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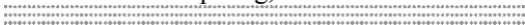
Preparing, Part 1

Targeting and Commissioning

The worker who prepares for cross-cultural church planting can be compared to a runner who undergoes rigorous mental and physical conditioning for an upcoming marathon. Runners also prepare by designing a strategy that fits the terrain and climatic conditions. In chapter 15 we will discuss the *personal dimension* of preparation, including qualifications, education, family orientation, and emotional and spiritual preparation. In this chapter and the next we highlight important *strategic* preparations and *contextually appropriate* decisions. Church planting leaders estimate that between 60 and 80 percent of the problems encountered in church planting result from faulty strategic thinking in the preparing phase (Logan and Ogne 1991a; Klippenes 2003, 84).

In this phase the geography or ethnicity of the focus people[1] is chosen, a church-planting team is formed and commissioned, the central vision and core values are defined, and, finally, a financial and prayer support system is established. In summary, this preparation phase involves defining the goal, assembling the players, and securing the support systems.

Biblical Examples
Acts 13:3: The Antioch church sends the first missionaries
Acts 13:5: The team is expanded
Galatians 2:7–9: There is need for support and for a clear ministry focus people

Key Steps
1. Define the church-planting vision and core values
2. Determine the ministry focus people
3. Recruit a capable team leader
4. Gather and organize the team
5. Secure prayer and financial support
6. Prepare and commission the team

Critical Issues
1. Agreeing on a clear vision, core values, and focus people
2. Having the right person to lead the effort
3. Building strategy on indigenous principles with the help of cultural advisers
4. Learning language and culture well
5. Assembling a healthy team

Define the Church-Planting Vision and Core Values

In twenty-first-century North America *vision* has become the cardinal virtue of effective entrepreneurial leadership. The word is popularly defined as the conceptualization of the preferred future toward which a group strives. Sometimes this vision is described in very specific quantifiable terms (such as a church of five hundred members that gives birth to ten daughter

churches). At other times it takes a more nebulous form, more like a dream than a measurable outcome (a movement of organic churches in every neighborhood of the city that transforms families and communities). Henry and Richard Blackaby (2001) remind us that Christian mission must be rooted in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. It must also come from God's purpose, not human ambition or imagination. The Holy Spirit communicates God's perspective and desires (vision) to those who seek him. Thus church planting is essentially a spiritual enterprise that grows out of an intimate walk with God and is further shaped by creative energy and imagination.

One danger to avoid is copying a church-planting vision from a different context. The Holy Spirit must guide in the shaping of a vision that fits the particular situation. The "broad strokes" can be outlined early, but determining specific evangelistic and disciplemaking efforts requires cultural understanding and cultural mentors.[2] The development of a church-planting vision should be approached as a process rather than a one-time decision. The church-planting leader resembles a navigator who charts a course for his ship on an ocean. He knows his final destination, but the wind and waves constantly seem to push him off course. He must consult his assistants, review his charts, and adjust his course on a regular basis. So it is with church planting. The vision is the final destination toward which the church is directed. This caution is not an argument against passion or entrepreneurial determination but an argument for humility, sincerity, flexibility, and openness in the journey.

Multiplication Movement Mindset

A movement of church multiplication must look down the road to indigenous churches that are reproducing with the manpower and resources available locally. Along with a plan to include local disciples and workers in the "control room" setting ministry direction, the apostolic team must have a phase-out strategy. In teams where some members come from the culture of the ministry focus people, there can be indigenous leadership from the start. This is ideal but cannot always be achieved in pioneer settings. In those settings the missionary team needs a progressive strategy of leadership development, empowerment, and role change before leaving local leaders in charge. "This is what David Bosch calls granting them a 'certificate of maturity.' It is responsible mentorship, the type of care Paul demonstrated to those to whom he ministered" (Steffen 1997, 9). Thus the future must shape the present and the apostolic team should function like temporary scaffolding (Saint 2001).

