

# Developing A Contextualized Church Planting Strategy

By Gary Bulley

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North American Mission Board

## I. Introduction

Perhaps, the most difficult task in starting a new church is developing a sound strategy that fits both the planter and his community. A variety of factors must combine with sound missiology and God's leadership in order to develop an optimum plan. Those who attempt to circumvent this process are usually left scratching their heads. Borrowing a strategy from the latest church planting fad rarely works. A failure to invest adequate energy into the creation of

**Contextualization is the greatest methodological issue facing the Christian mission today.**

Alan Tippet  
Cristopaganism or Indigenous Christianity

a contextualized strategy almost always leads to frustration. We must remember that every church start is a unique creation of the Holy Spirit. Its context and leadership are also very unique. Thus, the goal of this section is to establish the need for contextualization and to prepare and equip the planter to seek God for the unique strategy his context demands. We desire planters to have a well thought out, contextualized, complete, theologically sound strategy that fits the church plant team and community.

## THE MYTH OF MODELS

The biggest deterrent to contextualized strategies in church planting today is the proliferation of models. The PDC (Purpose Driven church) model, the Meta model, the Vineyard model, the Willow Creek Seeker model, the Ralph Neighbor cell model, the Dale Galloway cell model, the Charles Brock itinerant church planter model are just a few of the more popular models today. Everyone seems to be looking for the magic formula, the panacea or the quick fix one-two-three method for starting a church. However, it is difficult, if not impossible to start a church by copying the exact strategy someone else used. Most cultures and communities are significantly different. Planters are different. Gifts, personalities and theologies are all different. Can one planter, who is different from a second planter, go to a very different community and succeed using the other planter's strategy? It may be possible; however, God may prefer the first planter receive his strategy from him. God likely desires to build a unique church to minister to a unique people. Furthermore, the possible number of strategies God can use to plant a church are as infinite as the ways the Holy Spirit can work among a people. Yes, there are some common principles. Yes, we can learn from others. In fact, we had better learn from others. However, are not those we usually borrow from living examples of contextualization? We emulate them, not by copying their strategy, but emulating their seeking God for a unique strategy. God's successes elsewhere are not models, but case studies on the power of God to start churches. Furthermore, copying what someone else has done presumes upon God and leaves him out of the strategy process. The use of models likens church planting to franchising and turns it into a mechanical reproduction of institutions as opposed to the berthing of a unique expression of Christ's bride.

*To understand many of the methods in this book, you need to understand the context in which they*

*were  
cont  
princ*

### *Examples of Paul Contextualizing to Start Churches*

*the*

- ❖ Paul recognized contextual factors and changed his approach from community to community. In Pisidian Antioch, Barnabas and Paul started a church by speaking in the synagogue. The Jews were so impressed they invited the missionaries back to speak again the next week. Word spread through the whole town about their message and everyone attended the synagogue on the next Sabbath. Many believed and Barnabas and Paul were able to start a church before they were run out of town (Acts 13: 13-48).
- ❖ In Iconium, however, Barnabas and Paul's message in the synagogue did not convince all the Jews. Barnabas and Paul responded by performing miraculous signs and wonders to prove the truth of their message (Acts 14:1-4).
- ❖ In Lystra there is no record of them even going to the synagogue. Lystra was extremely pagan. Instead, Paul healed a crippled man to draw a crowd in which to speak (Acts 14: 8-18).
- ❖ In Philippi, Paul evangelizes the *oikos* or relational networks of Lydia and the jailer to begin a

What someone has done in another church start may or may not work for you. It probably will not if you blindly copy everything they did. The strategy you use should be uniquely God's and your own. Please do not cheat God of the opportunity to create a special, potent and contextualized approach for your church plant. God can do it. You have to trust what He comes up with, even if it does not look like the latest church-planting fad. Good church planting is not necessarily about being *innovative*; it's about following God to find the best way to introduce the gospel and its implications to an unreached community of people. Models presume that we know how to do that without ever seriously consulting God on the matter. It is important to enter every new church-planting situation as an open book, ready to allow God to fill in the pages.

*The ultimate goal of contextualization is that the church be enabled in a particular time and place to witness to Christ in a way that is both faithful to the gospel and meaningful to men, women, and children in the cultural, social, political, and religious conditions of that time and place.*

Danny Sanchez, SWBTS  
Missiology, p333

II.

## DEVELOPING YOUR UNIQUE STRATEGY

### *Contextualization Metaphor*

Every year in the desert heat of California, the grueling Baja 1000 punishes thousands of participants. Trucks, cars, motorcycles and other less conventional vehicles race to be crowned king of the toughest endurance challenge in motor sports. The fastest vehicle does not usually win. The best drivers do not usually win. Only those with guile and endurance have a chance at crossing the finish



## A Contextualization Model

There are many factors and variables that impact a contextualized strategy. For the sake of clarity, we will place these factors in three groupings: theology, team and environment. The planter, the Holy Spirit and the variables interact to create a contextualized strategy. The following diagram best illustrates the process.



The implications of this model are many.

