Insights from a CPM Practitioner

By Curtis Sergeant (from CPM Workshop CD), 1999

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There is nothing anyone can do to bring about a Church Planting Movement. A Church Planting Movement is entirely a sovereign act of God. You may wonder why I would devote a major section of this book to the discussion of church planting movements if there is nothing we can do to bring it about. The reason is that there are things we can do to pave the way for a Church Planting Movement, and there are things we can do to hinder it.

One of the most important things we can do to prepare the way for a Church Planting Movement is to saturate the target group with the word of God. How can they believe if they have not heard? Saturating a people with the gospel needs to happen in as many ways as possible. It is definitely a task that is best done with multi-processing. Utilize radio, utilize television if possible, newspapers, magazines, tracts, gospel portions, whole Bibles, Bible correspondence courses, personal testimonies, testimonies on audio-cassette as well as live ones. Utilize all of the above scripture, tracts, portions, etc., in an audio-cassette format. Utilize video-cassettes. Utilize any and every possible available medium.

Another thing we can do to aid and prepare for a Church Planting Movement is to pray. Prayer is nearly as indispensable as scripture. I like to think of prayer in terms of a metaphor. That metaphor is the use of bombs in warfare. You may remember during the Gulf War bombs played a critical role. The ones that got most of the headlines were the Tomahawk missiles, or smart bombs. It was the first time in a live combat situation in a war they had been used. These laser-guided bombs left an indelible impression as we saw television footage where a target moved nearer and nearer, and then the explosion occurred. The bomb had taken out a key military or communications targets with no margin of error in the targeting process. This enabled assured destruction of key installations. This may be compared to very specific, focussed, targeted, informed prayer in behalf of a people group. It may involve prayer for the salvation of specific individuals. It may involve prayer for specific projects or outreach initiatives. That focused, concentrated, informed prayer can serve in much the same way as the smart bombs.

But perhaps the more important function of bombs in the Gulf War involved the saturation bombing. Week after week, ton after ton of bombs was dropped upon enemy targets, softening the targets, dampening the morale of the enemy. As a result, when the ground troops went in, the enemy was already running up the white flag in many instances. The war was not won by the bombing, however. The war could not be won apart from the ground troops actually going in and taking control of enemy territory and capturing enemy troops. But the way was prepared by the bombs as they softened the targets. In the same way, in church planting ground troops are necessary. It takes actual people serving on the ground to go in, lead people to the Lord, help form them into congregations, provide discipleship, and so on. Someone eventually will have to go in, but the way can be prepared and the process can be hastened through softening the target with broad, widespread prayer on behalf of the spiritual needs of that people. So making the word of God available and providing prayer are two ways in which we can prepare for a Church Planting Movement.

The Hippocratic Oath

Similarly, there are things we can do to hinder or prevent the Church Planting Movement from occurring among a people group. The number of possibilities in this regard is endless. The first part of the Hippocratic Oath, which medical doctors take before they begin to practice medicine, states that they will "do no harm" with their medical arts. Church planters should probably take a similar oath. Many barriers can be erected simply in terms of restrictive thinking. Some very common examples would be the assumption or expectation that a congregation will have a dedicated building facility. Or that leaders must receive a certain level of education or specialized professional training. Or that only clergy do ministry. Or that people need to undergo a lengthy proving period before they are baptized. Or any one of hundreds of other possible limitations. Most of these are extra-biblical at best and anti-biblical at worst. Many of these patterns are harmless in one setting but can create barriers in another setting. It is important that we carefully examine our assumptions and patterns of working even more closely when we are crossing cultures to do ministry.

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Constant evaluation is also helpful. Are you wondering what the letters of this section title represent? If You Keep Doing What You've Been Doing, You'll Keep Getting What You've Been Getting. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting to get different results. Also, if you just do the same thing you have been doing but do more of it, you will probably get the same thing you have been getting, just more of it. So, if you are dissatisfied with the current results, then you need to consider altering your approach or changing the methodology that is currently being used. Constant ruthless evaluation is an important habit if you are seeking maximum effectiveness. Never be satisfied with the status quo. Always seek to improve. Above all, perhaps, is the importance of endvisioning, which we have discussed in a previous chapter.

1st Creation Leads to the 2nd

There is almost no item or movement of any significance that has been created apart from intentional planning of a person or of God Himself. Things don't happen by accident. The second law of thermodynamics tells us that things tend toward disorder rather than order. It is difficult to put together a jigsaw puzzle if you don't know what the picture is. It is foolish to begin constructing a building without a set of blueprints. Much energy, effort, and money will be wasted in the long run if you build without blueprints or plans. Floors and walls will have to be torn up to put in electric wires or plumbing later. When doors open, they will interfere with appliances or waste large amounts of space, etc.

If you don't intentionally plan what you are aiming for or praying for in terms of a Church Planting Movement, someone or something else will take control of the process whether it's inertia or other individuals. Most often, inertia or tradition will take over, and that is rarely going to take you where you need to go. You will rarely accomplish more or differently than you are aiming for. If you fail to plan to plant churches which have rapid reproduction in their DNA, then you are planning to fail in that regard.

Movements which Move

Secular sociologists have identified several characteristics which are common to movements which diffuse rapidly through societies. We will briefly examine some of these characteristics to see how Christianity can fit the bill in regard to these characteristics. This entire discussion is sort of like the approach in most of the book of Ecclesiastes, "under the sun"--that is, apart from the sovereign work of God.

The first of these characteristics is cellular organization with diffused leadership. A secular example of this would be the Communist party in East Asia or Eastern Europe about fifty years ago. You will note from the POUCH churches chapter that house churches with a shared leadership pattern within each house church and with the churches organized in a network rather than a hierarchy fit this criterion quite well.

The second characteristic of movements that diffuse rapidly through societies is personal recruitment which is carried out through existing relationships. A secular example of this would be Amway. The vast majority of Amway sales are made to family and friends of Amway representatives. In church planting, this highlights the importance of emphasizing to new converts the urgency of their witnessing to family members, friends and acquaintances. Their existing relationships provide the best possibility for rapid growth in terms of conversion.

The third characteristic is personal commitment which is tied to an act or experience. A secular example of this might be the admission that one is an alcoholic in Alcoholics Anonymous. Baptism provides the most natural way for Christianity to fulfill this requirement. This has implications for the role that baptism can play. Biblically speaking, baptism is intended to be an initiation rather than a graduation. In many places baptism is viewed more as a graduation. It is often delayed for a variety of reasons. In some places it is delayed until other family members are converted. This can be a dangerous thing since the rest of the family may or may not be converted. Jesus said that he would cause division in family, that family members would be against one another. It is not a given that family members will eventually convert. There is no excuse for delaying obedience to Christ's command for baptism.

Similarly, baptism is often postponed until a certain number of converts are won among the target group. I might concede on this point in highly persecuted environments where there is not a single believer; but, as soon as there are two believers, I would encourage immediate baptism for them, and they can witness each other's baptism.

Sometimes churches or church planters establish a proving period before new converts can be baptized. This is done in order to ensure that converts do not revert to their former beliefs and practices but are serious in their commitment. This is not a biblical approach to baptism. Jesus told us there would be tares in with the wheat. Simply raising the bar for admission into the church would do nothing more than ensure you have legalistic tares. It cannot ensure the steadfastness of believers and in fact may work against the steadfastness of the believers as they do not view themselves as fully a part of the believing community until they have been baptized. This leaves them in sort of a no-man's land in terms of spiritual belonging or community. They are no longer part of their old religious community yet somehow are not fully part of their new one either. It is far better not to leave them in such a no-man's land.

Sometimes baptism is delayed until the new converts can learn a set body of material. The longer it takes for this to occur the more damaging this approach is. Again, baptism is intended as an initiation, not as a graduation. If a believer is not baptized it is highly unlikely that he will be actively sharing his faith or taking any role in discipling other even newer converts. This delays his maturing process, gives him a status as a spectator rather than a participant in the spiritual ministries of the church, and is damaging in many ways. He will probably not mature significantly if he is not obeying one of the simplest and most straightforward commands the Lord has given.

