planter Competencies according to Thompson (1995 and 2007)
Intrinsically motivated	Call

Spousal cooperation	Family commitment
Exercises faith	Spirituality, integrity, spiritual disciplines, godly character, person of prayer
Visioning capacity, creates ownership of ministry	Leadership, church-planting skills, dynamic, philosophy of ministry
Reaches the unchurched and lost, effectively builds relationships	Preaching, evangelism, discipling
Uses giftedness of others	
Builds group cohesiveness	
Committed to church growth	
Flexible, adaptable, demonstrates resilience	Conscientious, likable, sensitive, flexible, resilient, healthy self-image

A synthesis of these studies and personal observations leads us to conclude that the most important qualities for effective church planting, regardless of approach and people focus, are (1) God's call, (2) godly character, (3) strong spiritual dynamics (prayer, listening to God's voice, etc.), (4) spousal support, (5) a mission-specific skill set,[2] (6) emotional intelligence and adaptability, and (7) spiritual gifts that fit the task. If these foundations are in place, God will continue shaping the worker in service (Grady and Kendall 1992; Ridley 1988; Thompson 1995, 2007; Taylor and Hoke 2003).

Additional Competencies for Apostolic or Cross-Cultural Church Planting

In the 1990s two major cross-cultural planter profiles were developed, prompted by alarm over the high attrition rate of

workers and in the hopes of improving their preparation and training (Taylor 1997; Hoke and Taylor 1999). Personal maturity and cross-cultural adaptability were identified as important factors in effectiveness and longevity (Taylor 1997, 184–249). Apostolic ministry among a different people group also requires evangelistic and entrepreneurial ability (initiating and gathering abilities) and cultural adaptation skills and proclivities such as flexibility, resourcefulness, and self-learning (Taylor and Hoke 2003). Effective cross-cultural leadership comes from the ability to adjust one's leadership style to the situation or culture, rather than from a set personality or pattern of behaviors. Because of the phase-out dimension and role changes required (Steffen 1997), cross-cultural workers need to be able to lead not only from in front but also coming alongside local apprentices and leaders. Furthermore, generational and people group distinctives should be taken into account.[3] Finally, one should never forget that no single church planter will have all the abilities; the team's competency set should be considered as well.

Spiritual Foundations

Calling and Confirmation

No amount of study, training, and experience can substitute for the call, leading, and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of church planters. The assurance of God's appointment gives a tremendous amount of confidence and staying power. Since God speaks to people in different ways, one does not necessarily have to receive a "heavenly vision" as Paul did from a specific direction-setting event. That conviction can come at the outset in a rather dramatic way or progressively through a process of studying Scripture, reflection, and discussion with others. Luke Greer (2009, 328–32) points out that there are biblical precedents for both: the "obvious call" (Peter's call to Cornelius) and the "subtle call" reflected in James's summary phrase "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" after much deliberation (Acts 15:28). But candidates must have a genuine, settled, and enduring conviction (that is shared with their spouse, if married) of God's leading that is affirmed by their local church body (see McQuilkin 2002).

Spiritual Maturity

Like Paul and Barnabas, lead church planters should be chosen from among those who have already demonstrated the spiritual maturity, spiritual disciplines, and ministry skills of an effective church leader. God's timing must be sought as well as his call. The Lord sovereignly prepares his servants through formative experiences that serve as foundational building blocks, shaping their character and drawing them to himself. He may take them through many crucibles of life and sacrificial service. These are his most effective teachers.

A deepening spiritual walk with God is required if one is to withstand pressure, respond graciously to opposition, and trust God in unpredictable circumstances. Wilderness experiences are often part of the maturing process. "Isolation is often used by God to teach important leadership lessons that could not be learned while [we are] experiencing the pressures of normal ministry context" (Clinton 1988, 161). There may initially be a "wrestling with God" that results in deeper intimacy with God, new patterns of dependence, greater humility and patience, and new ways of responding to emotional pain. If the potential church planter has not learned from such trying times, the initial shock of language and culture learning may be too great to bear. One Latin American leader offered this advice to cross-cultural church planters: "Don't come with ready-made agendas and plans, but come to learn." Another said: "Work with a spirit of prayer, trust, humility, respect, and, above all, with the infilling of the Holy Spirit." These character qualities require maturity and spiritual sensitivity.

Prayer and Spiritual Disciplines

The practice of spiritual disciplines should be well established. In many cross-cultural settings, church planters must nurture their spiritual life without the support of an established local church. Many find they must develop new or deeper patterns of spiritual disciplines because those practiced at home are inadequate on the church-planting battlefront. Research on one hundred effective church planters by Dick Grady and Glenn Kendall (1992) found that prayer is the number-one factor for success in church planting. The church planter who has not established an effective prayer life and ministry will not go far.