- ❖ Strategy is dependent upon many variables.
- ❖ Strategy is dynamic and fluid.
- ❖ Strategy should reflect the unique challenges of each setting.
- ❖ Strategy is determined by the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Strategy possibilities are infinite.
- ❖ Strategy may change when any one variable changes.
- ❖ Strategy cannot be determined before the context is examined.
- ❖ Strategy formation is a spiritual process.
- ❖ Strategy development is learned as we study others who have contextualized successfully.
- ❖ Strategy options increase with increasing knowledge of our team, our setting and our values.
- ❖ Strategy variables mean little without an understanding of church planting principles.
- ❖ Strategy development takes faith in the Holy Spirit rather than man's ingenuity.
- ❖ Strategy formation should be a team process.
- ❖ Strategy formation can be overwhelming unless we trust in God.
- ❖ Strategy formation can be reduced to one simple axiom: follow the Holy Spirit.

### Jesus on the role of self in Christian mission

*I assure you, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the father doing.* John 5

*I do nothing on my own.* John 8

*I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.* John 14

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me.* John 16

The remainder of this section will concentrate on the issues, tensions and implications to consider when examining many major strategic variables. We will approach these variables under each of the three major headings: theology, leadership and environment. One would have to be an expert in many fields to give an extensive treatment of each factor. We need not delve that deep. It is not necessary to be a sociologist or demographer to understand some major issues and their implications as we seek to plant churches. Frankly, most of contextualization is common sense coupled with keen observation. Contextualization is more a value and mindset than it is an expertise. It is an art more than a science. It is simply an understanding of how we must approach our task. The following illustrations are a few examples of context considerations of the billions that must exist. These illustrations are intended to create a value for and understanding of contextualization as opposed to providing answers for the exhausting amount of variables that exist in the real world.

*Planters can choose to franchise another church if they want to. However, by doing so they rob themselves of the beautiful process of God creating a fresh, new expression of his bride.*

## A. CHURCH PLANTING THEOLOGY

One might think that theology would not play a large role in contextualization. Do not all Bible believing planters believe the same things? No. It is possible for two planters to both be orthodox in theology, agree on all major points of doctrine and hold variances on minor points of doctrine that have huge implications for their church planting strategy. In fact, the theology of the planter may ultimately define the new church more than any other factor. Planters tend to plant churches that best reflect their own biases regarding church.

Furthermore, many planters do not know their theological, missiological and ecclesiological biases. They have never had cause to unpack many of the issues that starting a new church can surface. In such cases, practical expediency and the planter's own background can influence the style and nature of the new church too much. It is important for planters to work through some key theological issues and their implications as they develop their strategy. This will create balance, health and limit future frustration.

1. The definition/nature of church.

Now is a good time to visit the accompanying section in the first part of this course. This is found on page 10 in Part 1.

**Planters typically define church around one primary focus**

The five purposes  
An institutional vision  
To support a deeply held doctrinal belief  
The building  
Relationships  
Mission  
Covenant  
Worship

*All are common foci for church definitions*

Common issues related to a planter's concept of church.

a) Planters tend to start what they know.

The planter's concept of church will carry strategic implications. If he believes the church is defined by program, he will start a program type church. If he feels the church is defined by purpose, he will tend to start a purpose driven church. If he believes the church is missional, he will start a kingdom driven church. This raises two issues.

First, many planters have an ideal view of church that is inconsistent with their actual view of church. Some planters are caught up in the romance of innovative church patterns, but are incapable of practicing those patterns due to deeply ingrained values, preferences and experiences. They are simply unable to make the jump from theory to practice. For example, many seminarians are enamored with the idea of networks of relation based churches. Yet, most who attempt to start such networks struggle because they try to program the churches or assume a clergy style of leadership.

Second, the church concept of many planters carries strategic implications inconsistent with their target population. The strategy, the planter and the context should all be in harmony. For example, some believe in and attempt to start seeker churches in urban areas where the population is heterogeneous. Seeker churches tend to need large homogeneous populations to succeed.

If the planter's concept of church is inconsistent with the target population, the strategy, the planter and the context should all be in harmony. For example, some believe in and attempt to start seeker churches in urban areas where the population is heterogeneous. Seeker churches tend to need large homogeneous populations to succeed. In these situations, the planter would be best served by...