In Scripture there is no instance of baptism being separated in time from conversion. From the Philippian jailer to the Ethiopian eunuch, it happened immediately. Baptism is a command. It is part of the Great Commission. "Repent and be baptized," or "Believe and be baptized" are the commands for those who choose to follow the Lord. If we prevent new converts from obeying this first and most basic command, what does that communicate to them about obedience to the Lord and accountability within the Body?

The fourth characteristic of movements that spread rapidly is a shared ideology which forms the basis for unity among a network of groups. Perhaps the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts of America would provide an example of this. The various handbooks provide a basic philosophy and guidelines for activities which together bring about a degree of unity among the various troops. Scripture provides this shared ideology for Christians. It is our guide for life and practice in regard to spiritual matters and all of life. Having a consistent template such as the scripture provides a basis for unity. It is important since the movement is to be comprised of a network of groups rather than an established hierarchy. The authority then rests in scripture rather than in some individual. This in turn helps prevent heresies or cult formation to which rapidly growing movements are prone if they are based on the authority of one or more individuals.

The fifth characteristic of rapidly growing movements is that they have real or perceived opposition from the society or another group. For some reason, business examples come to mind here. I think about Pepsi, whose enemy is Coke. I think of Avis and Hertz, MacIntosh and IBM, and so on. The big, bad enemy provides a focus, a target, and a challenge. In the case of Christianity in many places this is a given. It is not entirely negative, as it provides or helps the churches maintain a focus and unity since they have common "enemies" who are opposed to them and trying to hinder their growth and development. This helps to prevent casual conversions. People tend to be more serious about their commitment if the price of that commitment is higher.

Training Cycle

In church planting it is helpful to keep in mind the training cycle: model, assist, watch, and leave. Generational markers can often serve as a useful guide in knowing when to change roles. That is, the church-planting team model as they plant a church. Then they change roles after the establishment of the church and take an assisting role. They assist the first-generation church in planting a second-generation church. After the second-generation church is planted, they again change roles and begin watching as the second-generation church plants a third-generation church with the assistance of the first-generation church. Then a new second-generation church is planted by the first-generation church. When this takes place, the church-planting team can transition to start work in a new area, modeling again as they do the work in another first-generation church.

Learning to ride a bicycle is a helpful analogy in regard to the training cycle. Typically a child, as she grows, will see people riding bicycles. This provides a model and gives her a frame of reference for what the activity involves. The parent is modeling.

That child will not learn to ride a bicycle without getting on the seat herself, however. When she is old enough and big enough, the parents or some other person will assist that child. While she gets on the seat, the person assisting will often grasp the seat and the handle bars and help the child maintain balance while she learns to pedal and steer. The child gradually learns how to maintain balance. The parent is assisting.

Then the parent will let go of the bicycle. Then the child will fall and get hurt, but she gets up again, gets on the seat, and the parent gets her going and lets go again. The child falls. This pattern continues repeatedly until finally the child is able to maintain her balance and rides successfully. The parent is watching.

When the parent is satisfied that the child can do this by herself and understands the basic safety rules, the parent then leaves, and the child rides on her own where and when she wishes. The parent is leaving.

The parent first provides a model by riding the bicycle, then provides assistance by holding the bicycle, then watches while the child rides the bicycle, and then finally leaves. This is an illustration of the training cycle.

Shadow Pastors

Many church-planting approaches rely on the church planter's assuming leadership in the new church at the beginning. This is not a good idea unless the church planter plans to remain with the church. It is far better for the church planter to mentor some of the new converts from the beginning to serve as leaders. Once there are baptized believers in an area, they should be the ones providing the up-front leadership. The church planter models up to that point and then begins to assist through shadow-pastoring.

Shadow-pastoring involves meeting with the new leaders in order to prepare them to lead when the entire church meets together. The shadow pastor can go over a Bible study with them, pray, teach them a new

song or help them write one, model participative leadership patterns, and so on. When the church meets as a whole, the shadow pastor may not attend at all or take a very low profile in the meeting. Very early on, the shadow pastor will encourage the fledgling congregation to begin working toward planting a new church themselves. The shadow pastor watches this process in a fashion similar to that of a parent who watches his child fall down when learning to ride a bicycle. The child will make mistakes. Guaranteed. When he plants another church, the church planter will need to move on to begin work in another area or return to his home church. He can already physically move on after the assisting stage, but he will need to maintain regular contact throughout the watching stage.

How a church planter treats new converts is an important determinant in the quality and nature of leadership which arises from among them. Rarely will people far exceed what is expected of them. Treating people as partners leads to the development of independent coworkers; treating them as observers leads to the formation of dependent followers who continue asking for guidance.

Control vs. Growth

In regard to church-planting patterns, external human control over the new converts and churches is inversely proportional to the potential growth and rate of growth in terms of both maturity and size. If a church planter or agency or denomination or other entity seeks to exercise authority to a great extent, then the new church and its members will tend to be dependent and not take responsibility for their own growth or for reaching others. Every time you are tempted to micro-manage, remember this principle.

Discipleship Chains

One way to ensure participation and maturity development of each believer is to utilize discipleship chains. A discipleship chain relationship is one that takes place outside of the regular church meeting. It is usually a one-on-two discipleship process. It can be one-on-three, but it is preferable to have a one-on-two relationship. The pattern is that a more mature believer disciples two others from within the congregation, each of whom disciples two others, who then disciple two others. Each discipling relationship involves mutual accountability for putting into practice scriptural truth that is learned and teaching what one has learned. This twofold accountability is extremely important.

In order for this process to work, a person need be only one step ahead of the person whom he or she is discipling. For instance, a believer who has been in the Lord ten weeks can disciple others who have been believers for only eight weeks, who could in turn disciple others who have been disciples six weeks, etc. This pattern has many advantages over common disciple patterns in which one person disciples many, either as a large group or individually, but disciplers are assumed and required to be highly mature and experienced believers. I refer to that pattern as banyan tree leadership. The banyan tree is a large tree which continues to put out shoots and roots laterally so that it gradually covers large amounts of ground and has quite dense foliage. Underneath a banyan tree there is no growth of any other kind of plant. The ground is hard-packed mud. This type of leadership does not allow for other leaders to develop. New believers become accustomed to constantly being on the receiving end of teaching. Only a rare few will ever consider themselves to be potential leaders because the few leaders who do exist are extremely experienced and mature. In a bad sense, they are irreplaceable.

A discipleship chain, however, not only allows but requires the development in maturity of other believers. With a banyan tree type of leadership, newer believers will rarely, if ever, view themselves as adequate to replace their primary discipler. Whereas in a discipleship chain every believer is required to become a discipler. Even those believers at the end of the chain are expected to teach what they've learned to an unbeliever, whether it be a child, a family member, or a friend. The command to make disciples was given to every believer; so we need to equip and expect every member to do so.

A good model for beginning a discipleship chain is the shadow-pastoring system in which the shadow pastor is mentoring two or three leaders from the group outside of the regular church meeting time. This can also serve as a good way to pass on leadership pointers which may or may not be suitable to teach during a regular worship service. The discipleship chain pattern is not limited in its growth potential as is the traditional model but also develops more mature believers in a shorter period of time than one-on-many systems.

One important thing to remember, however, is that the top or head of the chain needs to have continuing input and equipping from some source. This can partially be provided by a mutual accountability in discipling between or among the heads of other discipleship chains. It can also be provided within a network of groups by regular leaders meetings where more advanced biblical training and equipping is provided by an outside source. Failure to provide for this ongoing equipping and accountability has resulted in the death of many good churches around the world.

As a rule, a discipleship chain will extend only as far as the local house church or cell, so will not exceed four generations (plus the unbelievers the last generation is "teaching"). When a church grows to the point of division, the existing chain dissolves and re-forms in the new church. This provides an opportunity for those who are growing quickly or are able teachers to "move up" in the chain. This brings us to church multiplication.