A church planter in Quito, Ecuador, made this troubling observation: "While we devote much time, energy and money to rallies and crusades, we have neglected the apostolic method of church growth: prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Mateer 1988, 146). Church planters need to be alert to the needs, character flaws, and spiritual openings of those they are working with and to intercede with focus and persistence. Often God's direction comes from this kind of listening and observing prayer.

Prayer is linked to evangelism as well (Eph. 6:18–20). Intercession is not merely the means to effective service—it is the heart and soul of a church-planting ministry. One church-planting mission asked its teams to devote 10 percent of their ministry day to various forms of prayer—for each other, for the new believers, and for unbelievers. The prayer ministry they developed included evangelistic prayer walks, prayer vigils, and days of prayer with fasting. Practical guides to developing

a prayer life and ministry are found in sidebar 15.3 at the close of this chapter.

Spiritual Gifts in Church Planting

Church planters must also be men and women who rely on the Holy Spirit and use their spiritual gifts to reach the lost and build the church. Two comments are in order here: First, God uses *a variety of gifts* to plant his church, just as he uses many gifts to edify his church. Second, *some gifts have special relevance* to church planting, as suggested in table 15.1. Any list is suggestive, not exhaustive (Sawatsky 1991; 1997). In chapter 8 we identified and described the gifts that are most critical at each of the church-planting phases:

launching—evangelistic and apostolic gifts
establishing—teaching and shepherding gifts
structuring—leadership and administration gifts
reproducing—evangelistic and apostolic gifts

These are all primarily leadership gifts. We discover the role other gifts have when we look at biblical examples. A constellation of gifts prepared each team for the function God gave it (see table 15.2).

Table 15.2
Functions and Spiritual Gifts on a Church-Planting Team

Church Planter Function	Biblical Examples	Spiritual Gifts
		Apostolic (cross-cultural

Church foundation-layer	Paul, Peter, Barnabas, and Epaphras	gift), evangelism, preaching, leadership, faith, encouragement
Church waterer/developer	Apollos, Timothy, and Titus	Teaching, administration, encouragement, counseling
Church-planting assistant	Priscilla and Aquila	Evangelism, helps, hospitality, mentoring, teaching, encouragement

Church Foundation Layers

Paul and Peter represent the "foundation-layer" type who had the apostolic gift. Both were evangelists who mastered persuasive preaching. Barnabas, an evangelist along with Paul (Acts 13:2–14:28), was known for the gift of encouragement (Acts 4:36–37). He came alongside others to initiate them in ministry (Acts 11:25–26) and served as a bridge builder between people and groups (Acts 15:1–4, 12, 22–35).[4] Epaphras began the work in Colosse (Col. 1:7) and is also associated with Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col. 4:12–13). He demonstrated the gift of faith through his intercessory prayer (Col. 4:12).

Church Waterers or Developers

Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, was discovered by the Pauline team in Ephesus. He was an accomplished student of the Old Testament and an eloquent preacher who had accepted Jesus as Messiah. With further instruction, he was prepared to use his abilities to persuade and instruct others in the faith. He developed, or "watered," the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6) and apparently helped Paul in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:12). It appears that Apollos never undertook pioneer church planting but devoted his efforts to strengthening the established works.

Timothy is another example of a "waterer." Having helped Paul evangelize several cities such as Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19) and Berea, he remained to strengthen the believers while Paul went on to Athens (Acts 17:14). Later he returned to Thessalonica to affirm the faith of the new disciples there (1 Thess. 3:1–3). Finally, he ministered for an extensive time in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3–4). Titus and other of Paul's coworkers might also be considered waterers (Titus 1:5).

Church-Planting Assistants

The contributions of assistants or team members, though sometimes little noticed, should never be underestimated. In chapter 3 we give other examples, so here we highlight Priscilla and Aquila. They probably had the gifts of helps, hospitality, and, most certainly, teaching and encouragement (Acts 18:2–3, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19). They did the work of evangelism but also had the ability to come alongside others to contribute to their formation (Acts 18:26–27). Paul calls them "my fellow workers in Christ" (Rom. 16:3). Priscilla, the wife, is listed first, a fact

that underlines her vital contribution. She and Aquila were valuable and flexible coworkers in Corinth (Acts 18:2–26), Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), and later Rome (Rom. 16:3). In Romans 16 Paul greets a number of people who assisted him at some time in his ministry. Their importance can be seen in the descriptors he uses: "servant of the church" (v. 1), "fellow workers" (vv. 3, 9), "dear friend," (vv. 5, 9), "outstanding among the apostles" (v. 7), "approved in Christ" (v. 10), hard workers (vv. 6, 12), and "a mother to me" (v. 13).