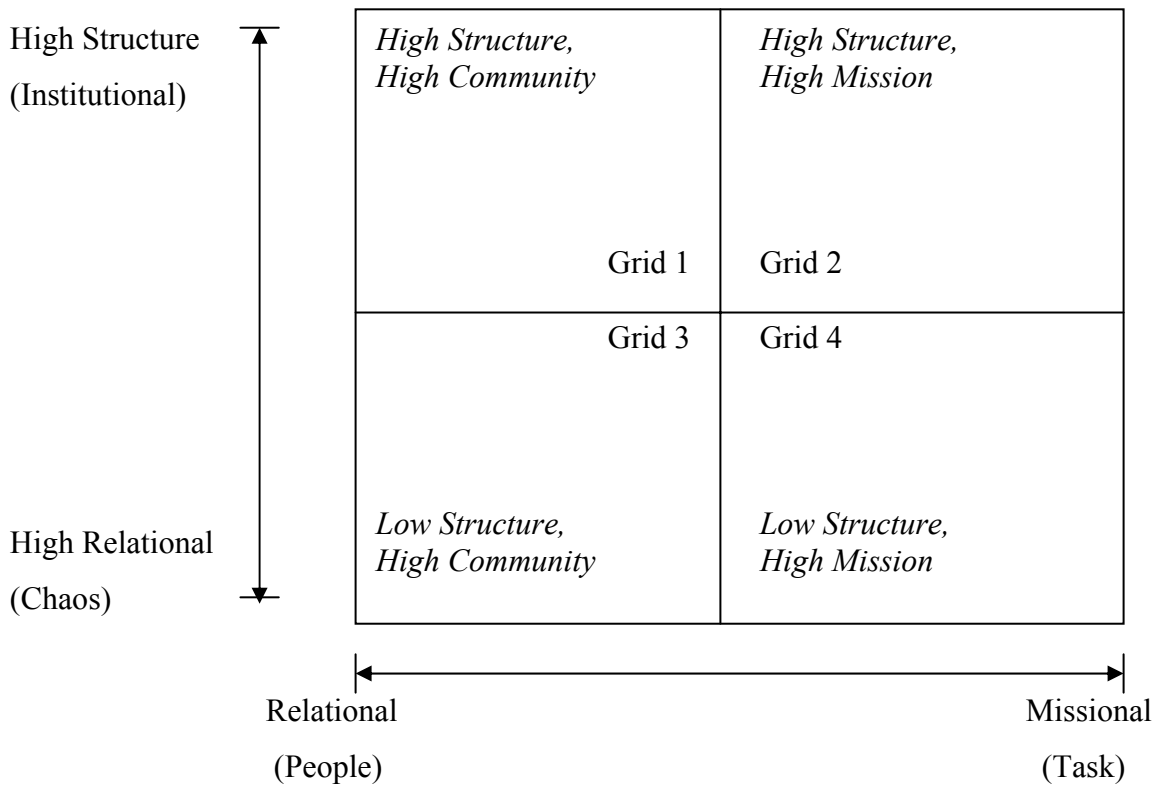
**Discussion Questions**

- *How do planters romanticize certain models of church?*
- *Why do our experiences sometimes influence our behavior more than what we say we believe?*
- *What issues must a planter deal with to begin a church in a style different than he is used to?*



b) What is the planter's understanding of the nature of church?

This would be a good time to revisit the discussion on the nature of church located in the first module on page 12. The basic model is provided here for discussion sake



The strategy implications for the various grids are also covered in part 1. Feel free to review that section with your class.

### *Discussion Questions*

- *What are the major strategic Implications for church starting from each grid?*
- *What are the strategic strengths of each grid?*
- *When would it be unwise to plant from each grid?*

Practically speaking, at what point is the new work considered a church? This moment is what most church planters are working towards. Thus, it will carry heavy strategic implications. Let's look at several points planters have used to mark the beginning of their new churches and the possible strategy impact.

- 1) **When members are identified and regular meetings established.** Once meetings are on their way, many planters feel they have a church on their hands in spite of the fact that no formal commitments to the church have been made. Many state theological objections to this view citing that the church cannot exist void of commitment. Those who hold this view feel that once attendance has been established, commitment is implied. In this approach, the crowd is church. Thus, the planter will work towards building crowd.
- 2) **When a formal covenant is established.** A covenant is a commitment of the members to one another and defines the nature and activities of their church relationships. Those who hold this view feel that regardless of attendance and other indicators of commitment, church does not exist until members are in covenant with one another. They feel the covenant defines them as church. Those who argue against covenants propose they exclude some by making membership more demanding. In this approach, the committed is church. Thus, the planter will work towards creating commitment.
- 3) **When a constitution is established.** A constitution is a document filed with the state government the church is in. This recognizes the church as a legal entity. Thus, it can own property and provide tax exemption for contributions. Those who hold this view have a more institutional view of church and feel the church needs to be official to be valid. Those who argue against this view suggest the state should never define church. The church is spiritual and the state has no bearing on spiritual things. In this approach, the official is church. Thus, the planter will work towards a legitimate organization.
- 4) **When the people move into their own building.** Few argue this point theologically, but some do not feel legitimate until they have a place to call home. Many argue against this view stating that the church is the people, not the property. However, others simply cannot conceive of being a church without a building. In this approach, the church is material. Thus, the planter will work towards obtaining property.

*Discussion questions:*

*Which of the four points of church conception do you feel is more biblical?  
In your opinion, when does a crowd become church?  
What implications does your point of conception hold for your strategy?*

c) W

According to the church planter what does a healthy church do? This question will have great bearing on what the planter works toward. Again, most planters fall into one of several patterns.

- 1) **Healthy churches consist of those who attend, give and support the leadership.** This view tends to come from those who value the organization. These activities will enhance any organization and many planters strive to develop these types of members. If this view is held by the planter, he will work to create loyalty to the church and define membership and spiritual maturity in these terms.
- 2) **Healthy churches consist of those who pray, share their faith and are knowledgeable about the bible.** This view tends to come from those who value discipleship. This planter will labor to develop his new found congregation and mold them into the types of believers he feels God desires. If this view is held by the planter, he will work hard to create these disciplines and define spiritual maturity in these terms.
- 3) **Healthy churches consist of those who seek to reproduce believers, disciples, leaders and churches.** This view tends to come from those who value mission or leadership. This planter will focus on raising others up to help advance the kingdom of God. If this view is held by the planter, he will work hard to create reproducing systems and define spiritual maturity as those who reproduce themselves.
- 4) **Healthy churches minister to the needy and hurting.** This view tends to come from those who value the church ministry to others. They believe they truly are salt and light as they seek social justice and offer a cup of water in Christ's name. If this view is held by the planter, he will work to mobilize his people to minister to the community and define spiritual maturity as helping our brother.
- 5) **Healthy churches have healthy relationships with one another, their families and world.** This view tends to come from those who value relationships. This planter will seek to develop unity and depth within the fellowship of the church. He will seek to lead his church to minister to their families and world by healing relationships. If this view is held by the planter, he will lead his people to practice grace and love and spiritual maturity will be measured by the extent these are present in his members.