Church planting that empowers and multiplies flows from a compelling vision for healthy indigenous church multiplication and a firm belief that future gospel penetration and transformation of the ministry focus people belongs in the hands of the national church. The martyred archbishop Oscar Romero expressed the empowering power of those who accept the limitations and risks of laying seeds for future generations.

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies

beyond us. . . . This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.[3]

Components of the Vision

In summary, vision for a church planter is the preconception of a preferred future, initiated by God himself but discerned progressively through prayer, consultation, and study. The vision should guide the church planter with the strategic choices discussed in chapters 5–7.

Chapter 5 outlined three types of church planters: pastoral, apostolic, and catalytic. The vision may include several of these types, such as an apostolic team working with local teams of laypeople led by a catalytic church planter. The leader of the church-planting team must understand his or her role as a foundation-layer and plan for transference of ministry responsibility to the local team of leaders. Thus leadership development is an important part of the vision.

Chapter 6 talked about indigenous principles and church-planting movements. The vision should lead to the reproduction of viable, healthy, indigenous, self-supporting, and interdependent churches. In order for the church-planting team to build reproduction potential into the DNA of the first church, the initial vision must include the reproduction of

disciples, small groups, and workers who, in turn, contribute to second-and third-generation churches.

Chapter 7 presented several church-planting models. Each one of them requires a distinct approach, a unique leadership team, and a different set of resources. When designing the initial vision statement, the church-planting team might discuss options like these: Will the new church be part of a cluster of house churches that grow like a spreading vine? Will it be a strong urban central church that will have satellites in outlying villages? Will it be a cell-church that covers the city, gathers together monthly for large, powerful celebration services, and carries out works of compassion in the neediest areas? The selection of a church-planting model will be an important part of the initial vision.

Church-Planting Core Values

As we noted in chapter 6, values are strongly held convictions that shape our decisions. If the vision is the final destination toward which the planter fixes the ship's bow, the values are the markers along the way that serve as points of reference. They are like the buoys that distinguish the navigable channel from the treacherous reefs in an estuary. One set of core values for a church-planting movement is given in sidebar 9.1.

Core values drive decisions, determine priorities, and facilitate evaluation. When held in common by the team, they foster cooperation and unity in ministry and allow for diversity in secondary things. Thus when common core values are identified, the team has an objective basis on which to build its

unity and avoid unnecessary conflict. The core values are closely related to the ministry vision, functioning like pillars that hold it up. When shared effectively, they inspire people to action and help people embrace change. They influence team building, role clarification, financial management, and resource allocation. In Christian ministry they must be rooted in Scripture, particularly in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Garrison's Ten Common Elements of Church-Planting Movements

Extraordinary prayer
Abundant evangelism
Intentional planting of reproducing churches
Authority of God's Word
Local leadership
Lay leadership
House churches
Churches planting churches
Rapid reproduction
Healthy churches

- Which of these core values would you adopt in your church-planting effort?
- Which would you want to change?
- Which would you want to add?

In the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1–7) there was a crisis over the care given to widows. Greek- and Hebrew-speaking widows were not being treated equally. The immediate action taken by the apostles indicates that care for the needy and equality were core values: spiritually mature and fervent leaders (another core value) were chosen to handle the growing pastoral and administrative needs. However, the apostles wanted to prioritize other core values: prayer and the ministry of the Word. In this situation there does not seem to have been a conflict of values, and in the end they preserved all the core values by finding competent people for a new, improved ministry. The final result was that the Word of God spread and the church grew.

Core values are especially helpful if they are expressed in term of priorities. Table 9.1 lists a few possible core values of an organic church-planting effort:

Determine the Ministry Focus People

Some resist choosing a ministry focus people, preferring to offer the gospel broadly to all. However, there are good reasons to select an initial primary focus people. First of all, having a strategic evangelistic focus has biblical precedents. The apostles agreed that Peter, James, and John would concentrate on the Jews while Paul and Barnabas would focus on the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7–9).