Gift-Mix for Church Planting

Gifts from each category in table 15.2 should be present in a church-planting team. Those of evangelism, teaching or preaching, leadership or administration, and the missionary (apostolic) gift should be present to launch a cross-cultural or urban project (Sawatsky 1991). In the following chapter we will consider further what gift mix a church-planting team might need. Nevertheless, God will not be limited to a formula. He can give additional gifts, bring in new team members, or raise up national leaders with what is needed. God uses many kinds of church planters working synergistically through the Holy Spirit: vocational and lay workers, entrepreneurs and consolidators, and strong leaders and humble helpers. Henry Blackaby concurs: "It is time to release God's people as the Holy Spirit directs them and to encourage them to do what they did in the New Testament: proclaim God's Good News to all whom He will send them and in all places He will lead them; to believe and to look for God to draw those being saved and add them together, forming them into new churches."[5]

Spiritual Battle

Church planting is not a business, nor a profession. Church planters could be compared to the frontline troops in a spiritual battle being fought to regain the territory of their King. Jesus assures them that neither Satan nor the world will prevail against his advance (Matt. 16:18–19; 1 John 4:4). Church planters strive to set captives free through the gospel (John 8:32) so that they are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Col. 1:13). They must learn to discern Satan's strongholds and rely on God's power and weapons to overcome them (Eph. 6:10–20). Spirit-empowered apologetics are needed to expose his deception and confront his lies. Church planters must count the cost and work diligently, wrestling in prayer as Epaphras did (Col. 4:12). The stakes are high and eternal, and those who engage in this battle must know how to use their spiritual armor, walk in *Christ*, battle in *his* power, and appropriate *his* resources to accomplish *his* will.

Those who have weathered the spiritual battle and experienced victory over darkness become more alert to and adept at responding to Satan's treacherous and devious ways. They learn to anticipate his strategies and expect his lies. Church planters must also go on the offensive to help others find freedom in Christ from spiritual bondage. A common weakness among Westerners is a functionally materialistic worldview. They believe in Satan and demonic influences but act as though rational persuasion and friendship alone will bring people to Christ. They don't know how to respond to or

recover from direct spiritual attacks. Here are some situations church planters should be prepared to face:

- helping believers understand and walk according to their identity in Christ
- integrating freedom in Christ and worldview transformation in discipleship (see "Special Issues in Discipling" section of chapter 11)
- discerning the source of debilitating habits and helping people find freedom from them
- assessing a person's spiritual influences and practices
- having a plan to help seekers with demonic oppression or overt demonic possession

Some further reading is suggested in sidebar 15.3 at the end of this chapter. However, one does not learn to act wisely and decisively in these situations through reading alone. Seeking the help of veterans and those with the gift of discernment constitutes the best form of preparation. Also, it is always better to confront cases of possible demonic possession with a prayer team.

The Church Planter's Emotional Life

Inherent Difficulties

Elmer Towns calls church planting in the modern world "getting a church started in the face of insurmountable obstacles with limited resources in unlikely circumstances" (quoted in Klippenes 2003, 13). How do you prepare for the unknown and the humanly impossible? Leslie Andrews lists some very real and unique missionary stressors: "Among these are such things as cross-cultural living and communication in a second language; social and geographical isolation; political unrest; communication and conflict with coworkers, friends and family; work obligations and roles; and limitations of time and resources" (quoted in Eenigenburg 2008, 423).

Many factors contribute to general missionary stress and burnout (Taylor 1997; Foyle 1987), and it is beyond the scope of this book to examine them all. Most fall in one of the following categories: (1) multiple new circumstances and changes, (2) a lack of resources and helpers, (3) a loss of support systems, (4) the inherent difficulties of starting a new church, and (5) opposition or lack of recognition. In some ways church planting is like starting a small business with volunteers when the market analysis indicates that most people are not interested in your product. Church planters often feel like intruders and are frequently misunderstood by those they are attempting to reach. Finally, role changes are intrinsic to church planting (Steffen 1997), and church planters have to be designers, developers, managers, leaders, and trainers regardless of their natural bent. For all these reasons and many more, church planting is a complex, demanding, but rewarding ministry that requires emotional intelligence, fortitude, and

resilience.

Emotional Resilience

When church planters move into their new place of ministry, they leave many things behind including church, extended family, and other emotional support systems. One of the qualifications for church planting is emotional resilience (Ridley 1988)—the ability to sustain oneself emotionally and physically through setbacks, losses, disappointments, and failures. Emotionally resilient people are adaptable and willing to accept change with few external props. They adjust to the challenging and rapidly changing environment of a growing ministry. When opposition and difficulties arise, they are not devastated but rather bounce back from even the most difficult circumstances to press on, finding strength within. They have their moments of discouragement but are nonetheless perseverant workers and unyielding servants of the cross.