When you focus on everything  
you focus on nothing

Most planters will state that they desire most, if not all of these activities in their church. Unfortunately, things usually do not work out that way. Planters can only

emphasize so many values, and activity flows from values. Planters have a tendency to focus on one of the above; although, they may desire all of them. Furthermore, this priority will be communicated both consciously and subconsciously as the planter's values naturally find expression in his activity. If the planter is aware of this, he can then become more intentional about church direction and may be able to intentionally promote several key values as he leads his people. All of the above values carry implications. The wise planter will learn these implications and apply them to his leadership activity.

*Discussion questions:*

- *Do you agree that most planters will focus on one primary value?*
- *Does activity flow from values, and why does that make it hard to have multiple foci in a congregation?*
- *Can you see any added implications to any of the above activities valued by the planter?*

d) How do we measure the success of the church?

Every planter desires to be successful and will therefore work towards success. Thus, his definition of success will be a driving force behind his efforts and the unfolding of a new church. Furthermore, different planters will have different views of success.

- 1) **Success is when the church is able to provide salary and security for the planter and his family.** Most planters who think this way do not own up to it. They feel mercenary striving for this measure of success, yet most church planters work towards this goal and feel successful when they reach it.
- 2) **Success is when attendance reaches a certain point.** Many planters feel they are failures unless worship attendance reaches 100, 200, 500 or higher within a specified time period. These planters will seek to drive their numbers ever higher to reach ever increasing levels of personal satisfaction. Those who do not reach their numerical goals often get discouraged and quit.
- 3) **Success is when property is acquired.** Many planters adopt the idea that until the church has a permanent home they have not arrived.
- 4) **Success is when particular programs or ministries are established.** Some feel that unless the church has small groups, Sunday School, children's clubs, youth ministry, choir or some other ministry they are not a real church. In their mind, a real church has

one or more of these ministries. Remember, we are dealing with practical, not ideal, concepts of church.

- 5) **Success is when converts are made.** Many planters desire to grow at least some by conversion growth. Unless people are being saved and baptized they do not feel a success.
- 6) **Success is when converts emerge as leaders.** Many planters are not satisfied with only conversions. They feel that until the disciples become disciple makers that they have not been effective.
- 7) **Success is when the new church plants churches that plant churches.** Some planters feel the natural cycle or birthing a church is not complete until it reproduces. Everything has fallen into place when reproduction occurs.

### *Discussion questions:*

- *How does one's measure of success effect one's strategy?*
- *What other measures of success have you witnessed in the church world?*
- *Which combination of the above do you feel constitute success, which are superfluous?*

## A Case Study on Success

Jeff started a church in a fast growing California suburb. His goal was to start a large PDC congregation that significantly penetrated the unchurched population. Being a smart guy, Jeff developed a fine plan; and being a gifted administrator, Jeff worked his strategy to perfection. The church started with a strong core group and over one hundred people in attendance. Everyone involved loved the church and Jeff quickly built a tight and committed fellowship.

Over the next three years, The congregation grew to average one hundred seventy in worship. Jeff could never get the group over the two hundred barrier. As more time went by, the more this bothered Jeff. He began to feel like he had failed because his church was not averaging over five hundred in worship.

Jeff's frustration caused him to press his church even more to grow. This caused significant tension in the congregation. Jeff became autocratic and withdrawn. After Jeff experienced some criticism, he decided that he should quit. He never felt successful and did not feel that his definition of success was achievable. He folded the church and took a staff position in a another congregation.

What was Jeff's measure of success?	Do you affirm Jeff's decision?	Was Jeff a success?
How did Jeff's concept of success shape his church?		How would you have counseled Jeff?

1. Examine the following definitions of church and site the strategy implications for the planter. Use the questions above on the definition, activity and success of church to assist you. In other words, what is church, when do they become church, what is their activity and their measure of success? These questions will help as you seek the strategic implications of each definition.

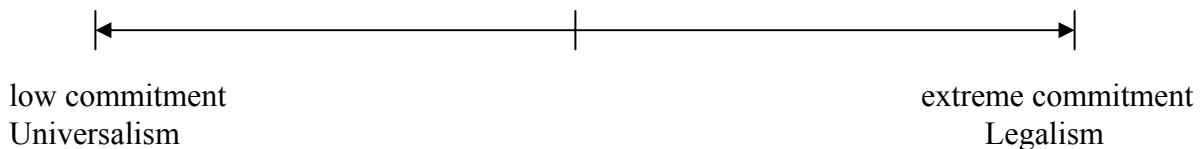
## 2. Soteriology

What the planter feels constitutes salvation will greatly impact his strategy whether he consciously considers this issue or not. Other related questions revolve around what it means to be a Christian or a member of his church. Once again, there are several issues of strategic

implications that are important to sort through: the convert's commitment to Christ and the target people group of the church planter.

### a) The convert's Commitment to Christ

What it means to be a Christian is an age old issue that Churchmen have debated for centuries. Here we find another continuum with universalism on one extreme and legalism on the other.



