11

Launching

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Evangelism and Discipleship

Church planting is that ministry which, through evangelism and discipleship, establishes multiplying kingdom communities of believers in Jesus Christ who are committed to fulfilling biblical purposes under local spiritual leaders. This definition underlines the fact that evangelism and discipleship are the heart of church planting. At the same time, not all kinds of evangelism and discipleship contribute to the establishing of new kingdom communities. The expressions *church-planting evangelism* and *church-planting discipleship* will be used here for the types of efforts that contribute to the congregating of committed followers of Jesus Christ.

In our experience with consulting and coaching church planters around the globe, except among the most responsive people groups, evangelism and discipling are the greatest challenges for pioneer church planters. They require that spiritual strongholds be overcome to establish a beachhead in enemy territory, that the gospel be communicated through words and deeds in culturally meaningful and reproducible ways, and that new disciples be gathered and prepared in such a way that they will in turn make other disciples. Because this

phase is so central to the task of church planting, and in many contexts the most difficult one, this chapter is longer than most in our book. Yet we have only scratched the surface of the subject; thus we encourage readers to explore the various other resources referred to in the discussion that follows.

Overview of Phase

Biblical Examples

Acts 2–5: Proclamation and disciplemaking in Jerusalem
Acts 10–12: Multiplication and expansion to other places and groups
Acts 18: Aquila and Priscilla and Apollos
Acts 18–19: Paul's Ephesian ministry

Key Steps

1. Develop relationships and initiate evangelism
2. Evangelize holistically, addressing felt and real needs
3. Baptize and teach obedience to Jesus
4. Disciple new believers and train them to do the same
5. Wisely assimilate transfer growth
6. Form a foundational community
7. Begin training servant leaders

Critical Issues

1. Adequate and sustained evangelistic thrust
2. Approach to evangelism and discipleship that deals with sin and worldview and builds spiritual disciplines
3. Believers are trained immediately to make disciples and to serve
4. Discipling so that the first kingdom community becomes truly indigenous and can multiply
5. A discipleship plan that addresses problems of worldview, spiritual strongholds, transfer growth, and defection

Develop Relationships and Initiate Evangelism

The launch phase should build on the insights gained during the preparation phase as described in chapters 9 and 10. No disconnect may be allowed between personal preparation, strategy development, and gospel proclamation. The emphasis on church planting as a spiritual endeavor must continue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one building his church, and he will direct his colaborers if they seek him. That spiritual discernment and direction comes both from hearing his voice and from observing and understanding those who are being reached. The gospel must be shared broadly, constantly, and powerfully. However, not all communication of the gospel has the same results. The following discussion presents principles that can be used to develop an effective evangelistic approach or to assess existing evangelistic efforts.

Building Relationships in the Community

As members of the church-planting team mobilize for evangelism, they begin by building personal relationships with people in the community. Already, during the preparation phase laid out in chapter 10, responsive segments of the society will have been identified and contacts will have been made with community leaders and gatekeepers. The methods of evangelism that seem to best suit the people should have been discussed. But now personal relationships must be built. One must get to know the people personally, and this takes time. Planters from Western cultures can tend to be very task oriented, and activities like socializing informally, drinking tea,

and chatting can feel like a waste of time. But in most cultures relationships come before tasks. Evangelism is first and foremost about loving people the way God loves them and then sharing the message of God's redeeming love with them. People are not objects or targets. They want to be respected and understood. They are people worthy of love, respect, and *time*.

Building relationships can begin in one's neighborhood, by becoming acquainted with neighbors, shopkeepers, mail carriers, and those with whom one has natural contact on a regular basis. Visiting shops daily to buy bread or groceries is a way to get to know the shopkeepers or cashiers. One church planter never purchased more than a few dollars of gasoline for his automobile at one time, so that he would have more opportunities for conversation with the attendant. Using public transportation instead of a personal automobile also gives one a better sense of connectedness and feel for people's daily lives, and it often opens opportunities for conversation. Another place to begin is a community organization, such as a school-related parent-teacher association, Rotary club, renters' association, or friends of the library.

The team should discover the venues where people congregate, spend leisure time, and socialize. As noted in case study 10.4, in one German city sporting clubs proved to be one of the primary forms of social interaction for whole families, even for participants who were no longer active competitors. In other places coffee or tea shops, a local trading post, or a water well may be the place where much social networking occurs. The church-planting team should commit a sizable amount of

time—this will vary depending on other responsibilities but should be 50 percent initially—to involvement outside the home with people from the community. One weekly evening may be devoted to a non-church-related community organization, where one can build relationships with non-Christians and make a contribution to the community.

Exercising hospitality is a good way to move relationships beyond casual acquaintance to a deeper level. But one should become familiar with local customs regarding the exercise of hospitality: there are many unwritten rules of etiquette, manners, protocol (who invites whom, for what purpose—a full meal or just tea—what type of food should be served, and how long the visit should last). When one is new to a culture or community, vulnerability and social ineptness can actually provide opportunities to meet people as you simply ask for help: "Forgive me, but I am new here and want to learn about the ways of your wonderful people. I am embarrassed at how ignorant I am about _____. Could you please help me?" Such moments can open up great insights into local customs and thinking as well as build relationships. Requests for this kind of help also contribute to building mutuality in what might otherwise be one-sided relationships.[1] Of course after a while locals will lose patience with one's incompetence, so this method must be used early and often.

If the church planter is from an affluent country and working in a poorer country, he or she will usually have little difficulty making friends! Also if the planter is a native English speaker, she or he may be sought out as an English conversation partner. Many have used English classes or cooking classes as

a way to meet people and build relationships. Such activities need not be overtly evangelistic. But they do provide the church-planting team with occasions to move out beyond their comfortable circle of Christian friends and get to know the people they are seeking to reach. In casual conversation one learns about the joys and sorrows, the dreams and aspirations, the worries and fears of the average person. Many preconceived false impressions are corrected. One develops a genuine understanding and love for the people. Apart from this, neighbors will quickly sense that the church planter is more concerned about a project than about people.

A Strategy Tailored to the Ministry Focus People Chapter 9 addressed the importance of selecting a ministry focus people, and chapter 10 provided guidelines to understand it through the lenses of lived experience, demographic research, and participant observation. It is essential that there be alignment between one's understanding of the ministry focus people and the evangelistic approach and tools of communication that are used. Those who neglect this conceptual preparation and jump straight into evangelism based on their preferred strategies or doctrinal emphases will usually live to regret it. One can be a personal witness in one's own culture, but it is quite another thing to develop a plan for church-planting evangelism that will penetrate a different cultural group and help members of that group carry the gospel to their own people!

The church planters should prayerfully review what has been gleaned so far about the ministry focus people, discuss

their philosophy of evangelism, consider the categories of evangelistic methods (see sidebar 11.1), and then decide on those methods best suited to their philosophy, the focus people, and the gifts and interests of the team members. There are thousands of methods of communicating the gospel. Approaches differ greatly depending on the varying convictions of the believers and the varying situations of the unbelievers they are attempting to reach. Evangelistic methods can be categorized several ways, including the following:

- more personal (building on relationships) versus less personal (allowing anonymity)
- individual versus groups or large meetings
- narrow appeal (to segments of the population) versus broad appeal (to anyone)
- program or event oriented versus informal or spontaneous
- attractional (invite people to an event) versus incarnational (go to the people with the message in word and deed)
- "decision" oriented (calling for an immediate response) versus process oriented (allow inquirers time to grow in understanding)
- instructional or confrontational versus conversational or dialogical

Methods of Evangelism

Personal evangelism

- Relational or friendship evangelism
- Personal testimony
- Hospitality, house parties
- Use of tracts such as "The Four Spiritual Laws"
- "Gossiping the gospel" in the neighborhood
- Internet blogs, chats, forums