NOTE: I highly recommend you review the sections in the Endvisioning case study section on "Modeling Considerations," "Urban Training," and "Rural Training" as they are all germane to church planting and training at this point in the discussion.

Local Planting (Church Multiplication)

There are several approaches to church planting which are appropriate in different settings. One approach is cell division. This pattern is usually good for urban areas. It is also applicable where there are large numbers of people in previously existing relationship with one another. For example, in some rural settings many people will come to the Lord who are already close to one another. They will naturally desire to worship together. In such a situation there can be large group worship (if the local security situation allows) and small-group prayer and Bible study. It is important that the small group dynamics and the high level of active participation and accountability not be lost.

When a group gets too large (maximum fifteen), they need to divide and start a new church or cell group. In such a pattern leaders divide up between two groups. New converts and those who brought them to the Lord or are related to them go with one group, and the others go with the other group. New leaders are identified immediately so that each group has a plurality of leadership or elders. Three is the preferable number of leaders. All other things being equal, it is best to send the less experienced leaders with the new converts to keep the gap between the maturity levels to a minimum.

There is often resistance to dividing a group. The more rapid the reproductive cycle is, the easier it is to divide a group. If a group is together for a long period of time, they may be resistant to division. One way to overcome such resistance is to allow the old group and the two new groups to both continue to meet for a period of time. If the old group has been meeting on Sundays, then the new groups will meet on Sundays and the old group will begin meeting at another time. After a while the new relationships will have solidified in the new group, and the old group can be more easily dissolved.

There are other approaches that can help in overcoming resistance to dividing a group. Make decisions about who goes with each group based on existing relational lines. This is especially important in terms of putting new converts with those with whom they already have relationship but is important for the other believers as well. Cast a vision for Kingdom growth rather than growth of a single church. One purpose of the church is to complete the Great Commission.

Communicate the idea that reproduction is a sign of health and blessing. In most societies a married couple without children is considered an oddity. People with many children and grandchildren are seen as particularly blessed and honored. Leaving the legacy of a large family is more important than a person's wealth or power. Similarly, it is more important for a church to reproduce regularly than to simply grow larger and stronger itself.

If the resistance to division is due to the reticence of individuals to assuming leadership because they feel inadequate then you can take a different approach. Make it clear that in the church and in God's Kingdom are servants. There are few prerequisites for being a servant. Almost anyone qualifies. Nearly all the biblical prerequisites for leadership in First Timothy and Titus are character qualities. The only requirement dealing purely with ability is the ability to teach. Christian leadership is not a matter of control or power but of servanthood. If potential leaders understand this then they will be more willing to take on leadership responsibilities. If a strong, controlling leader is contributing to the problem then sometimes they can be encouraged to start a new work. In his absence, new leaders are often more willing to assume leadership.

Distance Planting (Apostolic Pattern)

Perhaps the most universally applicable church-planting pattern is that of the apostolic band. An example of this type of church planting can be seen in the endvisioning case study section. It consists of a pair or small group of church planters who travel to an area where there are no churches. Through evangelistic efforts they gather seekers, and then converts are made from among this group of seekers using an evangelistic Bible study or some other method of evangelism. Then a brief and intense period of discipleship training follows, and the new converts are baptized. At that point, one of the church planters begins shadow-pastoring. The leaders are in the background while the locals take up leadership roles in the church meetings.

After doing this for a period of time, during which this new church begins planting another church, the

shadow pastor will leave, and on-going leadership training will be conducted through the network of churches which is established. Support for the church-planting team member can be provided through tithes and offerings since there are no buildings or staff to soak up the tithes and offerings. This is the general pattern utilized in the book of Acts.

Also, in rural areas, other church members can take care of farms, etc. In urban areas, people who can get off work for a significant period of time are really the only ones eligible for this type of church planting. Good prospects are retirees, teachers, those with a mobile business, and housewives with no children at home.

Leadership Cells

A third form of church planting, which is often suitable when working with transient groups such as students, migrant workers, seasonal workers, or nomads, is the leadership cell. A leadership cell is composed of a group of believers, preferably all of whom are potential leaders. This group models itself after a house church with two important exceptions. First is that it is time-limited from the beginning. A certain period of time is set for its existence. Second, it is closed. That is, new converts will not be taken into this group.

The purpose of the group is to prepare new converts for leadership positions and equip them to be able to plant a church whenever they leave the place they are in. It is important to share leadership on a rotating basis through the entire group so each individual has opportunities to develop his leadership skills. After students graduate, wherever they go, they can start a church. Migrant workers can establish a church among others who are traveling along the same migrant working route. Nomads and seasonal workers can do the same. With all except students, it is preferable for the converts to divide up two by two in planting the churches. With students this is often not possible.

When believers get to their next place of residence, they can win converts and form new churches. If possible, the original cell leader can serve as a coach for the new house churches that have formed if he is available to travel to that site.

An illustration of this occurred in my target people group. I placed two families in a school that trained English teachers for the province. They were effective personal evangelists and led a number of students and faculty to the Lord. They would form them into leadership cells of six members each. These groups met on different nights of the week, one family leading four groups and the other three groups. They would cover basic discipleship materials (New Life in Christ) and then fifty-two sessions of chronological Bible-storying (Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ). After graduating, the students would try to plant a church wherever they were assigned to teach. Some failed to do so, but a number of them succeeded. The two families would follow up and troubleshoot whenever there were school holidays which allowed them to travel. This was an effective example of using leadership cells to plant churches.

What to Do with New Believers?

Often opportunities for starting new churches are missed because of people's default patterns with new converts. The default pattern is frequently to incorporate new believers into existing churches. This should not be the default. The default pattern should be to start new churches whenever you get new converts. There are exceptions when a church is very new or very small, but as a general rule every opportunity should be taken to begin new churches. This can be done either by immediately assisting the new converts to pursue the conversion of friends and family members or by dividing an existing church and sending some of the members (including whoever led them to the Lord) to join the new convert or converts to form a new church.

The church growth movement has two rules which are true in every society studied. The first rule is that smaller churches grow faster than bigger churches. The second rule is that newer churches grow faster than older churches. This is one good reason to seek to start as many new churches as possible rather than incorporating new converts into existing churches.

Why Start New Churches?

Churches are a bit like ice. If you have a very large block of ice and you are wanting to cool water, it is not most efficient to keep the block as whole but rather to crush it, thus multiplying the surface area which is exposed to the water. This increases the cooling rate drastically. If you break a huge block into a million little blocks, you will increase the cooling rate by one hundredfold.

Assume for a moment that churches are supposed to impact society in the same way the ice is supposed to cool the water. Small churches have the greater surface area with the unbelieving society. Not only is there greater geographic dispersal, but more importantly, the number of relationships which believers have with unbelievers is multiplied. As a church grows and ages, a person's close relationships gradually

become more and more saturated with other Christians. Whereas, if a church is kept small and relatively new in its membership, then the tendency to saturate relationships with other Christians is greatly reduced and slowed. This gives greater opportunity in smaller and newer churches for evangelism by members of the church. Every person has a limited number of significant relationships he can actively maintain.

Think for a moment about how many significant local relationships you have with unbelievers as opposed to Christians. You see, there is a tendency to saturate our relationships with other believers. This is compounded in large churches or old churches. Our relationship set begins to stagnate in those situations.

Your default should be: new believers are not put into existing churches but are part of churches formed because of their conversion. This was evidently the pattern in the New Testament. Even in places which had many believers, they did not primarily meet as a large group but daily house to house.

Time Is Souls

You have heard that time is money, but I say to you, time is souls. I have an interest in China. Every four seconds someone in China enters a Christless eternity. Because of the natural growth rate, there is one more lost person in China in fewer than every three seconds. The rate of church growth is not even close to keeping up with population growth at this point. And China has been the brightest spot on the Christian map in terms of church growth over the past twenty-five years.