The focus can be part of a lifelong call, or it can be limited to a specific phase of the mission. Philip seemingly was led by God to reach the Samaritans without an apostolic mandate. Later the church in Jerusalem examined and affirmed his mission (Acts 8:4–17), and he continued for some time. While seeking God's direction, Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man, and Luke concluded: "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10). Following this pattern, church-planting missionaries have historically preached to all who would listen but concentrated their efforts on a primary ministry focus people at any given time.

Table 9.1
Application of Core Values

Value Statement	Possible Applications
Small before large	Multiply cell groups before starting public meetings
Infrastructure before superstructure	Grow disciples and small groups before investing in a building
Proven before public	People are tested through service before receiving titles and responsibilities
Character before charisma	Focus on spiritual maturity over dynamic personality
Going more than staying	Meet people where they are instead of expecting them to come to you
Multiplying more than adding	Invest in people and ministries that are reproducible and don't make them depend on outside resources

| The lost more than the found | Small groups and ministries should have an outward focus and make newcomers and seekers feel welcome |
| The lay more than the professional | Standards should be attainable by godly lay leaders. Do not use professional training in ways that are out of their reach |

Source: Core values from Ferguson 2007, 2, were expanded with applications for ReachGlobal EFCA Cross-Cultural Church Planting School, May 2008, by Gene Wilson

A ministry focus people is the people group the new church will reach and serve. It can be defined by ethnicity, class, socioeconomics, geography, generation (boomer, buster, millennial), or by other criteria that set apart a segment of the population. Failure to define a focus people will usually mean that the church-planting team will tend to, by default, reach people most like themselves. The method of presenting the gospel, the language used, and the forms of communication are never culturally neutral. Defining a focus people does not mean that those outside that group are ignored, excluded, or overlooked, but only that a conscious decision is made to focus efforts on presenting the gospel in a way understandable and meaningful to a particular people. There are several factors to consider when selecting a specific demographic focus people:

Spiritual need. As an apostolic church planter Paul wrote, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). The reason for this was straightforward: people without Christ are lost: "for

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:13–14).

Some people groups are unreached or less evangelized than others, and we know that God desires all peoples to have the opportunity to respond to the gospel (Matt. 28:18–20; cf. Matt. 24:14; 1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 5:9).[4] A people group is usually considered "unreached" where there is no viable, indigenous local church that can communicate the gospel in a meaningful manner to that people. Another definition of *unreached* is that less than 2 percent of the population is evangelical, with minimal or no church planting among them (Holste and Haney 2006). Demographic studies may indicate that there is an unreached people group that needs the gospel. But need alone is not a sufficient basis for determining the focus people.

Greater receptivity. Though no people should be without a gospel witness, there is a scriptural and missiological argument for giving priority to receptive groups over unresponsive groups (Matt. 10:12–14; Luke 14:15–24; Acts 13:46–47). Studies and experience may show that a segment of the population is open to change and will listen to the gospel. Donald McGavran based his "harvest principle" on this receptivity factor.[5] Often the final decision is made when there is a convergence of several of these factors as a result of demographic study, prayer, and exploratory visits.

Strategic effectiveness. Since human and strategic resources are always limited, the church-planting team can make best use

of them by prioritizing a specific group. The team increases its effectiveness by adjusting its efforts and ministries to the needs and worldview of this group. Contextually appropriate communication and action require the selection of a ministry focus people (Hesselgrave 1980 and 1991).

Geographic factors. Some of the wisest choices are made not in response to a situation on the ground but because of a strategic long-term plan to reach a city or region. In chapter 3 we noted that Paul's church planting concentrated on urban centers characterized by Roman administration, Greek civilization, Jewish influence, or commercial opportunity. Likewise, today's church planters may seek out strategic centers of influence, especially in pioneering efforts, and follow a natural progression along arteries of transportation such as highways, rivers, or subway lines. In areas where people groups interact, information and influence flow more naturally in certain directions. Initially it may be preferable to reach a more influential group and later extend efforts to other groups. This can also apply to social classes (McGavran 1980; Nida 1974). When a team seeks a strategic place to work, it can ask questions like, What would be a good platform from which to reach other population segments? What is a natural extension of what God has been doing so far?