Self-Management

Church planters often lack the external structure and supervision that pastors have. They seldom have a group equivalent to a church board to oversee and guide them. Many work out of the home without regular working hours or well-defined responsibilities. Consequently, some struggle to use their time and resources effectively. Sometimes they spin their wheels in indecision or procrastination and tend to fall back on the comfortable confines of their home or office instead of being out in public places meeting new people and sharing Christ.

Church planting involves both project development and people development. It is hard and complex work that requires

long hours, focus, and the discipline to stay on task. Church planters also need clear goals and self-control if they want to see any real progress. Before they begin their first assignment they should have demonstrated an ability to effectively manage their time, families, and resources at home. Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem and never lost sight of the reason he came. For some following his lead in this respect may be almost instinctive, but for most it is learned behavior. Self-management requires a realistic assessment of one's strengths and limitations and the cultivation of healthy habits and boundaries to keep moving toward the goal. The first healthy habit is the discipline of prayer.

Marital and Family Life

In the United States about one-half of marriages end in divorce.[6] Marriages are subject to formidable pressures in a society bent on instant gratification. Any Christian marriage will go through seasons of increased stress, but in church-planting ministry there are some rare and uniquely intense stressors. As church planting progresses through various phases, the planter's marriage and family life will be challenged in different ways, especially in the first years of ministry.

Stress from Initial Changes

Church planting usually requires relocation and crossing cultures to reach people from different backgrounds. *Culture shock* is defined as "an adjustment reaction syndrome caused by multiple and interactive stress in the intellectual, behavioral, emotional and physiological levels of a person recently relocated to an unfamiliar culture and is characterized by a variety of psychological distress" (Befus 1988, 387). Simply put, it is a product of the cumulative stress of exchanging a familiar culture for a strange one with few support structures. People in cultural transition go through four stages: the honeymoon stage, the crisis stage, the recovery stage, and cultural adjustment (Oberg 1960).[7] Case study 15.1 illustrates the crisis stage.

These changes, coming all at once, precipitate the adaptation process but can strain the marital relationship. Husbands and wives experience church planting differently. Often the husband's role is well defined because the entire process of selection and preparation has focused primarily on *his* gifts and training. If the wife's role does not appear to be as critical or clear, she will struggle more with role-related stress. The husband is more satisfied when he can begin church-planting activities, while she must stay at home with the children, having little time to devote to anything else. In some cases, on the other hand, the wife learns the language more rapidly and builds relationships more naturally, especially if she is more relationship oriented. When spouses have such different needs and perceptions, marital harmony becomes difficult to maintain. And as the illustration from Quebec

shows, there is added marital stress when the spouses enter the adaptation phase on an unequal footing.

Case Study 15.1

Increased Marital Stress

A church planter's wife describes a particularly difficult day during her first winter in Quebec: "On the way home there was a terrible snowstorm. I could barely see through the windshield. All the street signs were in French. Then I noticed the red and blue bubbles of a police car behind me. I pulled over. He babbled something. I assumed he wanted to see my registration and license. He kept repeating something and motioning with his hands to the back of the car. I got out and looked—it looked fine to me! I had no idea what he was talking about and tears began to appear. He wrote something down on a scrap of paper and let me go. I drove home crying and trembling uncontrollably. I felt like a helpless child. I couldn't understand the simplest things. When I got home, my husband read the note which said my taillight was burned out and that it had to be fixed within a certain number of days. I felt trapped. I wanted to go back to Florida. I hated it here. I missed my friends. I missed my job. . . . I cried many evenings during the long, cold winter. I tried to share my feelings with my husband. But he didn't experience the same difficulties; he had his job, the language, coworkers, and us. Once he said, 'At least you're not in Africa.' I felt like I was being a baby" (Wilson 1996a, 18–10).

Lack of Boundaries between Home and Ministry

Another difficulty is the "fishbowl effect," when day-to-day activities are scrutinized by neighbors and the sense of privacy is lost. Westerners working in tribal settings have particular difficulty with this, because people who live collectively in

extended families do not appreciate their need for privacy. Sometimes it is especially hard to accept overexposure of one's children. The natural reaction would be to pull away into a more private lifestyle, but parents realize the importance of their example and witness as a family and want to develop new relationships. They know that hospitality and a home-based ministry are essential in church planting. The tension is not easily resolved.

The lack of boundaries manifests itself in other ways as well. If an office is not available, church planters must learn how to work from the home. Children may be expected to share their toys and their space every Sunday if the church meets in the workers' home. Boundary issues seem only to increase as the ministry grows. Time with the family can become a scarce commodity as the work of mentoring disciples and leaders is added to evangelism and community formation. Healthy families will accept their need for "time out" and establish the habit of a family day off.