A CPM Requires Rapid Multiplication

Whomever you are targeting is likely much worse off than China in terms of making an impact on lostness. There are more lost people alive today than there have ever been before. Tomorrow there will be even more. If you care about people's eternal destiny, then you know why I place so much emphasis on speed or pace. If churches are not reproducing more quickly than population growth, then we are losing the race the Lord has set before us. Once they are gone, there is no chance to save them. If churches are to have any hope of making a serious dent in lostness, a rapid multiplication of churches will be required. Business as usual is not even keeping up with population growth at this point. We must rapidly increase the rate of church growth if we are going to save as many as possible. Far from pushing back the darkness, we aren't even keeping up with it. Part of the definition of a Church Planting Movement is that it is a rapid multiplication of churches.

There is a false dichotomy drawn between quality and speed. The frequent assumption is that faster implies weaker or inferior. This is not necessarily the case. For instance, in the discipleship theme pattern of equipping new believers which was discussed previously, a person may be a believer only a few months and may have already attained a relatively high level of maturity and commitment and gained much experience in equipping others and leading others into life in Christ and to grow in their spiritual life. Whereas someone who has been a believer for many years in a banyan tree style of leadership or under a banyan tree style of leadership may not yet have gained a significant level of maturity.

One major reason for this presupposition about faster meaning weaker is our view of discipleship. I believe that deep in our hearts many of us have bought into the idea that discipleship is a body of knowledge to transfer rather than patterns and processes to pass on. Where did we get this idea? Maybe from Matthew 28:19: "Teaching them...". But it doesn't stop there. It says, "Teaching them to obey..." which is a pattern. Certainly knowledge is involved, but it is not primary. The gaining of knowledge will last a lifetime, but the pattern of obedience should be practiced from day one.

The Chinese have a saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." If we view discipleship training as purely the transfer of a body of knowledge, then it divides the Body into knowers and learners. Where do you draw the line? How did Jesus do it? He sent His disciples out to minister from the beginning. How did Paul do it? Did he plant a church and stay around for years before letting them stand on their own feet? He never stayed anywhere for more than a few weeks except in Corinth (18 months) and Ephesus (3 years). Let's look at the first missionary journey. After spending a few weeks at each city and leading a few to the Lord, how did he lead all those new churches? He didn't! Acts 14:21-23 says,

21   After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

22   strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and {saying} "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

23   When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Paul did not have time to tell the people everything they needed to know about Christ and their new life in Him. He did have time to model patterns for them. How do you interpret, feed on, and apply Scripture?

How do you relate to one another in the Body? How do you pray and hear from the Holy Spirit? There are only a few basic processes by which we grow. If Paul could communicate those through modeling, then he could entrust the new churches into the Lord's hand with confidence. Yes, he followed up and checked back with them, but he did not coddle them. He was not overprotective. Read the epistles in this light. Note how many times Paul said to follow his pattern or example, how often he said to note how others did or did not follow his pattern. First Thessalonians is a good example in this regard.

In some ways its speed of development and high expectations and demands of new believers in the discipleship chain is what makes it more effective. Speed is not necessarily inversely proportional to quality.

Elephants vs. Rabbits

A Church Planting Movement by definition requires rapid multiplication. Whenever I think of rapid multiplication, I think of rabbits. When I think of slow multiplication I think of elephants. I did a bit of research on these, and I found some very interesting facts. Elephants are fertile only four times per year. This compares with seventeen or eighteen times a year for other large mammals. Elephants have only one baby per pregnancy. They have a twenty-two month gestation period. Ladies, you thought nine months was a long time...it could have been worse; you could have been an elephant. Elephants do not reach sexual maturity until eighteen years of age. Therefore, if you start with a pair of adults and wait three years, you can go to from two to three elephants.

Rabbits, on the other hand, are practically continuously fertile. They have an average of seven babies per pregnancy, they have a one-month gestation period, and they reach sexual maturity at four months of age. While the theoretical potential is never reached because of disease, overcrowding, lack of food supply, and other issues, the potential multiplication is absolutely staggering. If rabbits averaged eight babies per pregnancy, four male and four female, and reproduced at the optimum possible rate, in three years they could go from two rabbits to four hundred seventy-six million rabbits. The point of this illustration is to show that reproduction rate matters. It matters in churches too.

Reproduction Rate Matters!

Look at the table below. It indicates the number of churches you would end up with in a given number of years with varying reproduction rates. For instance, notice that, if you have a reproduction rate of five years, which is sixty months, over a period of ten years you will end up with only four churches. However, if you could knock this down to a twelve month reproduction rate for a period of ten years, starting with one church, in ten years you would have one thousand twenty-four churches. If you could knock the rate down to a four-month reproduction rate and maintain that for a period of ten years, you would have one billion churches. The point again is that the reproduction rate matters. As in rabbits, so with churches. Very high rates of reproduction cannot be sustained over a long period of time because of the decreasing number of lost people who are accessible and many other factors. However, high reproduction rates can be maintained for a period of time. A reproduction rate of under nine months was maintained in the endvisioning case study for five years; and, since they started with three churches, they ended up with five hundred fifty churches after only five years. So fairly high reproduction rates can be maintained for a period of time.

Shorten Reproductive Cycle

The question then becomes, how can we reduce the reproductive cycle time while maintaining high quality? There are several things we can do to achieve this end. One thing we can do is to take advantage of filtering techniques. Filtering techniques are any methods that are used to identify people who are potentially open to receiving the gospel. Filtering carries with it a presupposition. That is, the Holy Spirit is already dealing with some people among your target group. It then becomes a matter of identifying those people and directing your efforts toward them. This is the idea behind the "man of peace" approach.

There are many possible filtering techniques. Radio responses or indeed any kind of medium that is used with response mechanisms can be a filtering tool. A response mechanism could be attendance at some announced meeting. It could be in the form of a written response card or other methods of indicating interest.   Filtering can be done with observations of people watching a film or video. It can be done through interviews or questionnaires. But the point of any filtering device is to identify those who are already open to considering the claims of the gospel. Filters enable large numbers of people to be considered rather than relying upon developing close relationships with a small number of people before determining whether or not they are open to the gospel.

Another way to significantly reduce the reproduction cycle is to immediately place local believers in leadership positions in planting a church in a pioneer area. If this is not done, then it could take years for local believers to view themselves as competent to replace someone from outside who may have

significantly more training or experience. This has been a forty-year process in the church which I currently attend. It was planted by a foreign missionary and still has not found "suitable" local pastoral leadership. After twenty-six years a local believer from within the congregation was named as pastor. He was then deemed unsuitable because he had a different style than the founding pastor. He then left the church with a little under half the congregation and founded what is today the largest church in Singapore with over ten thousand members. That pastor is a widely recognized world-class leader but was not adequate for our church because he didn't match up to expectations when compared to the church planter. After ten more years another man was selected from within the congregation as pastor. He was pressured into resignation after a year because he also failed to live up to expectations. We have been without a pastor for three years since the church planter's retirement since the church cannot find anyone up to the standards or fitting the profile they have come to expect. The only daughter church this church has is the one resulting from the split fourteen years ago. This is an extreme example but serves to illustrate how much a church planter staying on as pastor can slow the reproductive rate of a church. An outsider's never taking an up-front leadership position also avoids many serious problems inherent in leadership transition.

Another leadership issue that can seriously affect the reproductive rate is the use of multiple leadership forms which enable the leadership training to be done primarily on the job and to stay ahead of the growth curve as extra leaders are always available to start new churches. Since sending people away to some residential school is avoided this can greatly shorten the necessary preparation time for leaders.

Many cultures do not have any examples of this type of shared leadership. This is not necessarily a drawback. In nature we see many examples of a non-native species thriving. For instance, the English sparrow has thrived all over the world, even though it is only native to a relatively small area. Frequently, the very fact that non-native species succeed is because they are different. The same is true sociologically. Uniqueness can be attractive and be an advantage. Much missiology training today heavily emphasizes the importance of contextualizing the church so it will be fully indigenous. An example might be Jesus mosques. I believe this is only a tertiary concern. We make a grave error if we elevate contextualization above two other concerns.