Case Study 9.1

Selecting a Focus People as a Strategic Choice
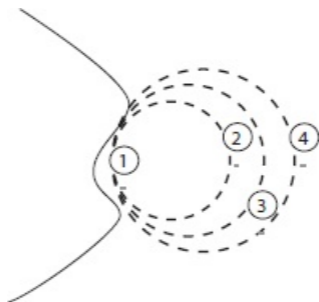
The work of the Evangelical Free Church of Peru began in the port district of Lima called Los Pilares. As the city grew in concentric circles away from the ocean, people from the original church moved to the suburbs. Bible studies were formed in those suburbs and some of those became new churches. Two of the suburban churches grew and began planting churches in developments that were less evangelized. Thus the church planting was driven primarily by the strategy of following demographic growth focusing on new emerging communities

Preexisting core group or diaspora Christians. There may be a small group of believers who already live among an unreached people. Perhaps they became Christians elsewhere and later returned home; or they may be believers from elsewhere who have, as a result of war, famine, employment, or

other reasons, relocated to the region. That displaced group of disciples can potentially become the core of the church and thus save the church-planting team the months, or even years, that it would otherwise take them to evangelize and gather an initial group. These persons may also have relationships in the community that can serve as pathways to communicate the gospel. We see something of this in the New Testament, when persecution broke out in Jerusalem: as a result, the believers scattered, the gospel was preached throughout the region, and the church of Antioch was planted (Acts 8:1–4; 11:19–21). In such cases the church-planting team must, of course, develop a relationship with the group of believers and determine whether there is sufficient compatibility to make a cooperative effort possible and desirable.

Exceptional opportunity. Sometimes an opportunity that does not necessarily fit the above criteria for determining a focus people presents itself unexpectedly (see case study 9.2). A "man of peace" (Luke 10:6; Matt. 10:11–14) from a certain social or ethnic group who is a strong witness among his people may ask for help establishing a church among his people. Or a strategic opening might arise. Paul postponed further pioneer work and remained in Ephesus longer than in most locations "because a great door for effective work has opened to me" (1 Cor. 16:9). He also reports, "I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me" (2 Cor. 2:12). Paul requested prayer that God would continue to open doors for his message (Col. 4:3). One of the most dramatic unexpected open doors of opportunity in recent times was the fall of the Iron Curtain in

the early 1990s. Many Eastern European nations had been closed to missionary work but public preaching of the gospel suddenly became open and receptive. Mission organizations quickly reallocated personnel and resources to take advantage of the opportunity. Sometimes such a window of opportunity does not remain open for long, as government policies are revised or the spiritual atmosphere changes. Sadly, this is the case in much of Eastern Europe, where responsiveness has fallen since the 1990s.

Determining the Ministry Focus People

The Need Factor—Spiritual need

Romans 10:13–15; 15:20

- Communities, people groups, classes without an indigenous, evangelizing church
- Small percentage of evangelicals

The Responsiveness Factor—Receptiveness

Matthew 10:11–15; Acts 14:27

- The likelihood that people will be receptive to the gospel and the church will be able to grow and become reproducing within a reasonable period of time

The Strategic Effectiveness Factor—Potential for multiplication and influence

- Opinion leaders, high-credibility persons
- Social groups or subcultures that influence others
- People groups with extended family or relationships through the region
- People groups that are industrious or entrepreneurial

The Geographic Factor—Significant location

- Commercial, educational, political, or transportation centers
- Locations of population growth, movement
- Possibility of launching a regional movement from the location

The Diaspora Factor—Preexisting core group

Acts 8:1–4; 11:19–21

- A number of Christians living among the focus people to build the core of the church plant

The Open Door Factor—Exceptional opportunity

1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3

- Exceptional opportunities to preach the gospel and/or exceptional responsiveness to the gospel