Individuals in people professions (teachers, doctors, social workers, and pastors) who do crisis intervention, family counseling, and emergency-room care have especially high levels of stress and anxiety (Hart 1999). Church planters who care for people in crisis, the destitute, hurting families, and couples on the brink of divorce fit into this category. They may face these emergencies with little preparation or training. Usually they see God's powerful intervention and manage to help, but their involvement can nevertheless take a toll on their personal and family health. Although emergencies are by definition impossible to predict or control, workers can learn to

manage their lives and schedules as health professionals do.

Boundaries are needed in the area of finances as well. A quandary is created when economic disparity exists between the missionary's lifestyle and that of the general population. There are many requests for financial help from both Christians in need and people from the community. What does a church planter do when several have lost their jobs and want help, or when a couple wants to borrow money because they cannot afford medicine for their daughter? Where does one draw the line? In response to such pressures, the church-planting family must learn how to set reasonable boundaries in four areas:

Space—How will the home be used for ministry? What parts will be off limits to outsiders?

Time—What evenings will be devoted to meetings and visits, and which ones will be set apart for family? What day will be the family's sabbath?

Relationships—How will the spouse at home develop friendships? Do the teenage children have Christian friends? Whom can the couple confide in about ministry problems? How will the children be protected from "overexposure"?

Resources—Will family finances be used to help the needy in the church, and if so, under what conditions? How willing are family members to share their car and personal belongings?

Couples new to church planting need to seek the Lord together and consult with experienced colleagues to guide them through some of these challenges. The following questions can be used as a discussion guide:

1. How healthy are our communication patterns? Are we able to practice active listening, solve problems together, and resolve conflicts without hurting each other?
2. Do we set boundaries to protect our marriage and family?
3. Are we setting time aside regularly to get refreshed and just have fun together?
4. Will we have the support we need (prayer, friendship, mentors)?
5. Are we both willing to make sacrifices to see that we make it together?
6. Do we enjoy working together as a team in ministry?
7. Are we prepared for spiritual battle?
8. Have we considered the educational options for the children and come to agreement?
9. What will we do to provide spiritual nurture and Christian friendship for our children?

Women in Church Planting

Women make up an important part of the church-planting force, whether they are unmarried or work alongside their husband. They also face some unique challenges. Some religious systems, particularly in Muslim and tribal cultures, have distinct patterns of worship and practice for women that tightly restrict cross-gender communication. Paul worked in meaningful partnerships with women assistants such as Priscilla (Acts 18–19) and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4) and local workers such as Lydia (Acts 16), Nympha (Col. 4:15), Phoebe, and others (Rom. 16) in an age when women were rarely found in leadership positions (Meeks 1986, 23–24; Banks 1994, 124–25). Women and men can work together in creative partnerships in church planting today as well, but there are difficulties that must be faced.

ROLE INEQUITIES

Women are sometimes expected to contribute without being given a real voice in team decisions. One female church planter changed missionary organizations because as a single woman and medical professional she had a full ministry load but no vote in team meetings. Frustration over role inequities is aggravated when the woman is serving in an Islamic state, where public roles for women are anathema, or in patriarchal and *machista* cultures where a woman's education, intelligence, and "voice" are not taken seriously. Even when women are treated with respect, they may have a harder time finding their place in a church-planting context. Often these tensions begin as minor irritants, but if they are not dealt with

openly and fairly, they can develop into full-blown festering sores.

Unrealistic Expectations

While some women feel like second-class citizens, others suffer from unrealistic expectations when they have to juggle children and a full ministry load. If women are full partners in church planting should they not also receive equal support and training? This means planning child care and including their agendas in team discussions. During her visits with church-planting wives, Linda Wilson (2003) often asked them to list the key issues and challenges they faced. The same ones came up time and time again, even though the women were serving in different countries (see sidebar 15.1).

Karol Downey (2005) suggests that both women and men would benefit from understanding ministry broadly as service to God in *every* sphere of life: family, church, and the outside world. This will help them find and maintain balance with less unwarranted guilt. Missionary organizations can also contribute by clarifying their role expectations of women, providing broad ministry opportunities according to gifting, recognizing and affirming the great contributions of women, and having experienced women involved in prefield preparation and coaching visits to the field (ibid.).

Sidebar 15.1

Most Challenging Issues Women Face in Church Planting

1. Adjusting identity and roles
2. Dealing with loneliness and discouragement
3. Building evangelistic contacts
4. Counseling believers with little training
5. Training leaders in the church
6. Coping with financial disparity and expectations of nationals
7. Raising children cross-culturally
8. Developing boundaries
9. Organizational rules and requirements
10. Gender role expectations and restrictions

Source: Based on Wilson 2003, 362–66.