Public proclamation evangelism

- "Crusade" evangelism
- Lectures
- Open-air preaching on streets or in parks
- Chalk talks, street theater, and the like
- Evangelistic or "seeker-oriented" church services
- Tent campaigns
- Book table or information stand in public places

Special event evangelism

- Concerts
- Celebrity speakers
- Sporting events
- Special interest groups
- Public debates
- Mimes or theater

Literature and video evangelism

- Bible and tract distribution
- Mailings and door hangers
- Evangelistic films and videos such as the jesus film
- Newspaper, radio, television, internet
- Books

• Local lending libraries

Small group evangelism

• Evangelistic Bible studies
• Chronological Bible story telling
• Inviting guests to cell groups
• After school groups
• "Andrew suppers"—meals where a testimony is given

Visitation evangelism

• Visitation of inquirers or church visitors
• Hospital visitation
• Prison visitation
• Door-to-door visitation, community canvassing

Seminar and course evangelism

• Alpha courses
• Marriage enrichment
• Adult evening school courses
• Bible as literature
• School religion classes
• English language classes or retreats
• Cooking or other skill classes
• Spiritual retreats, Christian ashram

Servant evangelism

• Community service projects
• Medical, dental clinics
• Education and tutoring
• Food pantry or distribution
• Community health evangelism (CHE)
• Legal counsel
• Crisis counseling and hotlines
• Economic development
• Volunteering at community organizations

Focus people evangelism

• Student groups
• Children's Bible clubs, AWANA, Royal Rangers
• Mother-child groups
• Single parents, divorce, grief, special need groups
• Addiction and codependency recovery groups

Prayer evangelism

• Praying for the sick
• Praying for people in personal crisis
• Praying for deliverance from spiritual bondage
• Praying at public events

The exercise in table 11.1 uses slightly different categories to help team members personally identify the evangelistic approaches that fit both the church planter and the ministry context. Respondents indicate their evaluation of each approach on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "poor fit" and 5 being "excellent fit." Then they answer the final questions and highlight the top approaches for their situation, remembering that there is no one magic bullet.

Table 11.1
Evangelistic Methods Used in the Bible

Evangelistic approach	Biblical example	Natural fit for me? 1 to 5	Natural fit for context? 1 to 5	Total

1. Testimonial approach	• The Samaritan woman and townspeople, John 4:39–42 • The blind man, John 9:13–34 • Paul before Felix and Festus, Acts 24:1–25:12
2. Intellectual (or apologetic) approach	• Paul in Athens, Acts 17:16–34
3. Confrontational approach	• Peter in Jerusalem, Acts 2:14–40
4. Service approach	• Dorcas, Acts 9:36–43
5. Interpersonal approach	• Andrew to Peter and Philip to Nathaniel, John 1:40–46

6. Invitational approach (meal, event, party)	• Matthew's party, Luke 5:29

7. Teaching approach

• Paul in the synagogues and at the hall of Tyrannus, Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1.; 19:9

8. Discovery approach (asking questions)	• Nicodemus, John 3:1–21 • Jesus and the Samaritan woman, John 4:1–26

9. Bible study approach

• Paul and the Bereans, Acts 17:11

10. Prayer approach (healing or power encounter)	• The Jerusalem apostles, Acts 5:12–16 • Paul and the demonized fortune-teller, Acts 16:18

Prioritizing Receptive Persons or Groups

During the preparation phase, potentially receptive members of the focus people were identified. As the church planters

now initiate evangelistic efforts, they will focus on these receptive persons. Ralph Neighbour's pyramid of receptivity can be a helpful tool in the process (figure 11.1). It can be applied in any culture and identifies different levels of receptivity. Christian witnesses can use this pyramid of receptivity in two ways: First, they can adapt their prayers and witness to the receptivity of the person and help them move to the next stage. Second, they will want to seek out a certain type of people and associate themselves with groups based on their current receptivity level. For example, if young people are more receptive, student ministry will be a good investment. In Quebec, Canada, church planters found that people who respond to Christian witness move though several steps, needing to hear the gospel several times in different ways, before making a real commitment to Christ. Furthermore, prior to that commitment they made successive incremental decisions *toward Christ* in response to a series of observations and insights (Smith 1995). The pyramid of receptivity for the Quebec team looked like this:

Level A—Open to a friendship with the messenger and to a discussion of the message: some youth, some spiritual seekers, and people in crisis.

Level B—Open to the messenger but not to a discussion of the message: youth, nonpracticing nominal Christians, friends, and family of believers.

Levels C and D—Not open to the messenger or to the message: antireligious or conservative religious people, people who have had bad experiences with Christians.

Figure 11.1
Pyramid of Receptivity

Open to the message — A

Open to the messenger — B

Aware, but not receptive — C

No awareness of the gospel — D
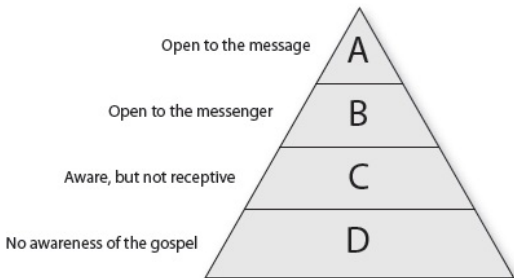
Source: adapted from Neighbour 1990, 245

One of the great challenges for church planting among resistant populations is how to find receptive people whom God seems to have prepared to hear the gospel. Often church planters who have relied solely on personal evangelism among friends and neighbors have an aversion to less personal approaches, especially mass evangelism. Although personal evangelism may be a good approach, in many cases it will not be adequate because the number of one's personal contacts is simply too few and none of them are ready or yet willing to hear the gospel. In such situations the church-planting team must also "cast the nets widely" with methods that identify prepared persons and seekers among the larger population.

Otherwise progress will be painfully slow and it may take years to gather a core of new believers. Dick Grady and Glenn Kendall's (1992) study of effective missionary church planters revealed that regardless of the receptivity of the region, more effective church planters used broad-based and flexible evangelistic methods (sidebar 11.2). "The most effective church planters had a greater tendency to use outreach methods that provide a large number of contacts in a given community. Those who enter a new cross-cultural situation, and devise a method for sharing the gospel with a large number of people, may then identify from this large group those who appear to be spiritually hungry. They invest productive time in discipling those who are more interested" (Grady and Kendall 1992, 366). They also use a wide variety of evangelistic approaches, because different methods appeal to different people. One cannot always predict which method will be most effective.

Mass distribution of literature, radio evangelism, door-to-door visitation, campaign evangelism, and other approaches that make contact with large numbers of people are entirely appropriate as long as the follow-up is carefully planned and personalized. The planters can then concentrate their energy on those persons who have indicated spiritual interest. As a church was being planted in Ingolstadt, Germany, thousands of mailers were distributed with a return postcard through which interested persons could request a Bible, literature, or a personal visit. Only three cards were returned, but two of the three persons who sent them eventually came to faith in Christ. For a church with fewer than twenty members, that was a major

breakthrough!

Keys to Effective Church Planting

Dick Grady and Glenn Kendall (1992) surveyed one hundred missionaries described as successful by their agencies and received responses from eighty-five. The following seven strategy principles were developed based on their responses.

1. More effective church planters spend more time in prayer.
2. More effective church planters use more broadly based evangelistic efforts.
3. More effective church planters are more flexible in their methods.
4. More effective church planters are more committed to a doctrinal position.
5. More effective church planters establish greater credibility.
6. More effective church planters have a greater ability to identify and then work with people who have a loosely structured religion.
7. More effective church planters have a greater ability to incorporate new converts into evangelistic outreach.

Mass approaches to evangelism will always need to be complemented with personal follow-up and discipleship. This may happen in small groups or in one-on-one relationships. As is true with the people in Quebec, many, if not most, people will need to hear the gospel many times and in many ways to grow in their understanding of the message and experience its full

transforming power. Ultimately there is no substitute for personalized teaching and spiritual nurture.