The Supernatural Guidance Factor—Exceptional leading of the Spirit

Acts 16: the Macedonian call

- Direct guidance may at times override very well-reasoned plans

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Supernatural guidance by the Holy Spirit. On his second missionary journey, Paul and his team attempted to preach the gospel in Asia but were hindered by the Holy Spirit. They then attempted to enter Bithynia but were again not allowed by the Spirit (Acts 16:6–7). Only when Paul received a supernatural

vision of a man from Macedonia calling him did God's guidance become clear (Acts 16:8–10). At a later time Paul would minister in Ephesus, in the province of Asia, where a church-planting movement would be launched. Sometimes our best plans, based on the most strategic and prayerful considerations, have to await God's timing. We must always remain open for the leading of the Holy Spirit, who may choose to redirect us to a more fruitful field of ministry that we had not identified or anticipated. Sidebar 9.2 summarizes the key factors to consider when choosing a ministry focus people.

Case Study 9.2

Selecting a Focus People in Response to an Open Door

The building of a new church had been approved by the major local denomination, and two different neighborhoods in rural Quebec requested that the new place of worship be erected on their land. Residents of the neighborhood that lost were so upset that they locked the priest out of the old chapel and put an ad in the newspaper for a minister of another denomination to come and serve them. Missionaries who were seeking God's guidance about where to begin their work saw the ad and spoke to the people about the way of salvation. The people were ready for change, and eventually the chapel became an evangelical church. This was a unique opening in an otherwise difficult context (Duclos 1982).

The church-planting team will have the ultimate responsibility of selecting the ministry focus people, in consultation with local advisers and collaborating churches. If

after all these considerations two focus peoples seem equal in their church-planting potential, initial contacts can be made with people of both population segments to gauge their response. Finally a decision must be made. A tentative focus people, chosen prayerfully, is better than no focus people or several focus peoples. Many factors should be considered, but at the end of the day the church-planting team should be convinced that God has called them to reach a particular group of people.

Recruit a Capable Team Leader

One of the most common reasons church plants fail is that the wrong person is chosen to lead the effort. The wisest approach is to find a proven leader who fits the culturally appropriate church planter profile. Chapter 15 will provide an in-depth discussion of competencies. The leader casts the vision, keeps the team unified, and ensures that it stays on target with its mission. Preferably this leader will be a cultural insider or a person comfortable in the target culture. Church history records how God often used men and women who came to Christ outside their native people group to lead the efforts to reach their people and establish or expand the church among them.[6] This enables the church to have a more indigenous shape from the start (see case study 9.3). If no national leader can be recruited, then the leader should ideally be a person with experience in the culture of the focus people or in a similar context.

Although all three types of church planter have their place,

as we have seen in chapter 5, cross-cultural missionaries who are apostolic planters work with and through emerging national leaders and move on. Those who have an apostolic mandate and gift, who are culturally adept spiritual entrepreneurs, who can lead a team, who prefer to see national leaders front and center, and who accept that theirs is a foundation-laying role make the best apostolic planters. On the other hand, those who have been pastors in their home country for many years before serving as cross-cultural church planters often find the role change difficult and slide back into a pastoral mode.

Case Study 9.3

The Importance of Leader Selection

Redeemer Church in New York City has been instrumental in planting 114 new churches throughout the world. It was listed by Lifeway researcher Ed Stetzer in *Outreach Magazine* (July 2007) as the number-one reproducing church in the United States. Twenty-nine of the plants are in postmodern European cities. Part of the strategy of the Redeemer Church Planting Center (RCPC) is to identify gifted leaders with a passion for church planting and come alongside them with resources and coaching to grow their church and plant others. Al Barth, European director of church planting, devotes much of his time to identifying and recruiting cultural insiders who are compatible with RCPC's distinctives and vision for church planting. This illustrates the importance of selecting a culturally astute and effective church-planting team leader.