When women are accepted fully as coworkers and empowered to use their gifts and abilities in the work, kingdom impact is multiplied: the missionary force is expanded; women in Muslim and Buddhist societies can be reached; local women are discipled and trained; the quality of decision making and ministry is enhanced by women's unique insights; the priesthood of all believers is demonstrated; and people are attracted as they see how women can be equals in Christ (Zoba 2000). Sidebar 15.3 at the end of this chapter suggests further reading on this subject.

Bivocational Church Planters

The expression *bivocational work* refers not to a church-planting method per se but to the way some missionaries and church planters financially sustain themselves. Bivocational workers, sometimes called *tentmakers* or *dual role/career workers*, have a secular job or business to supplement or fully finance their church-planting endeavors. They must be competent in both roles, integrate them, and manage them along with family responsibilities. In chapter 4 we examined the handicap that is applied to church multiplication when full salaries are considered the norm, and in chapter 18 we will outline some "best practices" concerning finances and church planting. Here we want to look at some of the reasons for bivocational ministry, identify challenges, and make some brief recommendations.

A Growing Phenomenon

The apostle Paul literally worked as a tentmaker part of the time. The Moravian missionaries—the strongest missionary force of their day—were entirely bivocational (Langton 1956; Ward 1992). Today tentmaking has become a significant factor in missions, especially in creative-access places where traditional missionaries cannot obtain visas. It also has been adopted by several associations as an intentional strategy for saturating U.S. cities and rural regions.[8] In international missions, much of the relevant literature falls under the categories of "tentmaking" and "business as missions" (BAM, whose goal is broader than evangelism and church planting).[9] The tenth anniversary of the Overseas Professional Employee Network (OPEN), led by Patrick Lai, was celebrated in 2009. According to Forman Justin, OPEN Network has about two hundred tentmakers from all over the world working in the 10/40 Window (as of May 2009) and exists to upgrade, serve, and facilitate overseas professionals and BAM workers, especially in places and among peoples where there is little or no correct understanding of Jesus's life and work.[10]

Church Planting with Bivocational Teams

Opinions differ as to the desirability or feasibility of conducting God's kingdom business concurrently with "for-profit" business. Yet tentmaking is rarely questioned on missiological grounds. In fact, how can one expect local church planters in unevangelized countries to work bivocationally if cross-cultural church planters are unable or unwilling to do so? "We must avoid communicating that professional pastors and missionaries are the only, or even the best, way to reach the world for Christ" (Ott 1993, 287). The case for lay church planting does not exclude theologically trained workers who are salaried but recasts them as catalysts, equipping agents, and guardians of the faith in church-planting movements (Garrison 2004a).[11] In sidebar 15.2 we summarize some of the reasons for bivocational teams in church planting (see also Garrison 2004a, 189–91).

Bible schools and theological seminaries will not furnish enough workers to complete the Great Commission or to sustain church-planting movements. Only reproducing local churches committed to the harvest can provide them. For multiplication to take place, we need new models of effective partnership between teams of lay workers and specially trained full-time workers who have equipping roles.

A survey and study was conducted of 450 bivocational field workers from nine different countries from many organizations and denominations over a period of six years. It is significant that although most workers surveyed were bivocational *by necessity*—they could not have entered the ministry site with a religious visa—almost two-thirds of practitioners saw

practical benefits as well (Patrick 2007). To make full use of those benefits, we must also understand and address some of the life challenges and ministry dynamics that tentmakers must face.

Unique Challenges

Stan Guthrie (2001, 84) identifies some unique challenges of tentmaking based on early attempts at tentmaking ministry:

> Too often in recent years, however, this missions "magic bullet" has misfired, sometimes hitting devoted supporters of the approach squarely in the foot. Between the boldface letters of hype, increasing numbers of astute observers in churches and missions agencies have become aware of tentmakers overseas wracked with guilt because of their double identity, or sent home broken and defeated thanks to a lack of training in spiritual or cross-cultural ministry, or an inability to balance the demands of their secular job with their spiritual ministry.

Sidebar 15.2

The Case for Bivocational and Lay Church Planters

Theological Basis. Bivocational church planting is grounded in the doctrines of the *priesthood, ministry, and gifting of all believers* and reflected in New Testament practice. Movements of lay mobilization advance the Great Commission and allow theologically trained pastors to return to the equipping role described in Ephesians 4:11–13.

Historical Precedent. This follows the pattern of the early church.

> In the early days the faith was spontaneously spread by informal evangelists, and had its greatest appeal among working classes. . . . There was no distinction in the early Church between full-time ministers and laymen in this responsibility to spread the gospel by every means possible. . . . It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but by lip. (Green 1970, 175)

If a clerical class had been established in the first century and the expansion of the gospel had been entrusted to this special group, it is unlikely that Christianity would have spread as it did (ibid., 166–93).