Evangelism as Both a Decision and a Process

When we read the book of Acts, we see that the earliest evangelists were bold to call both Jews (e.g., Acts 2:38–39; 3:19) and Gentiles (e.g., Acts 17:30; 26:20) to repentance and faith in Christ. Repentance involves turning from sin and idolatry to receive salvation in Christ and serve God (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:9). So too our ministry of evangelism must call hearers clearly to a decision for repentance and explicit faith in Christ, confessed with the lips and in the act of baptism. At this point a person is forgiven and born again into the family of God.

Yet evangelism must also be understood as a process. Though regeneration occurs at a particular time, there is a process leading up to that point and a process leading onward in Christian growth. Focusing too narrowly on a single decision for Christ often leads to superficial conversions that are rooted in misunderstanding or are wrongly motivated. In chapter 10 we discussed how the decision-making process differs in various cultures. Paul Hiebert tells the story of Papayya, an Indian peasant who gladly listens for hours to the gospel and is deeply moved by the message about God becoming man in Jesus Christ. Papayya prays to Christ but wonders whether Christ is just one more among millions of *avatara*—Hindu gods who have descended from higher spiritual realms. "As a Hindu he worships Vishnu, who incarnated himself many times as a human, animal, or fish to save mankind. Papayya also knows many of the other 330

million Hindu gods. But the stranger says there is only one God, and this God has appeared among humans only once. Moreover the stranger says that Jesus is the Son of God, but says nothing about God's wife. It's all confusing to him" (Hiebert 2008, 10). Hiebert asks whether Papayya can become a true Christian after just one hearing of the gospel, to which he answers yes. But the path of discipleship and true understanding will be a long one. The more the messenger can understand Papayya's world and beliefs, the better he can avoid misunderstandings and help Papayya to comprehend the gospel and become a faithful follower of Christ.

The story of Papayya illustrates that understanding of the gospel must grow in depth, which is often a long process.[2] Alan Tippett's (1992) studies of conversion led him to view conversion in terms of stages: people move from a period of awareness, to a period of decision making, then a period of incorporation, and period of maturity. He also found that rituals marking the transition from one stage to the next stage, such as an altar call, baptism, or destruction of fetishes, were critical to long-term conversion and discipleship among animists (Tippett 1967, 109; 1971, 169). An understanding of these processes will influence how the gospel is presented, expectations regarding responses, how to interpret people's responses, and how to help people come to a place of true saving faith in Christ and follow him.

Evangelism That Deals with Worldview

The life and work of Jesus have meaning only in the context of the biblical worldview of creation, sin, and redemption.

Consequently church planters ministering to people of another worldview—including the Western postmodern worldview—must begin with God's nature, his creation, the fall and the nature of sin, the need for redemption through the atoning work of Jesus, and the final judgment or reward at his return. Hiebert warns, "Too often conversion takes place at the surface levels of behavior and beliefs; but if worldviews are not transformed, the gospel is interpreted in terms of pagan worldviews and the result is Christo-paganism" (2008, 69). A host of other worldview issues such as the spirit world, ancestors, the nature of biblical revelation, or life after death may also need to be biblically addressed. Evangelism that addresses worldview is essential to building a solid foundation of faith and obedience by helping the listener receive God's truth, confront cultural distortions, and build a new and lasting conceptual framework.

In the example of Papayya we also see that evangelism that does not address cultural distortions of the biblical worldview may produce professions of faith but will not produce transformed disciples, families, and communities. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries to Africa brought Western patterns of thinking that, for example, separated the spiritual and physical realms and emphasized truth over power. African theologian Van der Poll describes this failure: "Because the Gospel was not brought to the people as a totally encompassing life view, which would take the place of an equally comprehensive traditional life view, the deepest core of the African culture remains untouched" (cited in Miller and Allen 2005, 42). Hiebert (1982) pointed out that most Western

missionaries failed to construct a biblical worldview of the spirit world including angels, demons, unseen powers, blessings, and curses. African people believed such powers to be the ultimate cause behind most significant events, including illness and drought. The failure to give new believers a biblical cosmology and help them know how to respond to such events left many confused and feeling powerless. And many simply returned to the traditional shaman in times of crisis.

Evangelistic Methods Adapted to a People's Learning Style Many popular evangelistic methods were developed in Western cultures and have proved effective in that context because they are well suited to the Western mentality, worldview, and learning style. For example, the well-known tract "The Four Spiritual Laws" has been very effective with certain groups; however, as shown in table 11.2, not all people groups share that Western thought-pattern.

Table 11.2
Four Spiritual Laws and Worldview

Some people . . .	But many people . . .
understand all of life in terms of fixed and predictable laws*	view life in terms of mystery or as being subject to capricious unseen powers, not law
think in abstract categories such as law and emphasize fact over faith and feeling	think in more concrete terms, use stories and proverbs, and intermingle facts,

	feelings, and faith
have a very linear logic—progressing from one law to the next	use nonlinear logic and think in terms of events or cycles rather than cause and effect
think of life in terms of a plan for the future	think of life fatalistically or more in terms of the past than in terms of "plans"
view "abundant life" as a primary goal	see survival or life after death as their greatest need
can make sense of abstract diagrams and representations such as circles, arrows, a cross	do not understand abstract diagrams but relate well to drawings of people or objects
prefer an ordered or structured life to a more spontaneous, disordered life	prefer a spontaneous life to a structured and ordered one
are accustomed to making personal individual decisions	normally make major decisions in consultation with family or peers

* The opening sentence of the "Four Spiritual Laws" is "Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God" (Bright 2007).

   Furthermore, many concepts in the "Four Spiritual Laws" can be easily misunderstood, such as "abundant life" (as material wealth), "new birth" (as reincarnation), and "sin" (as

an especially wicked deed, or as getting caught violating a social norm). Even the image of Christ knocking at the door (Rev. 3:20) can be interpreted as aggressive. In some cultures, houses do not even have doors that can be knocked on! All this is to say that although the "Four Spiritual Laws" has been a wonderful tool to share the gospel with millions of people, it will not be equally effective everywhere.

In recent years excellent materials have become available to share the gospel in very different ways that emphasize the element of story, concrete thinking, and oral communication. For example, Trevor McIlwain developed a chronological approach to telling the story of salvation history from Genesis through the Gospels in *Building on Firm Foundations* (1987).[3] The use of this method was wonderfully illustrated in the film *EE-Taow*. One advantage to this approach is that nearly everyone can understand and relate to stories. Abstract concepts such as God, sin, and redemption are unfolded in the context of the concrete acts of God in history and his dealings in the lives of people. Thus truths are discovered in a context that brings their meaning to life. Another major advantage to this approach is that as the message is communicated beginning with the story of creation and progressing through the fall, the call of Abraham, the Old Testament sacrificial system, the promise of a redeemer, and so on, a biblical worldview is constructed. The message of the redeeming work of Christ on the cross can make sense only against this background. In the words of one seasoned church planter working in East Africa, "We have found that those who come to Christ through hearing the chronological narrations have far

less of a struggle with syncretism in their Christian walk because their understanding of the whole framework of God's plan is much more complete" (Lyons 2009, 2).

Authors such as Tom Steffen (1996; Steffen and Terry 2007) have pointed out that about 75 percent of the Bible is narrative and that story is the dominant form of communication in many cultures.[4] Martin Goldsmith (1980) argues for the effectiveness of parables in the context of Islam. Oral learners may be illiterate, functionally illiterate, or literate, but all oral learners are simply more comfortable with the oral communication of information. "Making disciples of oral learners means using communication forms that are familiar within the culture: stories, proverbs, drama, songs, chants, and poetry. Literate approaches rely on lists, outlines, word studies, apologetics and theological jargon. These literate methods are largely ineffective among two-thirds of the world's peoples. Of necessity, making disciples of oral learners depends on communicating God's word with varied cultures in relevant ways" (LOP 54, 2005). Such an approach is relevant not only in traditional societies but increasingly also in modern and postmodern settings where people do not have a biblical worldview and where story is more communicative and persuasive than abstract reasoning. "Making Disciples of Oral Learners," the Lausanne report quoted above, goes on to point out, "Oral strategies are also necessary in reaching people whose orality is tied to electronic media. They may be able to read well, but they get most of the important information in their lives through stories and music from the radio, television, film, Internet and other electronic means" (ibid.).