Gather and Organize the Team

The primary focus of the lead church planter in this early phase is to be a *team builder*. Sometimes teams are put together haphazardly, using whoever is able or willing to join the effort. We will discuss church-planting teams in more depth in chapter 16, but the planter's primary role, rather than to be a pastor-teacher, is to lead the efforts, model church-planting best practices, and train others in evangelism and disciplemaking. The team is then built around the team leader, and he or she should have the greatest voice in assembling team members who can contribute significantly and be loyal to the vision and values (Exod. 18:21; 1 Chron. 11:10–25; Mark 3:13–14; Acts 15:39–40; 16:1–3). Of course, the leader will want to consult with others and may give team members a trial period to get to know them well.

The initial team should be kept "lean" and committed by the setting of high standards (Deut. 20:5–9; Judg. 7:4–8; Phil. 2:19–30; 1 Thess. 2:4–12). Those who lack maturity, loyalty, or commitment should not be accepted as full-fledged team members. One of the major causes of failure in church planting is the inability of team members to work together. The qualifications for participation on a church-planting team should be decided, made public, and used consistently. If a team is large it can be overbearing in its influence, both strategically and culturally. If it is "lean" there will be room for local believers to develop a greater role and voice on the local leadership team.

Chapter 16 discusses both foundational qualities that *all* team members should have, such as the ability to evangelize and disciple, and complementary qualities that should be found

somewhere on the team. Generally speaking, members should be chosen because they complement the leader and because they have the gifts needed to develop, empower, and coach a local team of leaders. The team composition will also depend on the type of church planting adopted. Clarity on the type of church plant is needed so that a team with the appropriate skill and gift set can be assembled. For example, if an apostolic church-planting approach is chosen, the team profile will be very entrepreneurial and evangelistic with strong initiating, gathering, and developing skills. A pastoral church planter, on the other hand, may select team members according to their ability to lead the core ministries of the church. Whatever the approach, the process described below can be followed.

Once a team is assembled, its members should identify key roles and the constellation of gifts and competencies that corresponds to those roles. They will work together based on their gifts and abilities rather than affinity, personality, education, or experience. Teams composed of people with similar profiles tend to foster competition and conflict—and unfortunately, many implode. On the other hand, people with complementary profiles tend to work more productively together.

Some of the key roles that complement the leader may be (1) evangelist-gatherer, (2) teacher-trainer, (3) administrative assistant, (4) mentor-counselor, and (5) several helpers who can encourage and disciple new believers. The team leader will delegate responsibilities according to these roles and help members get the training they need. He or she will empower and facilitate ministry rather than micromanaging it.

Secure Prayer and Financial Support

Church planting is a cooperative effort that requires unity of vision and a pooling of resources from many sources. Once the focus people is adopted, it becomes much easier to raise a support team for the project. Building a financial and prayer support team is similar to erecting the support walls of a home. Support walls look like any other wall but must be strong and stable. They can never be removed, because the other walls and structures rest on them. When they are strong, almost any addition or renovation can be made. Church planters need to put up twin support walls of prayer and economic support. Nehemiah is a good example in this respect. He was a man of prayer, foresight, and planning who built the walls of Jerusalem before rebuilding the nation. He anticipated the physical resources needed for the project (Neh. 2:8) as well as the spiritual opposition he and his team were sure to face (4:9–16).

Prayer Support

Paul and Barnabas had a special relationship with the Syrian Antioch church that sent them out on their first missionary journey with prayer and fasting (Acts 13:3). Later they returned to share and celebrate the results (Acts 14:26–28) and remained in Antioch until their next assignment. This relationship was not exclusive. Paul also appealed to other churches and individuals to support him in prayer (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:10–11; Eph. 6:19–20).

The need to rely on God's power and intervention through corporate prayer is documented in the annals of church-

planting history. God opens doors, removes obstacles, prepares hearers, and protects workers in response to prayer. The Moravians sent out more cross-cultural workers per capita than all other Protestant groups combined had sent in the two previous centuries (Tucker 1983, 71). What propelled this great missionary advance? There were undoubtedly many factors, but the turning point was a revival in Hernhutt that gave birth to a prayer movement with daily meetings and an around-the-clock prayer vigil that lasted one hundred years (ibid., 70). In North America, concerts of prayer for revival and missions accompanied the First Great Awakening. In 1748 Jonathan Edwards echoed a call from England to rally extraordinary prayer efforts in a pamphlet titled *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*.