Equipping Context. The local ministry context is the best training ground for frontline workers like evangelists and church planters. Sherwood Lingenfelter, a professor and seminary dean, concludes (with Paul R. Gupta):

> Formal education is ill suited and cannot effectively equip evangelists, church planters, and apostolic leaders for ministry. We are limited for the same reason that we do not train carpenters, masons, and airplanes mechanics through formal education. The skills and the work . . . can be understood and mastered only through practice, through experiential learning. (Gupta and Lingenfelter 2006, 23)

Churches must take the primary responsibility of preparing new workers through church-based training and other combinations of formal and nonformal learning.

Increased Relevance. Clergy are, to some degree, set apart from the members of the congregation by their training and status. While this might facilitate their leadership and ministry within the church, it often puts a distance between them and those on the outside. Bivocational workers identify better with the people, speak their heart language, use an incarnational lifestyle, practice more hospitality, and actively witness through word and deed (Patrick 2007, 171–73). In their for-profit work they share common spaces with those they are trying to reach, so that evangelism is more natural and integrated with life.

Economic Viability. In many places financial resources are too limited to sustain church planting through salaried workers. Even in affluent areas, funds are usually allocated to pastors and their staff before evangelists and church planters. The use of lay workers permits the mobilization and deployment of more local workers and makes funds available for missions and ministry outside the local church.

Steven Rundle, an associate professor of economics, found

that deficiencies in the early wave of tentmaking fell into one of three categories: (1) inadequate training in Bible, theology, and cross-cultural evangelism resulting in gaps in ministry competencies, (2) role ambivalence and tension between the two vocations, producing identity and integrity struggles (thus the label "schizophrenic tentmakers"), and (3) the failure to create a profitable business, which adversely affected both business and ministry (Rundle 2000).

Serving Too Many Masters

The immediate concern becomes how to effectively manage two major vocations—plus marriage and family in many cases—and the multiple expectations that go with them. The need for sabbath rest and boundaries between work and family may become more important even as they become more difficult to achieve. Time pressures can appear almost overwhelming; flexibility, resiliency, and good time management are critical to survival. Yet this challenge is not insurmountable. Research indicates that workers who successfully prioritized spiritual disciplines scored more highly in effectiveness (Patrick 2007, 171). And it should be noted that the for-profit work serves a dual purpose, since church planters *must* find common spaces with the unchurched. The bivocational role provides natural social networks with more people, including contacts for evangelism (Davies 1986; Patrick 2007). Furthermore, since there is no clear demarcation between sacred and secular spaces in the bivocational worker's life, connections can occur along natural lines rather than forced, artificial lines that require more effort and yield inferior results (Davies 1986, 96).

Attitudinal Challenges

Motivation is adversely affected when being bivocational is treated as second class, or when respect and more tangible forms of support or recognition are withheld. Ed Stetzer quotes a Japanese church planter with a strong aversion to bivocational ministry: "Never take [a] secular job to meet [a] financial need. I don't personally believe in part time ministry. If one is no[t] confident enough that the Lord provides [for the] needs of [the] worker, one should not take [up] ministry in the first place" (Stetzer 2003a, 260). Tentmakers must be able to articulate, and sometimes defend, their calling and philosophy of ministry.

Not all tentmakers are successful, and some struggle with a sense of guilt, feeling inadequate in both realms of business and church planting. Douglas Davies claims that a sense of liminality—being chronically in transition—is another part of a bivocational worker's identity struggle (1986, 100). Bivocational church planters can suffer from achievement anxiety, always feeling they are in process with few accomplishments and performance markers to point to. When tentmakers fail at their business, or never take it seriously, they hurt their credibility and jeopardize their presence as a Christian witness. "Those who live 'out of sync' with their peers have a hard time interacting successfully with them because they are not understood or respected" (Niles 2000, 306). Thus they are under pressure to be successful at both ministry and business! "A struggling business has a shorter life expectancy, which burdens the family as well as the entire ministry" (Rundle 2000, 294). This challenge points to the need

for realistic expectations. The time frame needed to start a church must take into consideration the requirements of this dual role.

Recommendations for Bivocational Church Planting

Improve Selection and Increase Preparation

Tentmaking is not for everyone. It requires a certain type of person—brave, relational, multitasking, flexible, hospitable, resilient, and adept at personal evangelism and cross-cultural communication. Mans Ramstad exemplifies this skill/attitude mix: "We know the difficulties involved in meeting such objectives in our 'restricted access' nation. We have endured police interrogations and always feel the oppressive weight of police surveillance. But the dangers and difficulties are not enough to dissuade us from the primary importance of evangelism and church planting" (1996, 416). The profile of aspiring tentmakers must include entrepreneurial skills and specialized work skills for the profit role as well as cross-cultural ministry training for the church-planting role. Tentmakers should also work toward professional competence, a good employment fit, and a positive attitude in their workplace, treating it as a part of their ministry rather than a means to an end (Niles 2000). A trainer working with bivocational church planters in African creative-access groups includes a module on designing a viable business plan in his basic training for planters.