Storytelling approaches to evangelism and discipleship have the added advantage that new believers can easily continue to tell others the Bible stories they have learned, and as a result, the method is locally reproducible and can easily lead to multiplication. Thus when the skill is learned, narrating the plan of redemption can capture the attention of hearers, enable them to interact directly with God's revelation, deepen their understanding, and facilitate retention.

Locally Reproducible and Sustainable Methods

Storytelling illustrates a principle. Approaches and ministries used by the church-planting team should be ones that local believers can use and will want to use. In order to be reproducible, they must rely on natural and readily accessible local resources and means. Usually this involves working primarily through relationships and avoiding using technology and imported means. Simple, cost-effective approaches are often the best. Tools such as literature and media are effective only when they lead to an exploration of Jesus's words and deeds in the context of the full biblical worldview, as illustrated in the above examples.

Case Study 11.1

Storytelling and Church Planting

Pastor Dinanath of India tells his story of ministry among his people: "I was

saved from a Hindu family in 1995 through a cross-cultural missionary. I had a desire to learn more about the word of God and I shared this with the missionary. The missionary sent me to Bible College in 1996. I finished my two years of theological study and came back to my village in 1998. I started sharing the good news in the way as I learnt in the Bible College. To my surprise my people were not able to understand my message. A few people accepted the Lord after much labour. I continued to preach the gospel, but there were little results. I was discouraged and confused and did not know what to do."

But then Pastor Dinanath's story takes a major turn: "In 1999 I attended a seminar where I learnt how to communicate the gospel using different oral methods. I understood the problem in my communication as I was mostly using a lecture method with printed books, which I learnt in the Bible school. After the seminar I went to the village but this time I changed my way of communication. I started using a storytelling method in my native language. I used gospel songs and the traditional music of my people. This time the people in the villages began to understand the gospel in a better way. As a result of it people began to come in large numbers. Many accepted Christ and took baptism. There was one church with few baptized members in 1999 when I attended the seminar. But now in 2004, in six years we have 75 churches with 1350 baptized members and 100 more people are ready for baptism" (LOP 54, 2005).

Priority should be placed not on strategies that require a high degree of education, specialized training, or exceptional gifts, but rather on methods that draw on ordinary Christians' natural means of communication and social intercourse. Another consideration in reproducibility is the ability to transfer such methods to young believers relatively easily using familiar learning styles and communication patterns. In oral cultures, narratives are readily transmitted from one generation of believers to another. The personal testimonies and transformed lives of local new believers are important elements of any evangelistic strategy. Working as a group in

evangelism models Christian community in action and provides strength through cooperation.[5] Cooperative evangelistic methods can also demonstrate unity and love among believers (John 17:23), as is seen in case study 11.2.

Evangelism That Leads to Discipleship

In Latin America and in many other places, a common problem is that a lot of energy is spent on evangelistic efforts that produce many inquirers and "decisions" but few lasting converts. Some evangelistic strategies have a built-in *follow-up gap*, which occurs when the respondents have no prior relationship with those calling on them. It can also occur when it is assumed that respondents have understood the gospel and been truly born again. Assessment of understanding and response should be the first step in follow-up, though the depth of the conversion experience may not be evident for months to come as the person grows in understanding and evidences Spirit-empowered life change. Robert Priest (2003) studied thirty-four conversion narratives of the Aguaruna in Peru and found that initially converts lacked any sense of sin but such awareness grew over time as they heard the Word of God. In such situations it is especially important to consider evangelism as a process that flows into discipleship.

When the gospel is shared face to face or in a small group by neighbors, friends, or relatives, follow-up is much easier. Questions and obstacles can be addressed. While personal approaches take more time, they lessen the follow-up gap and yield most lasting fruit.[6] When, on the other hand, evangelism occurs in the form of large meetings, literature or

media campaigns, concerts, open-air preaching, and formats that are less personal, extra effort must be given to following up on those who express interest. Personal information will need to be obtained from inquirers so that they can be contacted. Merely sending a letter or making a phone call is seldom adequate. Often follow-up is done through a personal home visit—though this can be difficult or impossible in large cities, where addresses are inaccurate, difficult to find, or located in inaccessible places (such as protected high-rise apartments or gated communities). Another approach is to offer a follow-up Bible study or other form of small group discipleship. One will need to consider the best venue for such meetings: the home of a believer, the home of an inquirer, a church building, or a more public, neutral location like a restaurant? It's best to pick the venue that inquirers are most likely to come to and feel comfortable in.

Common Mistakes in the Launching Phase

1. Church planting suffers when evangelism is only pursued during the first stage of the church plant.

   Often evangelism is the focus initially because there is no church and no other way to grow the church, but once a congregation has been gathered, evangelism gets neglected as the focus shifts to working with Christians. However, evangelism is not a phase beyond which the church eventually moves but the missional heartbeat of the church. When church growth is slow, the first question to ask is "How are we doing in our evangelism?"

2. Church planting suffers when there is only one

evangelistic approach.

The early church used a diversity of means and methods (Green 1970), and the Scriptures talk about making use of every opportunity (Col. 4:5). As noted above, Grady and Kendall (1992) found that effective church planters use broadly based evangelistic efforts, are flexible in their implementation, and combine them by integrating social activity (compassion ministry) and gospel witness. In so doing they establish credibility and build relationships. Those who focus on finding the one key to unlock the door often miss out—several keys are needed. Many different approaches are listed in sidebar 11.1 and table 11.1.

3. Church planting suffers when we rely only on the trained and the gifted for evangelism.

The Bible teaches that there are persons with the gift of evangelism (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11). But every Christian is to be a witness for Christ (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15) and joyfully share the message of Jesus with others. New believers from the ministry focus people normally become the most effective evangelists. Therefore effective church-planting teams do not isolate new believers from relationships with unbelieving friends and relatives.

Grady and Kendall's 1992 study confirms that effective church planters are able to integrate new believers into evangelistic efforts. They become the "bridges of God"[7] to non-Christians because they have many natural relationships with unbelievers in the focus people. And

because they have been converted recently, they still understand the thoughts and questions of unbelievers and can communicate with them compellingly. Kenneth Strachan of Latin America Mission found that movements grow in proportion to the church's ability to mobilize all members in the propagation of its beliefs. The impact of "every member mobilization" was demonstrated through Evangelism in Depth campaigns in many Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s (Strachan 1968; Roberts 1971).

4. Church planting suffers when evangelism is built on plans and programs alone.

It is commonly accepted that the greatest influence in a person's coming to Christ is the witness and life of a friend or family member (Gómez 1996; Smith 1995). If we equip Christians to live and share the gospel in their relational network, the evangelistic potential of the church is multiplied. Programs are great supplements to but poor substitutes for personal evangelism.

5. Church planting suffers when the basics of evangelism are neglected.

Prayer and use of the Scriptures are the biblical basics of effective evangelism. Grady and Kendall (1992) list prayer ministry as the number-one factor in fruitful church planting. The other basic is a clear gospel presentation. As the apostle Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Giving a personal testimony of what Christ has done for an individual is no substitute for explaining the offer of salvation in Christ as testified to in the Scriptures. We must remember that people from other religions also have their testimonies. A witness may begin with her personal story, but no one will be saved until they hear Jesus's message and story. The Word of God is powerful and active like a two-edged sword, and the gospel alone is the power of God that leads to salvation (Heb. 4:12; Isa. 55:10–11). It is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the hearer of the truth of the gospel and open the hearts of the hearers (John 16:8–10; Acts 16:14). An Indian evangelist expressed it this way: "Jesus cannot be explained, He can only be revealed."[8] Prayer and the gospel are the basics. Many new ideas and strategies can be attempted; the question is, "How do they incorporate these fundamentals?"

