

## **THE CHURCH PLANTER**

Church planting is not for every preacher. God's bestowal of spiritual gifts, talents, and natural abilities are usually combined in an unusual way in the lives of church planters. The church planter is a pioneer, entrepreneur, and catalyst. He is carving out a work for God, determining its direction, setting its pace, and establishing its permanency. He is building an armory for spiritual warfare, a lighthouse for lost souls, a hospital for the spiritually sick, and a warm welcoming family. What does it take to be an effective church planting pastor?

### **The Church Planter's Character**

The church planter must have experienced the new birth and be walking in obedience to Christ. The Holy Spirit must have worked in his personal life in such a way that the character of the Lord Jesus Christ is visibly being demonstrated in the man's life. He should meet the requirements of the pastor as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. His testimony before both the saved and unsaved should be beyond any question. He must be a Spirit-controlled man who responds maturely to the pressures of life and ministry. He should be a model husband and father. He should be an engaging "people person" who enjoys the company of others. He should be gracious and courteous toward others, compassionate toward the lost, and capable of patiently guiding them to understand the Gospel. He must be free from the love of money and material things. He lives an orderly life, setting priorities and accomplishing goals. He enjoys a happy and harmonious family life and his morals are above question. He is a man of God who can lead God's flock toward Christlikeness.

### **The Church Planter's Calling**

Two ministerial gifts are active today: pastor and evangelist (cf. Eph. 4:11). A church planter could have either an evangelistic or pastoral gift. The evangelist, like the Apostle Paul, goes from place to place preaching the Gospel and forming churches. The pastor establishes the newly formed church and leads it on toward maturity (cf. Titus 1:5). Some pastors will be endowed with church planting abilities. They are especially skilled at soulwinning, initial discipleship, and bringing people into the local church. Missionaries often function as evangelists who win the lost to Christ and turn over the newly formed churches to national pastors. There really is no special calling for church planters mentioned in the Bible, at least not by those exact words. Practically all the pastors and evangelists of the New Testament era were church planters!

### **The Church Planter's Capacity**

The ability to preach and teach the Word of God is a must for the church planter; he should be competent in the Scriptures both for public and private ministry. He should have capacity for personal evangelism and discipleship as well as ability to train

others in these skills. It will be very helpful if he is able to lead singing. He should be able to direct all aspects of the worship service, though he will gradually develop others to assist in leading worship. He should have the stamina to work fifty to sixty hours a week. He should not be seriously affected by discouragement, and by no means can he be a quitter. The more he knows about life the better. Knowledge of family life, finances, law, government, building, business, a layman's daily struggles, and local community activities will enhance his ministry.

### **The Church Planter's Companion**

The wife of a church planter is a special person. Her calling is to be his helper for life. Her constant encouragement will mean much to him. Often her companionship is his only human source of encouragement. Many disappointments and some discouragement will come to the church planter. People will let him down, break promises, and become critical. He needs an encouraging wife with a sweet disposition. He also needs her input. She views life like half the other people in the world—from a woman's viewpoint. Her tastes may excel in building decor, cleanliness of facilities, and even tactfulness in speech. She will also have a "sixth sense" about other women who could do harm to her husband's testimony. The church planter should listen to her, love her, and involve her in the ministry as an example to others. She should be one of the best women, wives, and mothers in the church, just as the pastor should be one of the best men, husbands, and fathers.

Her spiritual and natural gifts should enhance the church planter's ministry. She may be able to help teach a class, play the piano, help in the nursery, or plan events. She should have liberty to be herself without being forced into modeling another pastor's wife. The church planter should schedule time to be with her to do the things she enjoys doing since she is the most important person in his life and ministry. Then together the couple should involve their children in appropriate ministry activities with great joy.

### **The Church Planter's Circumstances**

The church planter should have completed his formal training for the ministry. This assumes undergraduate ministerial training and hopefully includes graduate or seminary level training. A lifetime of ministry demands sufficient training. A church planter should be financially debt-free or have only very low debt when he begins his ministry. Money will likely be tight, and he needs no discouragement from debt-driven financial pressure. He certainly must pay all his bills on time in the new community and needs no temptation to do otherwise.

Church planters should have several years of valuable experience working under a mature pastor. Selection of such a mentor is extremely important. The mentor's zeal and burden for the lost should be especially keen if he is to set a proper example for the church planter. Often church planters seem to be men in their late twenties or early thirties. They have their education completed, families started, introductory

ministry experiences gained, debts behind them, and an eye on the harvest fields. Energetic men in their forties and fifties can plant churches as well. If God burdens a man's heart to plant a church in a region and he cannot get away from the thought, he should pursue it by seeking advice from experienced pastors and church planters, visiting the area, and seeking God's face in prayer. He will give His perfect direction in the great adventure of planting a new church!

Often a team of people planted churches in the book of Acts, so a church planter should consider inviting another family or two and some singles to move to the new area to help start the church. College friendships may blossom into a church-planting ministry team. There are many advantages to team church planting: making initial contacts together, overcoming the loneliness of isolation with warm fellowship, providing childcare for one another and playmates for each other's children. Ministry skills of the volunteer lay couple will do so much for the new work and aid in drawing others to the church. The additional couple can serve as a sounding board for new, innovative ideas. Remember, God's work is teamwork! A church-planting team will likely draw people from the local community who then take their places in the new ministry in equal standing with all going forward together for God's glory.