Our primary concern should be whether or not an approach is biblical. If it is prescribed in Scripture, do it. If it is prohibited, avoid it. If it is neither prescribed nor prohibited then assess the secondary concern: effectiveness. If the approach will enable or promote rapid reproduction then use it, whether or not it is a pattern which occurs naturally in the society. When faced with several options which appear to be equally effective, then consider whether or not the approach is contextual. There are numerous examples of this, including in regard to multiple leadership patterns as alluded to above. There are many examples of places where rapid multiplication of churches has taken place in the presence of biblical leadership patterns which were foreign to the culture.

Another factor which can only help the rate at which people come to the Lord is through massive societal exposure to the gospel. Rom 10:14a

14   How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?

2 Cor 9:6

6   Now this {I say} he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

When the tide comes in, all the boats in the harbor rise. If you make sure that large numbers of your target population are being exposed to Scripture, then you will accelerate the work. Heb 4:12

12   For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Isa 55:11

11   So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding {in the matter} for which I sent it.

God will honor His word. It will have an effect.

Another way to shorten the reproductive cycle of churches is to model and communicate the idea that the discipleship process is just that, a process. It is not a body of information to transfer but a pattern of living and relating to God, His Word, and His Body. This is a pattern which can be modeled and learned in a short period of time, enabling a lifetime of ministry and growth. This view of discipleship will enable and, indeed, require new believers to very quickly be productive in ministry themselves. It brings every believer into a fruitful life of obedience from the very beginning rather than causing new believers to be a burden

on more mature believers who must disciple them for years before the new converts can begin to minister themselves.

If a method is utilized which involves evangelistic Bible studies and initial follow-up discipleship Bible studies there can be significant gains made by conducting the studies on a daily basis rather than a weekly basis. For the sake of illustration, let's assume a twelve-session Bible study for evangelism and a twelve-session Bible study for immediate follow-up discipleship. If these were conducted on a weekly basis, they would take a total of twenty-four weeks as opposed to four weeks if they are done on a daily basis. This is a saving of five months, which can be the difference in tens of thousands of churches over ten or fifteen years.

There are additional advantages to having daily studies. First of all, it emphasizes the importance and urgency of the topic. Particularly in the discipleship phase it is a well-known phenomenon that the period of time that elapses between conversion and follow-up is a major factor in the probability of whether or not the person will follow through on his new commitment. The one drawback is that in discipleship studies there is often a level of homework, including scripture memorization, which would be difficult to compress into a two-week period. However, some of this material could be postponed until after the initial follow-up period, and the corresponding gains in terms of immediate confirmation of one's decision more than outweigh the law which would come from slightly delaying some of this discipleship material.

Particularly in some urban societies, people I talk to claim that people would never be able to have time for daily studies, but they overlook the fact that they are asking for a limited period of time of around four weeks, whereas they would have to set aside twenty-four weeks of one session per week if a weekly approach were used. But in these same highly intense, competitive, and busy societies, people routinely take out large chunks of time for business training and other items of importance to them. If someone is highly motivated and serious about his commitment, he can make time for daily studies for a brief period.

Another opportunity for increasing the pace of church planting is to place an emphasis on the responsibility of sharing the gospel because of its inherent nature. Those of us who come from societies where the gospel is readily available sometimes forget the urgency of the matter. We have the message of life in the midst of dying people, the cure for the deadly disease which those around us have contracted. We have lifeboats at the scene of a ship-wreck. If this attitude is clearly communicated in word and action by the church planters, it will naturally be caught by the new converts, because it is obvious in areas where the gospel is not readily available. This urgency and desire for reaching out to those who have not yet heard the truth becomes part of the DNA of the church. It will become characterized by boldness in sharing the gospel gladly.

Also, it is a good idea to emphasize the gospel following existing lines of relationships. Certainly the new converts need to have the pattern of sharing with those whom they do not know. The gospel always travels faster along existing lines of relationship, however; so no opportunity should be missed for the quick evangelization of family and friends. These are but a few of the possible ways to shorten the reproductive cycle without harming the quality of the fruit. This is an important matter which should receive constant attention and thought.

There is a final point I would like to make about shortening reproductive time for churches. In many settings, particularly among those who are not fully literate, Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) is a popular method to use for evangelism and discipleship training. CBS has many advantages and strong points, but like any other approach it can be used well or poorly. There is a frequent misuse of CBS. That misuse involves delaying the presentation of the gospel until the stories of the crucifixion and resurrection. The idea behind this delay is that peoples' worldview will have time to change so that opposition or misunderstanding can be avoided. This is a worthy aim, but one can never remove the offense of the gospel. A culturally sensitive presentation of the gospel should not be postponed or delayed in this manner. For example, Paul did not hold back from preaching the gospel even before audiences which he knew were very likely to reject the message. He did not let the likelihood of rejection prevent him from sharing the truth, and usually a few would believe.

It is common for CBS to be conducted with one story per week for a year or more. In such a situation, the gospel may not be presented for up to ten months if one delays it until the crucifixion story. If the weekly approach is used then it is far preferable to start the process with the fast-track approach. The fast-track approach involves summarizing the entire story of the Bible from Genesis through the Gospels in one setting. This means that aspects of every weekly story which point to God's work of salvation can reinforce the gospel message. It helps to put each story into perspective.

In one of our training sessions the importance of this approach was communicated in a tragic way. One of the trainees had been using CBS with a group that included a lady who lived next door to him. Two weeks prior to the training session the lady had asked how she could follow Jesus. He told her to wait just a few

more weeks and they would get to that part of the story. During the training session he received a phone call informing him that the lady had died. He was crushed, knowing she had entered eternity forever lost. If he had only used the fast-track approach then whenever she became ready she could have respond to the Lord. Do not postpone giving people a chance to hear the gospel.

Think of the Process as a Whole

Another mental pattern which can have tremendous impact upon the way one works or thinks about church planting is whether one thinks of the process as a series of sequential segments or as a whole. Many people consider the process of church planting as a series of sequential steps. You arrange for prayer support and begin praying yourself. You do evangelism. After people are converted, then discipleship begins. Once discipleship begins or initial discipleship is completed, some people even put in a proving period, which is definitely not biblical. But at the end of either the discipleship or the proving period the converts are baptized. Then there is a step by which the church is actually planted. After the church is planted, you begin to develop leaders.

Viewing the process in this way can be very harmful. It is far more helpful to realize that what is done from the very first contact with an unbeliever has implications and effects on discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and ongoing approaches toward spiritual matters. For instance, if the approach taken during evangelism and discipleship is a one-way monologue from a knower to a person who is ignorant, it is not participative or interactive. It implies that one person is a giver and the other person is a receiver. Then the result will be people who do not view themselves as capable of leadership. It will also affect the nature of church life.

Such patterns established early on can be difficult to break down later. You can inadvertently set up many barriers and roadblocks to growth and development, either in individual disciples or in churches, by the approaches you may take in the evangelism and discipleship process or the timing of leadership development. You can be developing leadership from the moment you begin interacting with an unbeliever who is going to be converted. You can be affecting the nature of the church which will be planted by whether you approach things from an individual basis or a group basis. There are many applications to this principle.

Layered Filtering

Earlier we mentioned filtering. Filtering can also be done in layers--that is, progressively narrowing the pool based on the level of interest. An example of this which might be used in a city could be started with a radio show on raising children, perhaps something analogous to James Dobson's Focus on the Family. It could be pre-evangelistic in content. Besides providing some direct ministry, the radio show could also be used to establish a newsletter mailing list and make announcements for spiritually related opportunities. On the radio show and in the newsletter, which we'll say has a readership of ten thousand people, you could announce a free lecture given by an expert in the field who happens to be a Christian. Let's say one thousand people attend this lecture. The lecture would be very low key. At the lecture you could have a door prize which would enable you to get names and addresses and perhaps a couple of other items of information about those who have attended. Everyone who attends could then get a consolation prize like a Gospel of John or something of that nature.