Case Study 11.2

Evangelism through Cell Groups

The Dios Admirable Church in Caracas, Venezuela, began in 1965 as an evangelistic Bible study targeting college students. Pastor Francisco Liévano, its former pastor, led the church from two hundred to four hundred people by using discipling cell groups. By 1999 it had grown to twenty-five cell groups, and many others were used to start five new churches in Caracas. They are called Grupos Básicos de Discipulado Cristiano (Basic Christian Discipleship Groups).

This initiative was based on the convictions that (1) if believers are growing

in the Lord, they will be bringing new people into the kingdom, and (2) evangelism is accomplished best along interpersonal networks, with people brought into neighborhood groups as they come to Christ. One of the men in the church stated that at least 75 percent of the new converts had come through the home group ministry. He also reported that 90 percent of the active ministry of the church was done through the home groups (Neumann 1999).

Evangelism and Discipleship in Montreal

Most people under fifty years old in Quebec have a Roman Catholic cultural heritage and believe in God but have little understanding of who he is or how he relates to them. Few have even considered the possibility of a daily relationship with him. In order to better communicate the gospel to this people group, Christian Direction, a service organization for the Quebec church, asked people in existing churches what had led them to a personal relationship with God. They found that respondents had heard the gospel –or parts of it—eight times on average before making a decision for Christ!* The greatest influence on their decision was the life change of a family member or friend (Smith 1995).

While this indicated the need for patient gospel sowing through relational networks and community involvement, other factors indicated that some would respond to larger group proclamation: (1) There was respect for the Bible as God's revelation. (2) Most respondents had wanted to see Christians in action in a group setting before making their decision. (3) Most had made their final decision in a group setting where a clear message and invitation were given.

As a result, the church-planting team adopted a three-pronged strategy: (1) Relational approach: They became members of community groups, built personal relationships with neighbors, and shared Christ as they had opportunity. (2) "Gospel net" approach: All team members met weekly to share progress and pray together for evangelism activities and appointments. They organized public community events in neutral places to draw seekers. (3) Multiplying witnesses: They immediately trained new believers to share their

testimony and a simple gospel presentation.

The strength of the team's evangelism came from its broad strategy, teamwork, and perseverance. Several discipleship cell groups were formed. The greatest fruit came when Quebecois themselves shared their newfound love for Jesus with their peers.

Evangelize Holistically by Addressing Felt and Real Needs During the preparation phase (chapter 10) the felt needs of the focus people were investigated. Felt needs are those needs that people recognize and are motivated to resolve. They might include existential ones, such as food and water; personal ones such as love and significance; social ones such as transportation and security; spiritual ones for forgiveness or freedom from demonic forces; or any other host of needs that affect people's sense of well-being. Real needs are those that are needs *from God's perspective*. A felt need for food would be also be real need, but a felt need for material wealth would not. All felt needs must be taken seriously, but ultimately the church planter will seek to address real ones. Many people are unaware of their real needs for such things as forgiveness of sin and eternal life but

are awakened to them by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Jesus not only preached the truth but healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, restored outcasts, and cared for people as whole people. By addressing people's needs, one demonstrates goodwill and compassion. As messengers of the gospel, we must not only tell people of the good news: we must also *be* good news when possible.

In chapter 19 we provide a detailed discussion of holistic ministries with kingdom impact. Suffice it to say here that as evangelism is launched, it must be accompanied by deeds of compassion and service. The church-planting team will need to assess local needs and realistically evaluate which of them can be addressed competently and adequately given the available personnel and resources. Ways to meet real needs might include hospital or prison visitation, tutoring programs, operating a food pantry, and digging fresh-water wells. In community health evangelism (CHE), an approach that has been thoughtfully developed and widely used, local people are taught how to analyze their community's needs and how to meet those needs using local resources. "CHE seamlessly integrates evangelism, discipleship, and church planting with community health and development."[9] In the early stages of the church plant, however, the team must carefully discern where to best invest its time, energy, and resources. Ministries of compassion and service can consume endless quantities of resources. Balance and a clear sense of priorities need to be maintained.

Rick Grover (2004) points out that in suburban churches

Sunday mornings drive ministry, whereas in urban churches ministry drives Sunday morning. That is to say, in suburban settings the Sunday morning service is the primary focus of church life, and people are drawn to an attractive worship experience. Service ministries are an outgrowth of what happens on Sunday. In contrast, in urban churches the service ministries during the week (e.g., food pantry, job training, legal counsel) tend to be the primary focus of church life, which also draws people to Sunday services. This difference should not be missed when a team is planting urban churches. Grover continues, "I recommend that the new urban church begins prior to the first public worship service with one need-meeting ministry in the community that can grow and be done with excellence" (2004, 49).

Local values (what is important, what needs are most significant) should be considered when the team is deciding about forms of evangelism, service, and development ministries. Many cultural values and customs are neither right nor wrong but matters of convention, tradition, or aesthetics. Christ does not destroy local cultures; he redeems them, purifying the good and irradiating the evil. Cross-cultural church planters must be sensitive not to impose their own cultural values—values that are not necessarily biblical—on others. This is one of the great challenges of contextualization.

David Britt studied local factors in urban multicultural church growth. He concludes that congruence—the quality of according or coinciding, the ability to come together in harmony—not homogeneity, is what church planters should seek.[10] Churches and church plants grow best when they

address local cultural values and show how Christ fulfills the heart's deepest aspirations and greatest needs. How does this apply to ministries of service and evangelism? First of all, it underscores the need to study the community and understand their perception of Christians and Christianity. Second, it challenges the notion that to attract people we must be distinctive in every way. The church should stand out because of its message, love, and integrity—not because of the language, music, and other cultural values and symbols it uses. Finally, we should seek common spaces—both cultural and physical ones—with those we are reaching. Engaging the culture through involvement in community activities and services is one way of demonstrating the salt-and-light impact of the gospel on everyday life.

Baptize and Teach Obedience to Jesus

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 speaks of making disciples by baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching new believers to not merely know but *obey* all that Jesus commanded us. As we have noted above, a plan for evangelism must always include a plan for follow-up of new believers. Yet often such follow-up plans fail on precisely these two points: baptism and obedience. The follow-up often involves neophytes in a study that is primarily an intellectual exercise. They can quickly gain the impression that Christianity is first and foremost about knowing the Bible —that the measure of maturity is Bible knowledge. While the Christian faith is unquestionably grounded in God's truth as

revealed in the Bible, the goal of Bible study is not knowledge in and of itself but rather Bible knowledge that leads to a closer relationship with God and a walk that is pleasing to God. James 1:22 exhorts, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

We sometimes treat disciplemaking like a program or a class. A leader in Brazil once said, "When you speak of discipleship it sounds like a transfer of knowledge; for us it is the unfolding and outworking of the life of Christ in the believer." Neighbour observes, "We have spent all our training in the cognitive domain. We mistakenly think teaching and preaching change the values of Christians. . . . The curse of the traditional church is that there is no model, no leader who says, 'Pattern your life after me'" (1990, 2). This underlines the need for modeling and mentoring through a relationship of trust. Ranjit DeSilva defines spiritual formation as "the development of the inner life, so that a person experiences Christ as the source of life, reflects more Christ-like characteristics, and increasingly knows the power and presence of Christ in ministry" (DeSilva 1996, 50). God uses many means for life transformation. Robert Coleman (1987, 59–97) points out some of them:

- the importance of relationships— Mark 3:13–15; John 1:35–42
- meeting in homes—Acts 5:42; 20:20
- putting Scripture into practice—Matthew 28:20
- baptism—Matthew 28:19
- a new community—Acts 2:42–47
- loving obedience to a new Master—John 15

- the transforming of worldview and values—Romans 12:2
- a new source of life and power—Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:22–23

Thus a balanced follow-up plan will include Bible study that not only clarifies central Christian truths but also helps new believers apply those truths to their everyday life. It will include much prayer for new believers and practical instruction in Christian disciplines. A key will be helping them discern the will of Christ for their life and ordering their affairs under Christ's lordship. Often it is during the first days and weeks that new believers are most open to change and reordering of their personal affairs as they are particularly sensitive to the reality of God's fresh work in their life. This opportunity should not be missed.