   Church-planting advance depends on both spiritual dynamics and human strategy. Prayer must infuse both for kingdom breakthroughs to take place. Paul associates prayer with the spiritual battle for the lost. Although no magical formula should be sought, nor guarantees given, the intentional use of prayer to break down spiritual opposition has been documented in a broad array of literature (Taylor 1959; Robb 1990; Piper 1993). All those involved in church planting should maintain a strong discipline of intercessory prayer, but even that is inadequate. They need others who will faithfully stand with them in prayer. A prayer team should be built so that strong, sustained prayer can easily be mobilized when decisions need to be made and spiritual battles take

place. This involves asking for a specific commitment to pray regularly, communicating key prayer requests on a regular basis, and returning to report in person (Acts 14). The principle of prayer as the driving and sustaining force behind church-planting ventures can be summarized by this axiom: *No church-planting movement will rise above the prayer ministry of those involved with it*.

Case Study 9.4

Prayer and Revival

A godly Indian woman, Pandita Ramabai, became burdened by India's need for revival. In 1903 she became interested in the movement of prayer in Australia that preceded the Torrey-Alexander campaigns there. A year later, she learned of the revival in Wales. So Ramabai began special prayer circles at the beginning of 1905, and hundreds of her helpers, friends, and missionaries attended these sessions (Orr 1970, 62). While missionaries were heavily involved, the leaders were almost always Indian (Duewel 1995). The result was a great extension of the gospel. "The number of Christians in the Punjab quadrupled from 37,695 to 163,994. During the decade of revival in India, the Christian population increased by 69.9 percent, which was sixteen times the amount of increase in the Hindu community" (Duewel 1995, 227).

Financial Support

Poor financial planning and practice destroy many homes. They also undermine many otherwise sound church-planting projects. Economic issues and financial support can be major factors in the success or failure of church planting. When

asked, "Why do church planters fail most often in Latin America?" many church-planting leaders mentioned a lack of funds, financial support, or denominational backing as a primary cause (Wilson 2001, 229). Few things teach dependence on God as well as financial need. Ernesto Zavalla, then Latin America director for Scripture Union, said: "God's business is in the hand of failing men. . . . We need to come naked before God every day" (quoted in ibid.). On the other hand, several approaches to financial support have been used effectively, and the history of the church abounds with evidence that in spite of meager resources, God provides for every endeavor he directs and every person he calls.

No rules can be made concerning the mechanics of financial support, but in this preparation phase church planters should have a reasonable and viable plan for the financial support of their families (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9; Phil. 4:10–17). Some church planters use "faith" as a pretext for acting irresponsibly. Dependence on God's supply does not relieve church planters of their responsibility as providers (1 Tim. 5:8). There are three major options: (1) full-time secular work, (2) full-time church planting by raising full financial support beforehand, and (3) bivocational church planting requiring partial support raised beforehand.

Cross-cultural church planters typically raise all or most of their support at home in order to have a stable income that does not depend on the local church or community of their ministry focus people. Many have to show the authorities that they are not taking a job from a local worker. The apostle Paul's life is instructive at this point. He worked as a tentmaker, and

God supplemented his revenue with gifts from at least one church. Paul wrote about his personal needs and the needs of established churches in distress (1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8–9; Phil. 4). He also avoided depending on those he was discipling for his livelihood (Acts 20:34–35; Phil. 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:9). He argued that laborers in ministry are worthy of their wages and that he could have asked for support if expedient (1 Cor. 9:7–14). But he chose not to do that for several reasons: (1) he did not want to be a burden to new believers; (2) he wanted to give his opponents no pretext for questioning his motives; and (3) he wanted to set an example of hard work.