At the conclusion of that lecture, and in the newsletter and on the radio, there could be an announcement about a similar lecture. This one would be on Christian principles of child-rearing and more specifically Christian in content. Let's say three hundred people attend this lecture. Again, a door prize could be offered so you could get information on the attendees, and perhaps a Jesus video or something like that could be given as a consolation prize to all who attend. This group is fairly highly filtered already; so at the conclusion of this lecture you could announce that there would be a Bible study for all who are interested in knowing more about what Christians believe. This would be an evangelistic Bible study.

Let's say you have roughly one-third attend this, one hundred and five people. You could divide them (based upon their addresses, which you would have from the door prize information) into seven groups of fifteen people each based upon geographic considerations within the city you are targeting. These seven groups would seek to model as much as possible the type of church life you are hoping to see in the groups that get planted. They would use a participative, interactive teaching style, and the groups would have shared leadership as each would be led by two or more believers. They would treat the Bible as authoritative and have other similar characteristics which you would want to typify the churches.

At the end of this evangelistic study, since these were highly filtered individuals, you may have nearly half convert. Let's say seven out of every fifteen became Christians. You could potentially have seven new churches of seven members each. You would provide a follow-up Bible study. At the end of that study, they would be baptized and formed into new churches. This is just one example of how layered filtering

can work.

There was a real-life example carried out along this same pattern in a city in China. It started with a newspaper advertisement for free ESL and American culture classes. The paper had a readership of 120,000. There were 1,250 who attended. As part of the American culture classes there was information on Christianity (largely through lectures on holidays). The entire group was also offered a free showing of the Jesus video to help explain what Christians (the majority religion in the U.S.A.) believed. Four hundred attended. Those who showed interest were followed up with personally. They were offered an opportunity to participate in a small-group Bible study. Two hundred attended these evangelistic studies. Sixty-five made decisions to follow the Lord, and they were formed into several new churches. You can see many striking parallels between this and the radio example above.

A key is the feedback loop. For any filtering to be effective, it has to include a feedback loop.

Another notable technique is to begin modeling while people are still unbelievers as much as possible. In the above examples this began at the Bible study level.

Also note that it is more effective to group unbelievers and win them than to win individuals and group them. It is often very difficult to win individual converts, disciple them, and then try to form them into a new church. It is often far more effective to group them either based on pre-existing relationships such as family or friends, or based upon common interest or experience. In the radio example, the families that would be involved would be families who are raising children and are drawn together by this common stage in life and common interests and concerns. Then they have experience in common in the fact that they listen to the same radio station and they have attended the same lectures and Bible studies; so it has developed many common feelings and attitudes that enable them to bond together and trust one another to a far greater degree.

Historically, this has been a huge problem among Muslims. If people can be exposed to the gospel in groups, it somehow lessens the fear of letting those people know you have converted. Often individuals will make their decision only in a one-on-one setting in persecuted environments, but it will still help them feel free to meet with others if they were exposed to the truth in a group setting. Instead of winning a person to the Lord and then having that person tell his family and friends, why not locate someone who is promising and have him get his family and friends together before he becomes a Christian? A low-key witness in the group setting can go a long way toward diffusing suspicion and distrust among family members later and may open up some tremendous possibilities.

Finally, if you are using some large mass media type of effort, start multiple groups whenever possible. Don't plan to have all the converts in a single church but start as many churches as you can from the effort. This is another application of the default setting being to start new churches with new believers.

Tie Media Together

Not only should you utilize feedback loops when you are using media; but, as much as possible, you should reference all the other available media. That is, at the end of each radio show, mention Christian websites or how one can get audio-cassettes or written materials. Media that could be referenced in other media include television, such as satellite television, cable or network television, videotapes including the Jesus film or other Christian videotapes or testimonies, radio programs, tracts, scripture portions, newspaper advertisements, audio-cassettes of various kinds including music, sermons, testimonies, or scripture on audio-cassette, Bible correspondence courses, lectures, websites, e-mail addresses, snail mail address, personal witness, leaflets on how to start a church, etc. You could develop a half-sheet of paper that would list nearly all of the available resources in a given area or language and include that half-sheet with everything that is distributed, such as videotapes: you could mention them on the radio program, in tracts, in newspaper ads, in audio-cassettes, in Bible correspondence courses, and on the website. In each of these you reference each of the others.

Clearly, in restricted-access environments many of these will need to be off-shore contact points, and not all the tools will be available. Even in restricted access areas, however, people have not really "tested the edge" very much. Short-term volunteer "expendable" teams can get a surprising amount done before being picked up by the police, given free lodging in jail, and deported.

Evangelization Scale

There are many reasons for tying media together. One is the fact that almost no one ever becomes a believer as a result of a single contact with the gospel. The Engel Scale is a linear scale used to describe how close a person is to becoming a disciple. It was adapted into a two-quadrant scale by Sogaard. I like to adapt it to a full four-quadrant model with the horizontal axis being knowledge and the vertical axis being attitude, because it is possible to actually have misinformation about Christianity, thus negative knowledge, as well as positive and negative attitudes.

For example, let's say there is a Muslim who has misinformation and a bad attitude about Christianity. He is in the lower left-hand quadrant. Someone hands him a tract which he reads. It corrects some of his misperceptions about Christianity, but he still has a very negative attitude and some misperceptions. There is radio broadcast information stamped on the back of the tract; so out of curiosity and irritation he tunes in. Again, he learns a bit more but still has an even worse attitude. When an address is given at the end of the radio program, he writes in to tell them that they are wrong in airing this program which will deceive many people and that they should be ashamed of themselves. The radio broadcasters respond to the letter, offering to send someone to talk to the man so he can explain more about why he feels this way. The letter explains that they do not want to do harm or mislead people and that they want to understand his perspective. He agrees to allow the visit. The radio station sends someone for a face-to-face visit. During this visit the man is still unconvinced, but he is impressed at the humility and gentleness and obvious love of the person who comes to visit. His attitude is improving.

The person who comes to visit loans him a Jesus video. The man watches the video. By this time his misconceptions have been corrected, and he has a slightly positive attitude toward Christianity. He is barely into the upper right-hand quadrant. When the man who loaned him the video comes back to collect it, he then gives him a New Testament. The man begins to read the Bible regularly. He is understanding more each day and really admires Jesus at this point. After a period of time he contacts the man from the radio station, expressing interest in learning more. So he is placed in an evangelistic Bible study. His attitude drastically improves toward the gospel. At the conclusion of this study, when he gets the opportunity to visit a church planted among his own people group, it is enough to convince him that he too wants to be a follower of Christ.

You see how a single contact with the gospel through that tract wouldn't even come close to converting this man, but the fact that each medium was tied to other media enabled the person to have multiple exposures to the gospel in many different forms. If it had been left up to chance for this man to get a tract, to find the radio station, to meet a Christian and visit with him in depth, to view the Jesus video, to get a Bible, to join a Bible study, and to see a church, it never would have happened. Because the various evangelistic approaches were intentionally linked together, he was enabled to gradually proceed from misperception and opposition to understanding and acceptance. This is one good reason to tie media together and to provide feedback loops.

Key to the Backdoor Problem

In many parts of the world, a large percentage of new converts do not end up staying in churches. In a number of countries this reaches up to eighty percent. This is called the back-door problem. I believe there are at least two keys to the back door problem. The first key is providing an intimate experience in church. This is possible only in a participative setting. Participative settings do not occur in large groups. Therefore, small-group interaction is necessary.

The second factor is opportunity for ministry. If people are not held accountable for applying scripture and passing it on, then they often feel unnecessary and unimportant. Again, it is difficult to achieve a high level of accountability and involvement in large groups. It is far more natural in small groups. So, whether you use Sunday School or house churches or something else, maintaining intimacy and accountability is vital for preservation of fruit.