One of the principal outward signs of becoming a disciple of Christ in the New Testament is baptism. Baptism has many levels of biblical meaning: public confession of repentance and faith (Acts 2:38), entry into the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:13), identification with the death and resurrection of Christ unto new life (Rom. 6:1–10), and cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). In some contexts, such as the Muslim and Hindu world, it has been suggested that a substitute for baptism as a rite of passage should be practiced because of baptism's negative associations or false understandings.[11] However, three reasons argue in favor of the universal practice of water

baptism: First, the theological meanings associated with it are reflected in the physical act (Rom. 6:1–10; 1 Pet. 3:21); second, Matthew 28:19 explicitly commands us to baptize "all nations"; and third, in Acts both Jewish and Gentile new believers were baptized—we have no example of any substitute. Indeed, Ephesians 4:5 speaks of *one* Lord, *one* faith, and *one* baptism. Westerners with a highly rationalistic bent tend to underestimate the spiritual, social, and psychological importance of rituals such as baptism. Ritual acts that mark the transition from one stage to the next stage (such as an altar call, baptism, or destruction of fetishes) can be essential elements in the process of conversion and critical to identification with the new faith and church (Tippett 1967, 109; 1971, 169; 1992).

Church planters will have several decisions to make about the practice of baptism within their context: the time of baptism, its form (immersion, pouring, or sprinkling), and whether it should be public or private. Many factors come into play, including the beliefs of the planter; thus we limit ourselves to a concise, but important, look at some of the issues.

The question of time concerns not only whether infants or only adults should be baptized but (especially in pioneer settings) also whether there should be a period of instruction and waiting or baptism should be administered without delay. In every example in the New Testament, baptism (even of pagan-background Gentile believers) was administered almost immediately after the person's conversion and simple confession of faith. This should warn against an overly cautious stance. On the other hand, many professions of faith

are shallow and based on a very inadequate understanding of the gospel or on questionable motives. Baptizing a person who later turns out not to be genuinely converted can have many negative repercussions. Rather than establishing a mandatory waiting period, an emphasis should be placed on waiting to see clear evidences of commitment and change. Planters will want to consider the perspective of other local believers and the reaction of the new disciple's peers as they look for evidence of new life in Christ.

For those who come from Muslim, Hindu, and even Catholic or Orthodox backgrounds, water baptism (or "rebaptism" if they were baptized as infants) is seen as the final threshold that marks conversion to a new faith and community. If that threshold is crossed willingly, publicly, and with clear understanding of its implications, new disciples are more likely to grow in their identification with the church and its practices. It will often have a significant impact on the disciple's relationship to his or her family, friends, and former community of faith. Thus church planters must not take the command to baptize lightly, overlooking the *theological and personal* significance of baptism for the new believer and for the healthy development of the church.

Disciple New Believers and Train Them to Do the Same

Evangelism must lead to discipleship, and discipleship must include baptism and learning obedience to Christ. The separation of evangelism and discipleship is an artificial one. The mandate for both comes from the same command to "make

disciples" (Matt. 28:19). In the New Testament, discipling bridges the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of believers in the faith. Multiplying biblical disciples is the sine qua non thrust of church planting.

Disciples and Discipling

Church planters should have a good understanding of what a disciple is biblically and what a disciple would look like where the church is being planted. Disciples are those who follow Christ and his teaching in order to become progressively more like him and accomplish his will for their lives. In the New Testament a disciple is not an "advanced" Christian: people are called disciples from the moment they begin to follow Jesus and as long as they continue in his way. The twelve apostles had a particular calling as apostles, but they continued to be called disciples (Mark 3:7, 13–15). In Acts 14 the term "the disciples" is used for those in Derbe who had just turned to Christ (vv. 20–21), for young believers who came to Christ during the first leg of Paul and Barnabas's journey (v. 22), and for the more mature believers in Antioch who had sent them out (v. 28). Thus a disciple of Jesus is a follower of Jesus regardless of maturity level. However, in this chapter we are primarily concerned with the first stages in the life of disciples.

We define *discipling* as helping new Christ-followers become established, grounded, stable, and secure in him and in their practice of obedience to him. If we are called to make disciples, we should have a clear idea of what Jesus expects of his disciples and what he promises them. Table 11.3, which compares the costs and rewards of following Jesus, was used

by a church-planting team in its discipling efforts.

Table 11.3
The Biblical Profile and Reward of a Disciple

Profile of a Disciple		Reward of a Disciple	
Remains in Christ and in his Word	John 8:31; 15:4–6	Loved by Jesus and his Father	John 15:9, 15
Keeps his commandments	John 14:15; 15:10, 14	Receives answers to prayers	John 15:7, 16
Loves Jesus more than anyone else	Matthew 10:37	Bears much fruit	John 15:5, 8
Loves others with Jesus's love	John 13:35; 15:12, 17	Becomes more and more like Jesus	Luke 6:40
Gives witness of Jesus	John 15:27	Experiences deep joy	John 15:11
Denies self	Matthew 10:38; 16:24	Experiences extraordinary peace	John 20:19–20
Accepts opposition	John 15:20	Receives correction to bear more fruit	John 15:2
Exercises trust in	John 14:1	Is filled with the	John 14:16; Acts

Jesus's description reminds us that being a disciple is a life transformation, not simply adopting a new set of doctrinal propositions and religious behaviors. It is a new way of life guided by the Word and the Spirit, motivated by a transformed mind, a grateful heart, and new affections. Thus the emphasis is not on becoming a bona fide church member but on becoming a faithful, obedient, and fruitful follower of Jesus—although belonging to a community of faith is an important outcome and outward sign.

Growth is the measure of progress in discipleship. Disciples grow in many ways, and these dimensions of growth cannot be isolated from each other; God expects them all. We can identify in the Scriptures at least seven ways he expects disciples to grow and produce fruit to his glory:

- in character and fruit of the Holy Spirit (John 15; Gal. 5:22–23), maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:15), faith and love (2 Thess. 1:3)
- in knowledge and truth from the Word (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18)
- in service and prayer (Acts 6:1–5; Eph. 6:10–20)
- in love and mutual edification (John 17:20–26; Eph. 4:1–6; Col. 3:12–17)
- in witness and missional impact (Acts 1:8; 1 Tim. 5:7–10; 1 Pet. 3:15)
- in social impact (Matt. 4:23–25), including healing (Acts 9:32–43), spirit deliverance (Acts 19:19), social justice

(James 2:1–7), and care for the needy (Acts 4:34–37)
- in unity amid ethnic and other differences (John 17:20–23; Eph. 2:11–22; Rev. 5:9–10)

Why so many dimensions of growth? So that God's people will spread the knowledge of the Almighty, declare praises of his mercy to the world (Eph. 1:6–8; 1 Pet. 2:9–10), and draw people from all nations to faith in Christ and obedience to his Word (Matt. 28:18–20).

Corporate and Peer Discipling

Discipling takes place in both individual and corporate settings. Both individuals (Matt. 8:22; 9:9; 19:21; John 1:43) and groups (Matt. 4:19; 10:38; 16:24; John 10:27; 2 Thess. 3:7–9) are called to follow Jesus. Jesus called his disciples individually, indicating that he knew them particularly and had a plan for their individual lives (John 1:48; 15:16). This is accentuated by the fact that in Jesus's day most disciples chose their rabbi (Costas 1979).[12] He calls his disciples "friends" (15:15) and "his sheep" (John 10), going after the individual lamb in danger (Luke 15:1–6). Even in group settings Jesus addresses disciples individually and deals with their questions and doubts personally (John 14:5, 8). Correction must also be initially handled on an individual basis (Matt. 18:15–17). One-on-one relationships are an important but not exclusive means of discipling in church planting.