Please note that commitment is from the planter's perspective. This discussion is not intended to delve into the weighty issues of soteriology such as Calvinism or Arminianism. This discussion simply intends to introduce the idea that the higher the level of commitment needed to be a Christian in the eyes of the planter, the more time and energy that must be spent with each prospect to bring them into the church. Let's progress through the continuum to demonstrate this principle.

- 1) **No commitment/Everyone is already saved.** One wonders why a planter who holds this position would even plant a church. Yet, people from more liberal traditions do, and do so to enlighten others and minister to the down trodden. This planter spends no time seeking to convert anyone and can focus on the tasks he feels are important.
- 2) **Some commitment/belief in God and church attendance.** People with this view feel that any turning towards God indicates a belief that God will honor. Salvation is demonstrated by continued fellowship with a church and the desire to seek God. Planters with this view can focus all their energy on building the crowd. These planters can focus on breadth because depth is not a big issue. Few, if any, evangelicals hold this position; however, many demonstrate this theology in their church planting strategies with an overemphasis on crowds and numbers.
- 3) **Moderate commitment/Christ as savior.** Most evangelicals believe that a commitment to Christ as Savior is necessary for salvation. Planters with this view must develop a strategy for presenting Christ as savior and their need to respond. Generally speaking, it takes longer for someone to seek Christ as savior than it does to simply believe in God. Energy must be invested into each prospect to bring them to a point of decision. This extra energy effects both timelines and activity within the plant.
- 4) **Strong commitment/Christ as savior and lord.** Lordship is a difficult issue for most unchurched people. Lordship is a radical concept to them, yet most evangelicals feel it is necessary for salvation. If the planter genuinely believes this he must significantly invest in each prospect to lead them to embrace Christ as Lord. A strong relationship with the church at some point is usually important as the prospect learns to trust Christ. People who hold this position feel it is important to not only pray a commitment prayer, but

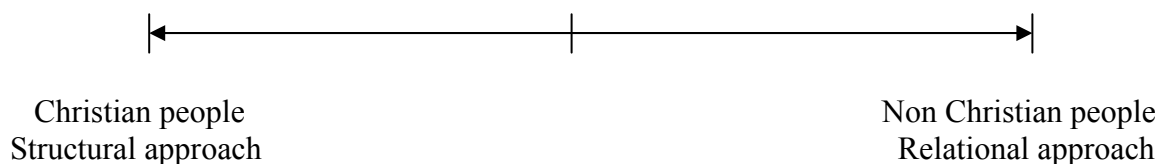
demonstrate fruit. Again, time and strategy must be expended to bring people to this point.

- 5) **Extreme commitment/Christ plus works.** There are those who feel that a person is not saved unless he or she demonstrates their salvation with a particular activity. For example, many Charismatics use tongues as the litmus test of a person's faith. Many evangelicals do this as well. They indirectly communicate this if a person is not connected to a church, sharing their faith, involved in a quiet time, involved in ministry, believing the right doctrines or agreeing with the right people they may not be Christian. The planter who consciously or subconsciously feels this way will tend to equate being saved with the verifying work. In other words, if the planter can get you to be involved in the activity added to faith, then they assume faith is present. A planter who holds this view must spend considerable time and energy not only making converts, but exhorting them to the behavior desired. Most who do this do not know they do it, still it is an observable strategy in many plants.

Again, the more commitment necessary to be a Christian, the more time and energy invested in each convert that must be reflected by the strategy.

## b) The Target Group of the Church Planter

Most planters desire either to build a church or reach the lost. Those who desire to build a church tend to reach churched people and those who want to reach the lost tend to reach unchurched people. Why can't a planter do both? Actually, most planters do both, it is the extent to which they do it that determines their strategy. Generally speaking, the more a planter plans on building the church, the more Christian people he will reach and the more structured he must be in his approach. The more a planter plans on penetrating lost communities, the more non Christian people he will reach and the more relational he must be in his approach.