Many people in areas where there is enough freedom to plant large churches are hesitant to try house churches because they are afraid all their converts will be attracted to the larger, more service-oriented churches. This will happen to some extent. Some who leave will never come back. This is especially true if they have special needs which can be ministered to more effectively by a large church with specialized programs and ministries. Some, however, will return. They will miss the high degree of intimacy, accountability, and opportunity for truly significant ministry which are more emphasized in the house-church setting. In some ways this is a win-win situation. The larger churches, which are not as good at evangelizing the lost, gain new members. The house churches lose much of the deadwood of members who are not willing to be held accountable or who have special needs which would consume much of the time and energy of ministry in the church. This helps keep the house churches vibrant and strongly focused on outreach and growth.

Group Size

Group size is an important consideration for churches. The size of a group is inversely proportional to the levels of intimacy and accountability which can be maintained. There is nothing wrong with large group meetings as long as they do not replace the primary unit of the small group. Do the right thing in large groups if you are going to have them. Singing is definitely better in a large group. Worship is a legitimate large-group activity. Most other functions are more effectively carried out in small groups.

The ideal maximum size will vary by culture. It is partially dependent upon how many deep relationships a person can have within a given society. There is probably no society which has an ideal maximum of over fifteen people. Many suggest a maximum of twelve.

5 M Analysis

The five M analysis, often utilized in industry, is a helpful guide to church planting and evaluation. The five M's are manpower (who is doing it), methods (how they are doing it), materials (what they are using), minutes (when and how long), and money (how much it costs). I will briefly illustrate using the Endvisioning case study.

Manpower questions might include: Are all available workers being tapped? Are there unnecessary limitations on who is available? We utilized volunteer lay people to do all the church planting. Those who went to plant churches were supported by others in their church for the period they were serving. We utilized methods which did not require literacy; so we didn't rule out people because of educational level.

Methodology questions would include: Are the methods effective? and are they reproducible by all the manpower? In our situation some of the methods included using teams, participative teaching, being Bible-centered, using small group settings, taking advantage of locally mentored leaders to enable church multiplication, targeting least-reached areas, and using shadow pastors. Each aspect was designed to be reproducible and was evaluated for effectiveness.

In terms of materials, you could ask: Are the materials readily available, and are they appropriate? We used the Bible as the primary tool. Often we made use of audio or video tools (including Scripture) to deal with illiteracy issues. Sometimes simple photocopied Bible studies were used. Bibles were not available locally, and this was a problem. We provided high-speed cassette duplicators for the two networks which emerged; so availability of audio-cassettes was not a problem.

Minutes relates to the pace issue. The most important question is: Is the time frame as compressed as possible? Over a five-year period we had under a nine-month doubling rate in the number of churches (under seven months for believers). There were a two-month mentoring for new leaders, immediate turning over of leadership in pioneer church plants, rapid baptism of new believers, and daily studies in the church-planting phase. It was as compressed as I knew how to make it.

In terms of money, you should ask: Does the use of money reflect the intended priorities? It does reflect the priorities, but are they the priorities you want? In other words, in looking at this issue just ask: Are the resources in the harvest? They should be. If church-planting and growth patterns rely on the constant infusion of foreign money, then a Church Planting Movement will never occur. Regular infusion of material resources develops dependence, not real growth. When Simon Mwangi, Associate Pastor of Parklands Baptist Church in Nairobi, was going through SC training, he said, "You do not empower Africans when you give them money. You enslave them. You empower Africans by giving them something for their minds and hearts, something they can take with them and share with others." This is true not only of money but also of manpower.

Who is Really Mature?

Often we fail to allow for the involvement of new believers, thinking that they need to mature before they become involved in ministry. This is a shame, because the first few weeks of a Christian's spiritual life are potentially the most fruitful. One reason for the way we treat new believers and expect so little of them is related to our view of maturity. We often mistake knowledge for maturity. This is related to our view of discipleship as a body of knowledge to be transferred rather than patterns and processes to be passed on.

Knowledge is worthless without practice, without applying it to one's life. If people are not allowed to apply what they have learned, they will not grow in maturity. A relatively new believer can in reality be more mature than a much older believer if he is practicing a high percentage of what he has learned.

Perhaps a better measure of maturity would take into account not only the level of knowledge but also the ratio between knowledge and practical living out of that knowledge. Thus, if we fail to provide an opportunity for ministry for new believers, we are condemning them to a life of relative immaturity. This would be a grave mistake, because the resources for evangelizing the world are in the harvest.

The Resources are in the Harvest

If you are working among an unreached people group, the chances are that the greatest church planters, the most effective church planters among your target group in two years are people who are not yet even believers. The most effective church planters two years from now will be people who will be won, perhaps, in the next few months. The resources are truly in the harvest. If we fail to plan for that and fail to recognize that fact, we are condemning the results to be relatively meager. No unreached people group can afford to rely primarily on outside workers for evangelism and church planting. Outside workers are

necessary to get a work started; but, once it is started, it must be carried out and carried to completion by members of that target group, or it is destined for failure.

We naturally recognize this principle in agriculture. Saudi Arabia recently made an agreement with Australia to import sheep. Australia wanted to butcher the sheep before shipping them. The Saudis claimed that freshness would be lost, and they were afraid the sheep would not be *halal* so they convinced the Australians to let them butcher the sheep once they arrived in Saudi Arabia. The Australians ensured that it was written in the contract that all the sheep must be slaughtered. None must be bred. The Aussies then built the largest livestock ship in the world to transport them. The Saudis signed the contract but failed to follow through on it and are culling out their own breeding stock so they can save money and reduce dependence upon Australia.

We can all recognize the prudence of that maneuver, even if it is dishonest. Yet we fail to recognize that when it comes to kingdom issues such as laborers for the harvest field of souls. We must never forget that the resources are in the harvest. A wise farmer does not buy seed year after year. He keeps some of his best grain to plant the next year's crop. An African worker recently told me he had seen families allow their children to starve rather than allowing them to eat the next year's seed corn. Those families believed in this principle. Do we?

Spiritual Journey

The principle of reproducibility is a key principle in church planting. However, it has been used as a weapon against many potentially fruitful approaches, sometimes without justification. Imagine, if you will, a continuum from A to Z where A represents having no awareness of the gospel and Z represents full attainment of the image of Christ. The midpoint, M, would represent the conversion point. On the segment of the continuum from A to M, the emphasis should be on massive exposure to the gospel. The M to Z emphasis is on discipleship and Christian growth. The M to Z segment of the continuum should place a premium on reproducibility. The A to M segment, however, should have relatively less emphasis upon reproducibility. The nearer efforts lie to A on the continuum, the less emphasis reproducibility should have. The emphasis on reproducibility will gradually increase as you move from A to M.

Many methods for providing massive exposure to the gospel are not particularly reproducible, but this should not prevent us from utilizing them because these are a prerequisite for significant spiritual movement among the target people. These efforts provide, as it were, a raising of the water level in the spiritual harbor, which allows the boat of discipleship to float. So reproducibility may need to be sacrificed early on in the work among a target group in order to attain tremendous awareness of the gospel.

Church-Planting Math

The importance of recognizing that the resources are in the harvest can be illustrated with a little church-planting math. If outside workers do all the church planting, you can achieve additive growth, illustrated by 5 + 5 = 10. If outside workers train local church planters to do the church planting and they plant mule churches (churches that will not reproduce), you can still achieve multiplicative growth. This is possible as long as the outside workers continue to train new church planters who repeatedly plant new churches. This is represented by 5 x 5 = 25. However, if outside workers train church planters who plant horse churches--that is, churches which regularly reproduce--you can achieve exponential growth as long as the church planters continue to plant the churches. This is represented by 5 to the 5th = 3,125. This type of growth is possible, but so often we fail to aim for it because we fail to recognize that the resources are in the harvest. This illustrates the difference in aiming for conversions, which is additive growth; or church planting by converts, which is multiplicative growth; or church planting of reproducing churches, which is exponential growth.