Jesus and Paul also often address disciples corporately.

Their modus operandi was to use dialogical teaching in groups of various sizes. Like grapes, disciples are naturally found in clusters and grow together. Jesus alternately spent time with a group of three (Peter, James, and John), with the Twelve, and with larger groups. Meeting in small groups for discipleship can strengthen members' motivation as they develop group solidarity and hold each other accountable. Especially in more collectivistic societies, groups are a more natural and motivational setting than one-on-one meetings. Thus discipleship encompasses many types of intentional interpersonal and group relationships. When these are held in balance and centered on Jesus, they provide the broadest and most effective discipling.

Discipleship and Multiplication

The goal of discipling is the multiplication of Spirit-transformed witnesses for Christ who become agents of his kingdom.

Probably the Christian community within three decades had multiplied four hundredfold which represents an annual increase of 22 percent for more than a generation, and the rate of growth continued remarkably high for 300 years. By the beginning of the fourth century, when Constantine was converted to Christianity, the number of disciples may have reached 10 or 12 million, or roughly a tenth of the total population of the Roman Empire. . . . The early church grew by evangelistic multiplication as witnesses of Christ reproduced their lifestyle in the lives of those about them. (Coleman 1987, 39–40) Discipling that requires formal education or resources will stand in the way of total mobilization and multiplication; only discipling that is simple, organic, relational, and accessible to every believer will lead to multiplication. The pattern must be taught, modeled, and maintained. Effective multiplication approaches often include both personal mentoring and small group accountability. Neil Cole (2004; 2005) has modeled and taught the use of

small disciplemaking groups as a means of multiplication. Disciples do not make others in isolation but in small groups Cole calls "life transformation groups" that use mutual discipling and do not require theologically trained leaders.

Discipling centers on Jesus's teaching. In the Gospels he is constantly giving the disciples lessons about the kingdom of God, using parables, and correcting their faulty patterns of thinking. He clearly expects them to make every facet of their lives conform to his teaching under the control of his Spirit ("obey" in Matt. 28:20). Paul also practiced life teaching for life change. He reminds the Ephesian elders: "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house . . . for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (see Acts 20:20, 27).

Discipling is costly and time consuming. While striving for multiplication, church planters must avoid shortcuts. Several authors have identified three stages in Jesus's plan of spiritual formation (Bruce 1971; Hull 1988). It is helpful to envision discipleship reproduction as a process, and what better pattern to follow than the one Jesus established with his disciples? In the first stage, the disciples observed Jesus's ministry of teaching, healing, and serving. Later they were called to leave their occupations to follow Jesus. In the third stage they received deeper teaching and were sent out on practical ministry tours.

Discipleship is also costly because it involves life-on-life mentoring in order to extend the lordship of Christ to a person's entire being: thought, belief, behavior, relationships,

and character. This is the New Testament pattern. Jesus walked, talked, taught, corrected, demonstrated, fed, helped and received help from his disciples. His first discipling activity was hospitality. He asked two curious followers of John the Baptist, "What do you want?" and then invited them to share a day with him (John 1:38–39). Paul followed the Master's plan of discipling and compared his care for the Thessalonians to the nurturing of a mother (1 Thess. 2:7–9). Spiritual parenting can be painful as well: Paul addresses the Galatians as "my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

Responsible parents plan for the shelter, nourishment, protection, and exercise of their children. Yet every child is different, and individual care and interventions must be carried out. Likewise, a basic discipling plan will have a primary (preferable natural) mentoring relationship, a discipleship group in which the new believer learns to live in community, and a Bible study plan that establishes new biblical patterns of thinking and behavior in direct obedience to God's Word. The Grace Brethren have been among the strongest advocates of the centrality of disciplemaking to church planting. Sidebar 11.3 explains some basic principles they use in their "apostolic church-planting team strategy" (Julien 2000).

Special Issues in Discipling

Discernment is needed to help new disciples with personal problems that are deeply rooted conceptually or spiritually. Although all believers are new creatures in Christ, they can come with a significant history of destructive spiritual practices

that may have created deep roots and chains of demonic bondage. Sinful habits, if not identified and abandoned, will invariably choke the seed of new life.

New Christians come into the Christian community with unresolved conflicts and unhealthy relational patterns. Like the Samaritan woman, some come with dysfunctional marriages and families. They also come with distortions from their former worldview and need a worldview transformation. In all these cases discipling must be corrective as well as developmental. It must deal with the realities that are present below the surface. Satan's lies and destructive patterns must be confronted in love. It is often helpful to have someone on the church-planting team with skills and gifts in counseling to help new believers work through such issues biblically, and someone who is studied in apologetics or the religion of the focus people to help answer questions and anticipate misunderstandings.

When a new Chinese believer committed suicide, the local church was shaken and the church planter was confused. The young man had been a faithful disciple and appeared to be a promising future leader. He had never shared his internal conflicts and struggles, though, and he chose to take his life over living in hypocrisy and failure. The church planter commented in a letter: "I think there is greater need for . . . awareness of the spiritual battle, where each one has had a chance to deal with the strongholds and footholds of evil they have allowed in their hearts before and after beginning their walk with Christ." Some form of discerning spiritual influences is needed. Sometimes this is done in the context of preparation

for baptism. Assessment tools such as those used by Freedom in Christ Ministries can be helpful (Anderson 2001). However, much more is needed. Here are some recommendations:

- Anticipate these cultural/spiritual strongholds by studying the history, cultural sins, and worldview distortions of the ministry focus people.
- Continually foster an atmosphere of grace and trust in the community.
- Invest in personal relationships where honest and vulnerable communication of questions and struggles can take place.
- Seek the counsel of mature local believers who understand the cultural complexities of an issue and perhaps are even familiar with the personal and family roots of the new Christian.
- Exercise spiritual discernment through prayer and careful listening for patterns of conflict or struggle.
- Ask the new believer to tell about his or her religious and spiritual pilgrimage, and ask questions.

Wisely Assimilate Transfer Growth

Existing believers are often drawn to a new church plant. Church growth that comes from the addition of members who are already believers is called *transfer growth*. They come for a wide variety of reasons: because they have caught the vision

for the new church, because they have moved to the locality and do not yet have a home church, or out of curiosity. But some may be running away from relational problems or conflict in another church. The worst-case scenario is when newcomers have ulterior motives, wishing to exercise power or influence in the church plant. Persons with different doctrines or traditions can become a source of conflict if the church plant does not align with their expectations. The key is to discern whether these transfer believers are workers coming to help and disciples willing to learn or disgruntled people who will sap energy. Worse yet, some may be wolves in sheep's clothing coming to exploit or divide. The goal is to identify those who come for the right reasons and selectively enroll and engage them in the church-planting vision. These guidelines can be used:

1. Someone on the church-planting team should meet with the newcomers, find out their history and the reasons for coming, and get permission to contact their former church.
2. Contact their former church and find out under what conditions they left. Cooperate with their former church when it is a case of church discipline.
3. Ask the would-be new members what they are looking for in a church and what their core beliefs and values are. Lay out the beliefs, values, and vision of your work and see if there is alignment.
4. Regardless of their experience and maturity, do not move them into places of influence or leadership

rapidly. Rather invite them to work and serve in simple ways. Watch for a humble, cooperative, submissive spirit.

5. If their motives are good, make them feel welcome and help them make the transition into a small group and ministry. Make sure someone in the church, or on the team, builds a relationship of trust with them, encourages them, and helps them find their place in the family.