In Paul's day people were profiting from the gospel (2 Cor. 2:17), so he needed to set himself apart from them by relying on his tentmaking work and receiving only voluntary gifts from outside churches. There is a healthy pattern here for cross-cultural missionaries to follow. Not only should they not depend financially on those they are discipling, but they should be willing to support themselves if needed and should always give an example of hard work. As a result, when it is time to leave they will not be financially dependent on the new church for their income and will not open themselves to unnecessary criticism in financial matters.

An increasing number of missionaries going into creative-access countries[7] are starting businesses that provide part of their income and give them a platform for their ministry. In this case, they are self-supporting to some degree and rely on the contributions of outside churches and friends to supplement their business income. Handling two lines of work in a credible manner and coping with the stress of managing both

responsibly is not easy.[8] In some cases the church planter's spouse and members of the team are able to find some form of income and contribute financially to the project. The goal is that, as soon as possible, the new local disciples learn Christian stewardship and shoulder the financial responsibility for the work.

Besides the day-to-day expenses for oneself and one's family, there are usually initial costs involved in outgoing travel, setting up a home, and launching new ministries. In some cases the sponsoring or supporting group helps with *seed money* (Prov. 24:27; Luke 14:28–33) for such expenses. The expression "seed money" comes from the agricultural world. The farmer counts on the harvest to cover most expenses but needs to cover the cost of the seed ahead of time. Seed money is a minimal provision that allows the farmer to begin working the land. To use another analogy: just as parents who plan for a new baby make some basic provisions ahead of the birth or adoption, church leaders who plan for a new spiritual family gather some launching funds before planting. Ongoing ministry expenses such as rents or salaries should be borne by local believers as the ministry grows (see chapter 18 on the use of resources).

Ultimately, God will supply for his work done in his way according to his timetable (Phil. 4:18–19). Church planting is a venture of faith that depends on God's supply in ways humans cannot anticipate. Church planters must teach and exemplify both trust and sacrifice. If the team waits for all the needs to be met, it may never begin; on the other hand, the team should not incur debt or move far ahead of God's supply. God supplies in

his time, and the church-planting team should wait on him, take one step of faith at a time, and model both confident faith and patient dependence on God.

Prepare and Commission the Team

While team members are making personal plans, growing their prayer and financial support teams, and gaining whatever knowledge they can about the ministry focus people and the mission at hand, the team should solidify into a cohesive unit following these three steps.

Devote a time to focused team building. It is wise to carefully select an appropriate venue and a strategic time for team building. This is when relationships, vision, and strategy are adopted. Teams go through a cycle that includes tension and conflict after the honeymoon stage (see chapter 16), and it is important to begin addressing differences before the pressures of church planting emerge. During this period the team members will make a covenant with each other and to the mission ahead of them. Those who cannot make those commitments should be released graciously. Although the team clarifies the goal and makes key decisions, it should not prematurely map out detailed strategies and specific ministry plans. Rather it should wait to be on location and get the indispensable insights of cultural insiders.

Address deficiencies in preparation. Paul had many years of gospel ministry in Tarsus, Cilicia, and Syria before he left on his first journey with Barnabas (Gal. 1:15–2:2). He was uniquely prepared by God with languages and cultural understanding

from his youth. Some of his associates had less depth of preparation. For cross-cultural workers we would affirm the crucial importance of thorough language learning, growing cultural understanding, and a strong biblical foundation. This should be considered one's first ministry, and time must be set aside and plans made accordingly. In the case of those who are planting in their own home country, although less time needs to be devoted to it, some demographic and cultural study is still very important. We will talk more about that in the following chapter.

Commission the team. Team commissioning has great spiritual and practical value (Acts 13). The sending group pledges its prayer, financial, emotional, and logistic support. The team promises to be faithful to its Lord and its calling. The team covenant can be read at this time. Both the joy of following Christ and the somberness of difficulties ahead are felt. Church leaders lay their hands on those who are being sent (Acts 13:3) as a charge to service, a symbol of consecration, and an invocation of God's blessing and protection. This commissioning should not be seen as a ceremonial requirement as much as an intimate pledge of support and partnership in mission.