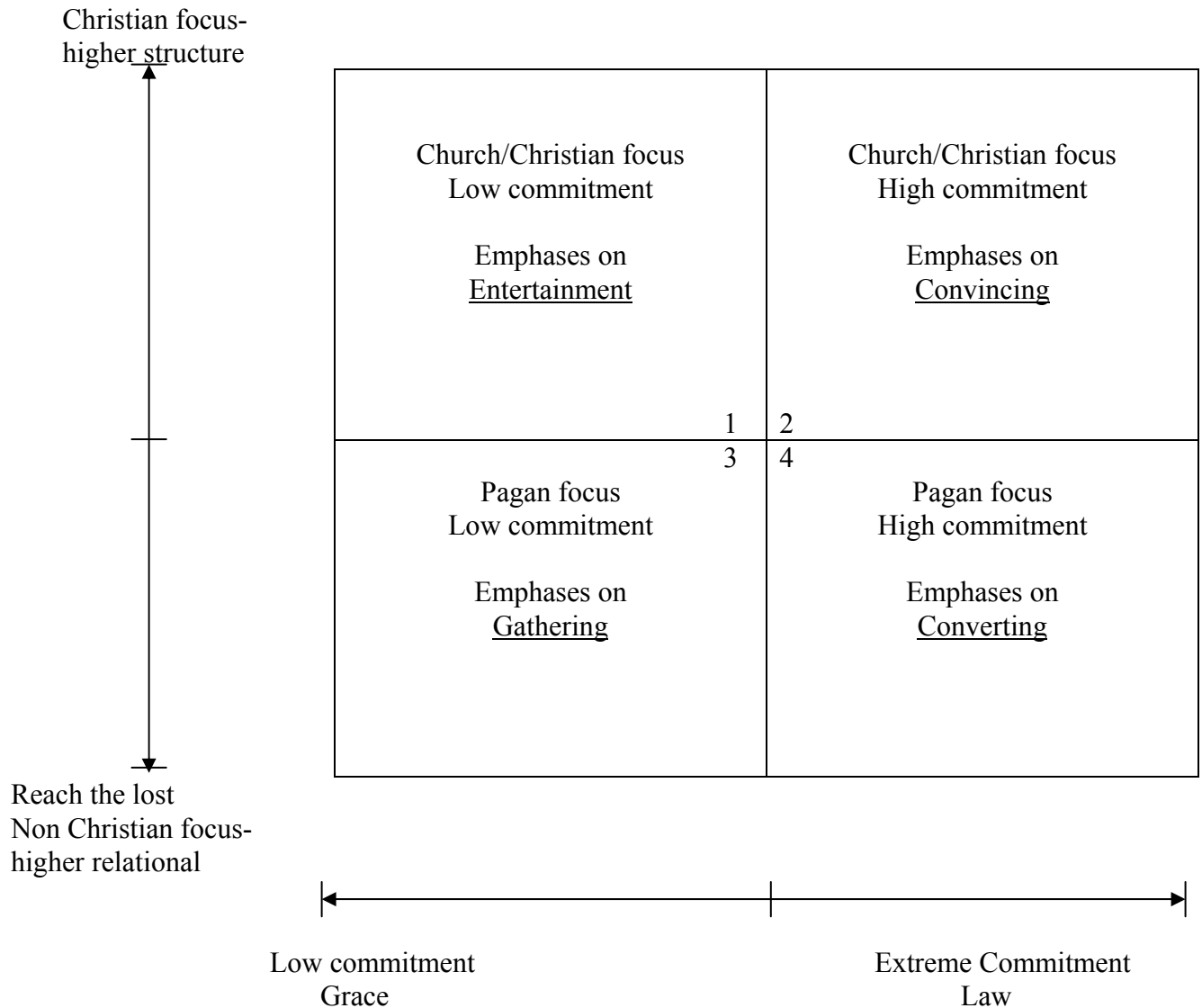


Once again, if we combine these two principles on a grid, we can gain significant insight into the strategy of the church planter.

## Soteriology Grid

Build the church





Grid 1 church plants are those where the planter seeks to grow a great church and does not demand high levels of commitment from his congregation. This planter will tend to attract Christians who are disgruntled or burned out. He will also reclaim many unchurched Christians back into the fold. This plant will be focused on the needs of the Christian community. Grid 1 churches will do and say all the right things. They seek to make people comfortable and not to offend; therefore, grid 1 planters will tend to revolve their strategies around entertaining. Grid 1 church members are much like consumers and their pastors, shopkeepers. Thus, the strategy focus of grid 1 churches is to *entertain*.

Grid 2 church plants are those where the planter seeks to grow a great church and does demand high levels of commitment from his congregation. This planter will tend to attract Christians looking for a deeper, more conservative or more meaningful relationship with Christ. These planters attract people looking for correct doctrines, philosophies, traditions, ministries or other church elements the seasoned Christian may desire. Such a planter must spend considerable energy not only convincing prospects that

his church is the right one to join, but also convincing them that the church is worthy of their time and service. Thus, the strategy focus of grid 2 churches will be to *convince*.

Grid 3 churches are churches where the planter desires to seek the lost and does not demand high levels of commitment from his congregation. This planter will seek to befriend many non Christians and gather them for church meetings that help them with key life issues. Grid 3 churches are very non threatening and informal. Many seeker and contemporary churches fall in this grid. A grid 3 or 4 church can be identified as a church where more members join through baptism than either transfer or statement. The strategic focus of grid 3 churches is to *gather*. They continuously seek to gather more and more people.

Grid 4 churches are those churches where the planter desires to seek the lost and does demand high levels of commitment from his congregation. These planters must build strong relationships with non Christian people to not only convert them, but disciple them as well. Grid 4 churches demand more time and more energy invested in the initial converts. Grid 4 churches start slow, but have a great potential for growth and reproduction beyond the abilities of the planter. This planter will win and disciple those who will win and disciple others. The strategic focus of this planter will be to *convert* true disciples.

### *Discussion questions:*

- *Is it fair to place growing a big church and reaching the lost as competing priorities? Why is it sometimes hard to focus on both?*
- *Why does it take more time and energy per convert to start a church with high commitment levels?*
- *What are the strategic advantages to low commitment churches? What about high commitment churches?*
- *In their attempt to reach people, do some churches make membership too easy?*
- *In their attempt to stand on conviction, do some churches make membership too hard?*
- *Which grid does Saddleback Valley Community Church fall into?*
- *Which grid does your church fall into?*
- *Which type of church do you resonate with and what strategic implications does it present?*

### 3. Indigeneity

Indigenous means to spring from the native soil. Charles Brock applies indigeneity to churches by meaning that they are *self supporting, self expressing, self governing, self teaching and self propagating*. The antithesis of indigenous is foreign. The more a planter imports leadership, resources, structure and style, the less indigenous the church is.

Every church is a mix of both gospel and cultural elements. The gospel is both counter culture and non negotiable. However, the cultural elements of church can and do vary. The more native the cultural elements, the more indigenous the church is. The more foreign the cultural elements, the less indigenous the church is.