Discipleship and the Apostolic Church-Planting Team Strategy

1. Discipleship is the major mandate of church planting.

The development of strong spiritual families, leadership, and churches are all based on making disciples who are faithful in obedience to all that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:16–20). Healthy and growing disciples are the building blocks of healthy and growing churches. Both the book of Acts and church history demonstrate that churches are formed where there are faithful, reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ.

2. Center discipleship on the development of personal growth disciplines.

Many traditional forms of discipleship lead to dependency on teachers and discipleship materials—that is, passive discipleship. However, converts who

develop the ability to build a deep relationship with God through the practice of Christian growth disciplines take responsibility for their spiritual lives (Heb. 5:14). The disciple's five basic disciplines are Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, and witnessing. Other discipleship activities must be secondary to the development of these disciplines, since they are central to a growing walk with God.

3. Use discipleship methods that foster personal discovery of God's truth.

Without diminishing the importance of the teaching ministry, the priority should be to help new believers understand God's Word and feed themselves. God will reveal himself to his children as they seek him through his Word. The mentor's goal is then to help new disciples make their own discoveries. When learning is based on personal study and discovery rather than on another person's ability to teach and motivate, disciples are able to nurture their own walk with God and help others do the same.

4. Establish patterns of mutual discipleship.

One of the best ways to avoid the dependency syndrome, foster personal discovery of Bible truth, and develop leadership qualities is to structure discipleship around the concept of mutual accountability. This style of discipleship places the responsibility for developing the Christian growth disciplines on the believers themselves. The church planter equips others to help each other and hold each other accountable for their spiritual disciplines. This promotes a high sense of ownership and personal responsibility for oneself and for the spiritual well-being of others.

5. Use the home as a central stage for discipling.

"Nowhere is this [reproduction through discipling] more evident than in Christians' homes. Here, where friendships are most natural and genuine, evangelism centered . . . witnessing was not a technique or a program, but a lifestyle" (Coleman 1987, 92–93). One of the most neglected virtues in Western societies is hospitality. Family life is highly instructive to new believers (adapted from Julien 2000).

Form a Foundational Community and Begin Training Servant Leaders During this launching phase the foundational community of the emerging church will be formed. New believers will be meeting in small groups for discipleship, prayer, simple worship, and planning. These new believers will become the nucleus of the church. Thus it is important to gradually instill in them the sense that they are the people of God, a distinct body of believers, brothers and sisters in Christ. This sense of identity will be developed further during the next phase. But even from the earliest gatherings, a sense of fellowship and spiritual bonding should be encouraged. The core values of the church-planting vision should be modeled and taught. Conflicts should be dealt with lovingly and biblically. The DNA of the church will take shape gradually during this phase.

The future leaders of the church are often already present among the first new disciples. In chapter 17 we will discuss at length how to identify and develop leaders in a church plant. But once again, even from the earliest days, responsibility should be increasingly borne by the local believers themselves. Their natural tendency will be to look to the church planters to do the work of the ministry, but they should be encouraged to give to others what they have received. New believers can share their testimony, begin discipling another new believer, and help others in practical ways. By creating an ethos of empowerment, planters will both mobilize local believers for ministry from the outset and combat the idea that one must be

highly trained or have been a Christian for many years before one can serve. This ethos is essential to the entire process of reproduction and mobilization. The seeds of church reproduction are sown right here: a new believer evangelizing others, a new disciple discipling others.

The Problem of Attrition

Several studies indicate that the evangelical church has a serious "backdoor problem" in many parts of the world: visitors, members, and new believers may attend church for a time but then leave, never to return (Rainer 1999; Stetzer 2001; King 2007).[13] Some have estimated that in the United States 50 percent or more of people added to the church drop out within a year (Klippenes 2001). Reasons for attrition are many and varied, but studies from various contexts reveal that recurrent themes emerge. In Costa Rica almost one-third of those who left their church took responsibility for their choice and said their conduct and lifestyle led to the choice (Gómez 1996). Another third were disillusioned by the management of finances or the conduct of leaders or members. The final third gave a variety of answers like the pressure of family and friends, the appeal of another religious group, or a lack of help in difficult times. Few respondents attributed their desertion to external factors such as persecution.

Many had never understood the implication of the gospel and of their decision to follow Jesus. "The results show that there must be a commitment by the leaders so that, within the first year after conversion, the implications, the content, the

expectations and the privileges that go with the message of salvation are clearly understood. Forty-one percent of those interviewed with a year or less of conversion did not clearly understand the message of salvation that was presented to them" (Gómez 1996, 68). However, steps can be taken to reduce attrition. For example, according to Patrick Johnstone (2001, 206), addressing the problem directly in Costa Rica has helped to reduce the rate of attrition and spur on a new wave of growth.

We will not achieve 100 percent retention, nor should we try to. There are some people who *should* leave. On the positive side, we should be proactive and ask, "What helps to retain sincere believers?" A study of Pentecostal churches in Brazil revealed that while many were attracted to churches by healing and supernatural manifestations, it was close personal relationships and care that led to retention (Duck 2001, 230–32, 238–48, 331–44). An investigation into exceptionally high retention rates of over 80 percent of new believers among the 'Nso people of Cameroon found six significant factors: attending lessons on "counting the cost" before baptism, prebaptismal attendance at worship services, previous attendance at a church of another denomination, involvement in evangelistic activities, involvement in worship leadership, and contact and conversion by an evangelist (Kee 1991). In Taiwan it was discovered that new believers were more likely to remain in churches if they had a relatively long, intensive relationship with a Christian prior to their conversion, which could be understood as a warning against rushing people into hasty a decision for Christ (Swanson 1986). Case study 11.4

describes Costa Rican churches that are effective at retention.

In the North American setting, Thom Rainer wrote a book whose title underlines one key factor for retention, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret of Keeping People in Your Church* (1999). In essence, churches that expect more get more. Larry Osborne (2008), pastor of one of America's largest churches, emphasizes the importance of integrating newcomers into sermon-based small groups that "velcro members to the ministry."

Case Study 11.4

Churches That Are More Successful at Closing the Back Door

Eleven factors found in Gómez 1996, 135–37

1. They use collective evangelism efforts as well as personal witness.
2. They put the emphasis on unchurched people.
3. Church members have a clearer understanding of the gospel, evangelism, works and grace, and the message of the cross.
4. They demonstrate a higher level of pastoral care.
5. They have more members who have been discipled and can help new Christians.
6. They are more sound doctrinally (less perfectionism, universalism, and prosperity gospel).
7. They prepare their members to mentor others.
8. They balance the needs of men and women in their pastoral care.
9. They have more accessible leaders who can give advice.

10. They have more efforts and programs to help new Christians.
11. They make a greater effort to seek out and reintegrate those who have been absent.

In summary, reducing attrition and raising retention can be improved by addressing the following dimensions in the discipleship of new believers:

- *Spiritual*: clearly articulating the gospel and the cost of following Christ, and praying for new believers that they might be strengthened in their faith
- *Intellectual*: helping new believers understand the Bible, integrate their newfound faith with daily life, and develop a biblical worldview
- *Social*: helping new believers build close personal relationships with other believers so that they gain a new social network, support, and identity as well as a loving experience of the family of God
- *Ethical*: helping new believers learn how to overcome sin—on the one hand living by the grace of God and on the other hand taking seriously the importance of a life growing in holiness

If making disciples is the heart of church planting, and if disciples are obedient followers who become like their Master, it would seem legitimate to evaluate our success in church

planting by the quantity and the quality of disciples. "Disciplemaking is an indispensable criterion for evaluation missional faithfulness. One way to evaluate our missional program is to ask three questions: (1) Is it leading women and men to follow Jesus at each crossroad of life? (2) Is it enabling them to participate in Jesus' mission in the world? (3) Is it teaching them to obey him in all things? Following, participating and obeying—these are marks of authentic discipleship of a faithful Christian mission" (Costas 1979, 24).