There are two quick ways to assess the type of growth which is being practiced. The first is, how are most of the churches being planted? By outsiders? By the same individuals over and over? By churches (or representatives from churches)?

The second is the patterns of use of outside funds. If pastors or church leaders are being paid, it is safe to say that additive growth is the best that is possible. Even the churches which are planted will not be healthy in such a situation. If church planters are being paid, then multiplicative growth is possible as long as money to pay more and more church planters is available.

In one South Asian setting which is often hailed as a model, this pattern has been used. Many large agencies are supporting church planters to the tune of more than a million dollars per year. There are more than a thousand workers hired to work in one area from several agencies. Many churches have been planted, but these churches are weak and struggling to survive. These churches are not reproducing. No one is planting churches unless he is being paid to by outsiders. These churches are not joining in the task of winning their own people group, let alone reaching out to other groups. What will happen if the outside

funds ever dry up? What will happen over time as these churches experience ongoing pressure from the majority religions in the area? Only time will tell. For the present there is rapid growth fueled by outside funding.

Is it possible to transition from the outside funding of local church planters to a pattern in which churches are planting churches? Yes. Is it easy? No. In one Southeast Asian people group, the work was started by paying locals to do church planting. They experienced steady growth. New churches, however, were started only by the paid church planters. Later, a decision was made to try to transition to unpaid church planters who were provided free training. For eighteen months there were a lot of hard feelings. Many churches pulled away from the network, and some withered. The number of new churches fell. Then, gradually unpaid church planters who were supported with help from their own congregations began planting churches. After another year, the rate of growth even exceeded the rate achieved with paid church planters. The strong growth is continuing to the present.

Another pattern which is less harmful is to pay church planter trainers. This is better but still not ideal. The ideal is for churches to plant churches and equip people to plant churches in a way that is locally reproducible, including the funding. It is true that it is possible to get a faster start by compromising on this ideal. There are certainly circumstances in which such shortcuts might be acceptable or even advisable (except for paying a local pastor from outside). The important thing is that you realize you are taking a shortcut and what you may be sacrificing. There will be a price to pay later either in making the transition or in permanently limited growth rates and patterns. You will never achieve beyond additive growth unless you are equipping locals to plant churches. You will never achieve beyond multiplicative growth unless locals are planting churches which will reproduce. Aim for exponential growth!

Better a Mule than No Church at All

However, even given this fact, we cannot allow fear of planting mules (churches that don't reproduce) to prevent us from planting churches at all. It is far better to plant a mule than no church at all. Fear of doing it wrong can lead to paralysis, which is a fatal error. A mule is a victory, albeit a smaller victory than a horse (a reproducing church). It is far better to plant a mule and learn from the experience and try to do better next time. There is no harm done by planting a mule. The mule will not become the rule because it will not reproduce. You can try again in another place and do better next time. Once you get a horse, it will multiply, and it will become the rule because the horse churches will very quickly outgrow the mule churches in terms of total number of believers. Almost any way of planting a church is better than not planting a church at all. For, as Wayne Gretzke says, "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you never take." Nothing significant is ever achieved without taking risks, and there is no risk greater than the status quo in our situation. If the situation does not change, unreached people groups will remain unreached, and millions will die and enter a Christless eternity. No possible alternative is a greater evil than this. So the greatest risk of all in our situation is the status quo. We must not fear making mistakes, because the mistakes can be no worse than the current situation.

The Marine Warfighting Manual states that risk is inherent equally to action and inaction. This is manifestly untrue in matters of church planting. Inaction has infinitely more risks than action.

What Will Your Final Groups Look Like?

If you follow the suggestions made in this book, what will the churches which are planted look like? We can make a conjecture based upon work in settings which utilized similar methods. These are purely descriptive, not prescriptive. This is descriptive of what typical groups ended up looking like across a number of people groups, cultures, and continents.

They primarily meet in small groups, in many settings operating covertly. They usually have ten to twenty people. The are led by "laymen" rather than by ordained, professionally educated clergy. The ordinances are conducted by the group; they do not wait for outsiders to come in and assist with ordinances. There is a heavy emphasis on prayer. There is a degree of koinonia, often extending to the point of the sharing of resources--a sharing which extends beyond emotional oneness to oneness in material possessions as well. It is typified by a loose network in which at the very least a church will know its parent group and other churches planted by the parent group. Frequently the churches and the believers are acquainted with suffering. Yet the believers and the churches are characterized by boldness. They do not have dedicated facilities (church building). They frequently have women in key roles in the church. Women are viewed as ministers, as having spiritual gifts just as much as men, even in patriarchal societies. (Biblical parallels would include Junia, Phoebe, the four daughters of Philip, Priscilla, Dorcas, Lydia, etc.) The groups are characterized by intentional sharing of the gospel and intentional plans to multiply. Multiplication is an expectation, not a vague, remote hope.

Finally, they recognize that scripture and the Holy Spirit are all they need. They are not heavily dependent

upon outside resources but view scripture and the Holy Spirit as adequate for their needs.

Isn't This a Cell Church?

Many people ask, "Isn't this just a cell church that you are describing?" Well, it really isn't. There are several distinctive differences. The primary difference is in regard to structure. A cell church, or metachurch as I call them, is hierarchical in structure, and teaching and authority flow from the top down. What I am describing is a network of autonomous house churches which voluntarily cooperate together and submit to one another in mutual accountability. There are advantages and disadvantages to each form.

Starfish vs. Octopus

The difference may perhaps best be illustrated by the difference between starfish and octopi. Starfish represent house churches. If you cut off the leg of a starfish, you get two starfish, and nothing is lost. With an octopus, if you cut off the leg, you get a new leg, and the old leg is lost. With a cell church the leadership level that develops in each cell is not nearly as mature as that which develops in an autonomous house church because the cell group depend upon the hierarchy to provide regular teaching and structure and authority instead of learning to feed on scripture for themselves. So if, because of persecution or severed relationships or some other problem, the cell group breaks off from a metachurch, it will typically die.

Similarly, with a starfish, if the head is destroyed, you get as many starfish as there are pieces of starfish. But, with an octopus, if the head is destroyed, the octopus is dead. In the metachurch, if the senior leadership of this church is imprisoned or dies or falls into sin or some other problem, typically the church is seriously damaged or even killed. Whereas there is no problem like that with house churches, because each unit is not reliant on the organization but is self-sufficient for feeding and growth.

Starfish are simple and nonspecialized, whereas octopi are complex and specialized. This is true of cell churches and house churches. A cell church or metachurch that is complex and specialized can provide a myriad of services and opportunities which can never be offered by the house churches because the house churches are simple and nonspecialized. They simply meet the simple, basic, straightforward needs, not the highly specialized needs. The authoritative structure in the metachurch enables it to act with greater coordination than is possible with a house-church network.

One other advantage of starfish is that you can't eliminate them even if you try. You can try chemicals or biological warfare against them, but they are very tough to eliminate. Whereas, octopi are an endangered species in areas where they come under environmental stress. This points out a fact that is true about metachurches. They are appropriate for only certain settings. They tend to be appropriate for urban settings but not rural settings and for authoritative societies but not consultative societies. House churches can thrive in both urban and rural settings in consultative and authoritative societies. They are much more versatile and adaptable than metachurches pattern.

Metachurches can and do offer many of the same benefits as house churches. If you are serving as an SC in an urban area where there is enough freedom so that large churches are possible, then you should certainly consider this pattern. Probably the best course is a both/and approach. Having a house church network can provide an alternative in case serious persecution becomes a factor and can help develop leaders more fully.

God Can Do It!

After all is said and done, we must end where we began. There is nothing any person can do to bring about a Church Planting Movement. It is a sovereign act of God. What we can do is pave the way through proper approaches, through wise stewardship of people, resources, and methods so that we do not hinder what God is trying to do or place artificial bottlenecks upon the process. We can free people to respond in as great numbers and with as great speed as possible so that God can accomplish what he wants to without having to overcome barriers that we erect.