Select the For-Profit Role Carefully

Of course, having a secular employment is a ministry advantage only if the for-profit role is congruent and amenable to the building of personal relationships and church planting. The fact that tentmakers find a good fit professionally is not

necessarily a predictor of church-planting fruitfulness. Bivocational workers, like other Christians, can get caught up in their professional role to the detriment of their church-planting activities. Patrick observes "We need to admit that tentmakers may become so focused on our work platform that we will not be effective in ministry. Our motivation needs to be God-centered, not self-centered" (2007, 170). The for-profit work should, if at all possible, (1) involve credible employment, (2) be amenable to building relationships, (3) be a good personal fit, and (4) allow time for the ministry role.

Work in Teams with Clear Purpose and Accountability

Because of their constraints, there is a greater incentive for tentmakers to work in teams where responsibilities can be shared.[12] Each member can concentrate on the dimension for which he or she is gifted and prepared. In Patrick's investigation, those who were part of teams with members from more than one country were found to be more effective in spite of the difficulties of cross-cultural understanding and communication (Patrick 2007, 172).[13] Frequent meetings—once or twice a week—were also a condition for fruitfulness (ibid., 174). Teams should provide regular means of holding each other accountable, since "laborers who have someone holding them accountable in ministry at least once a month have a better probability of being effective" (ibid.). The team must have a clear common purpose and strategy to which all members contribute. "Workers who have a clear strategy for planting a church are very effective, while workers who do not .

. . are normally ineffective" (ibid.). Ramstad concurs:

> It's not easy to figure out in what ways we are evangelists and church planters, and in what ways we are Christians with secular vocations. But people who are supported with gifts and prayers from a home church must have a clear understanding about three things: 1) why they are going overseas; 2) what they are going to do to serve the causes of evangelism and church planting; and 3) how they will specifically work toward those objectives. Many tentmakers want this kind of accountability, but others do not. (1996, 419–20)

Establish Ongoing Training and Support Systems

Clearly, recognition and moral support are important factors in the sustainability of bivocational work. Christy Wilson (1997, 142) recommends that tentmakers "not be like 'loose canons' around the world" but work through or in collaboration with reputable missionary organizations. Those who do are more likely to join a ministry team and receive prefield orientation, coaching, and logistical support as they face the hurdles ahead. Training for cross-cultural ministry should not be neglected, since there is a direct positive correlation between that training and church-planting effectiveness (Patrick 2007, 169). Although most bivocational workers have some training (Bible college, seminary education, focused missiological training courses, or short-term trips), they continue to need training once they are on the field—especially those working with non-Christians in the 10/40 Window (Patrick 2007, 170). That ongoing training can be informal (mentoring and coaching) and nonformal (theological education by extension and web-based instruction). Fortunately, there are distance education institutions that make theological and ministerial education accessible and affordable.

Furthermore, tentmakers should be given special consideration for educational grants, skill acquisition opportunities, and other forms of linkage or social capital. They also benefit by being linked with colaborers as part of a learning community or peer-coaching group like OPEN.[14]

Sidebar 15.3

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FURTHER STUDY AND EFFORTS ARE NEEDED

Tentmaking is no panacea, yet the majority of the world's unreached people groups reside in countries that restrict missionary access, so the need for bivocational workers from many countries and backgrounds will only increase. Rick Love affirms: "Training workers like Paul—who have integrated identities and combine credible tentmaking with fruitful disciple making—is the challenge of the 21st century" (2008, 36). Tentmaking by both local and cross-cultural workers should be embraced prudently but very intentionally by those who are so called and qualified. Carefully crafted and coordinated strategies, along with dogged perseverance, are needed to carve out effective tentmaking ministries in the Americas, Europe, and other places where the church has neglected lay mobilization and bivocational church planting. Creative and synergistic partnerships between lay teams and full-time theologically trained workers should be explored. For example, a German pastor with a passion for church planting has been empowered and released to devote 50 percent of his time to work with church-planting interns and guide new church-

planting teams. As a catalytic planter, he is working with Bible school graduates and lay leaders to form the teams.

Conclusion

Although this discussion of life issues that church planters face is cursory due to space limitations, their importance should not be underestimated. This chapter should encourage church planters to strive for personal growth, balance, and a healthy integration of personal and ministry dimensions. Effective coaching takes both equally into account (Logan and Carlton 2003). Planters can be proactive in this by growing in self-awareness, establishing goals, having a mentor or coach, and joining a learning community of peers. Sidebar 15.3 offers a selection of reference works that are representative of many other excellent resources for further study in these areas.