The issue of indigeneity is complicated when trying to discern what is cultural and what is gospel in regards to the elements of church. Some have a tight view of gospel and culture in that certain structures, programs, musical styles and meeting patterns are mandated or at least implied by scripture. Many can only in good conscience begin a program based church with Sunday School and southern gospel music. Many will settle for nothing less than a PDC style church with small groups and praise worship. Others will take an entirely opposite stance by insisting that the gospel message of salvation is the only non negotiable and everything else is up for grabs as long as it does not violate scripture.

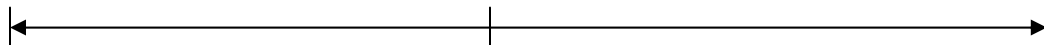
Another factor that clouds the issue of indigeneity is who decides which structures are indigenous and which are not. This is not as simple as it appears since the community is not in a position to state either way prior to being evangelized. Thus, the indigenous conscious planter has two choices: he can evangelize and disciple people until they are mature enough to make the call themselves; or he can seek to understand the culture and position the church to respond. Both choices present serious challenges. The planter who waits to determine structure, style and leadership until well into the work cannot plan ahead and he must trust the people he has reached to take responsibility for the church. The planter who makes the contextualization decisions himself runs the risk of being wrong and he begins by violating the major tenets of indigeneity. He will have relinquish control at some point, which is something neither he nor the people may be willing to do.

The strategic implications of indigeneity can be illustrated with another simple grid. The grid will combine the two major issues presented to the planter as he contemplates indigeneity.

- a) The gospel vs. culture tension. The extremes of this tension are obvious. The first extreme represents the position that structure, style, meeting patterns and leader qualifications (clergy training) are all biblically mandated and must be carried out regardless of culture. In this extreme, the native culture has little to no impact on the form and expressions of the new church. The other extreme is that only the salvation message is relevant and the culture must determine all forms and expressions.

Structure and expression are  
biblically determined.  
Tight and non negotiable

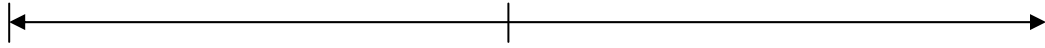
Structure and expression are  
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Free and negotiable



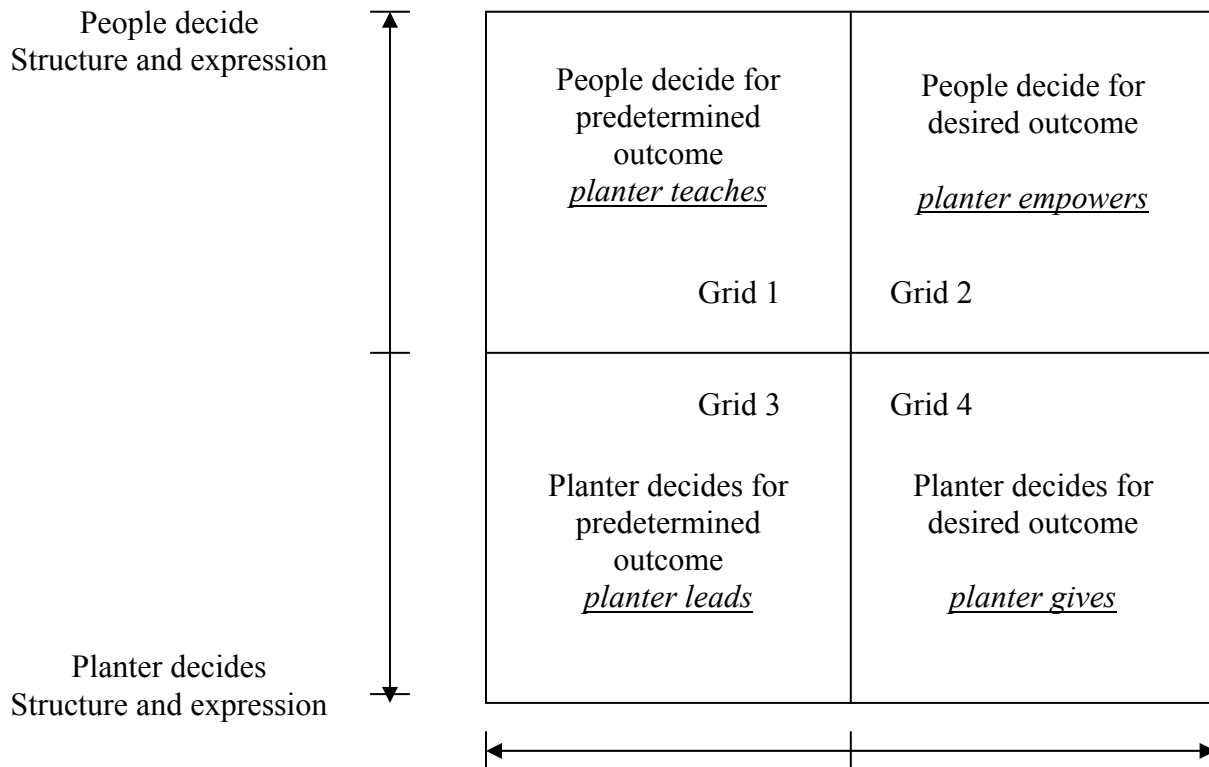
- b) The planter vs. people decision tension. The first extreme on this continuum is that the planter only decides what is right and the people or congregation have no say in any decisions regarding structure or expression. The other extreme is obviously that the congregation makes all the decisions and the planter refuses any input.

Planter decides  
Structure and expressions

People decide  
structure and expressions



Before we take a look at the grid it is important to note that most planters will drift towards the middle on both continuums. Still, this exercise is valuable because it forces the planter to decide which elements of church are gospel non negotiables and which ones are not. It also forces the planter to examine his own leadership and how much of him is driving the new church. Hopefully, each planter will develop a strategy to create ownership and empower the new congregation as soon as possible. Looking at the grid is a valuable exercise because each section will carry strategy implications.



Grid 1 churches are 1                      Gospel determines                      ch people the correct way                      Culture determines  
they can come to the                      Structure and expression                      h themselves. The plante                      Structure and expression  
churches must be car                                                                lation. This planter is a teacher. Grid 1  
churches tend to be program based. Program based proponents have a high view of both  
autonomy and their preferred form. This enables them to school their converts in what they view  
as the biblical forms of Christianity. As converts take responsibility for the church they will  
naturally drift towards the patterns they have been taught.

Grid 2 churches are led by a planter that desires to empower people to take responsibility for studying the scripture regarding church and applying it to their context. The planters of grid 2 churches attempt to be neutral and desire their converts to reach key conclusions themselves. However, they may fail to realize that no planter is completely objective.

This planter is a coach. He will encourage them to clothe gospel essentials in the forms of their culture. He will lead them to be self expressing, self teaching, self governing, self supporting and self propagating. Grid 2 planters will focus on evangelism and discipleship as opposed to building a church. Their task will

often begin slower, but has by far the greatest potential to result in a movement of churches because it is the easiest to reproduce. Grid 2 churches tend to be relation based.

**Autonomy will  
develop in stages**

Keith Eitel, Missiology, p304

Grid 3 churches are led by a planter that desires to lead people to congregate according to his understanding of scripture. The planters of grid 3 churches are often challenged by the reality that their understanding of church may not reflect the native culture. He may have difficulty gathering and congregationalizing. This planter is a CEO. Grid 3 churches tend to be program or purpose based. Many program based planters will begin a grid 4 church as well. The difference is in driver of the structure. Many plant PDC churches because of a personal conviction that PDC is the correct approach. These churches will be grid 3. Many start PDC churches because they feel that it is the approach that will best reflect their community. These churches will be grid 4. The bottom line is that if the planter feels the PDC structure is non negotiable, then it is a grid 3 church. This planter will teach and lead the church to grow along PDC patterns.

Grid 4 churches are led by a planter that desires to give people the gospel in a culturally relevant way. These planters are convinced they understand the culture enough to decide what the church should look like in order to reflect that culture. The planter of a grid 4 churches desires to connect with others and give them what he feels they need and desire. Grid 4 planters are often challenged when people do not respond to his benevolence as he feels they should. This planter is a servant. Grid 4 churches tend to be ministry, seeker or purpose based. Occasionally, program or relation based churches are started this way if the planter genuinely feel these approaches will best reflect the community. Grid 4 planters will be sociologically sensitive and accommodating.

The difference between enculturation and contextualization is one of emphasis. Both terms relate to how the gospel message engages culture. The former deals primarily with resolving the tension between Scripture and culture in general, while the latter is more specifically focused on the social issues emerging from within the context.

Keith Eitel, Missiology, p305

Thus, Grid 1 and Grid 2 churches are playing a lesser role on the domestic church planting front. Grid 3 churches have become the predominant church planting approach; however, many planters are now advocating Grid 4 churches as have foreign planters since the inception of missions. This makes sense as the American population drifts away from a Christian worldview and becomes more like the foreign field.



Planters who lean towards the left side of the continuum must develop a strategy that reflects a clergy centered church. This planter will develop a strategy that will allow him and his staff to evangelize, teach and lead the new congregation. As people receive Christ, they are taught to attend, tithe, serve and support the leadership. Few churches are on the extreme left of the continuum. The churches that tend to drift the furthest left are smaller pastor led churches and larger multi staff program based churches.

Planters who lean towards the right side of the continuum must develop a strategy that reflects a lay led church. Many planters intend to start churches on the right side, but hold on to leadership and start churches on the left. The key is to develop leaders and then empower them to do the ministry. It will initially take longer to grow the church than if the planter just assumed all key leadership roles. However, in the long run, the lay empowered church will be far more effective. The primary issue is whether or not the planter can release ministry to those who cannot do it as well as he can.

A clergy centered strategy will rise and fall on the time constraints and abilities of the planter and any staff that he has. Therefore, the strategy must carefully consider the limitations of any one person, or burnout will result. The strategy will likely reflect more large group and centralized activities. This allows the pastor to make more effective use of his time by exposing him to as many people as possible. This planter spends his time leading the various church meetings and events.

A lay centered strategy will rise and fall on the maturity, giftedness and experience of the core group, and the ability of the planter to mobilize this core. Therefore, the strategy must consider the limitations of the group. This strategy may reflect more community penetration through small groups and decentralized activities. This planter spends much of his time coaching and developing.

### *Discussion Questions*

- *Why do so many who desire to start lay centered churches end up starting clergy centered churches? Why is it so difficult?*
- *How would a planter with no core group go about starting a lay centered church?*

up lay leaders he must model and teach leadership that is reproducible in that it is easily caught and taught. If the pastor's style is highly professional in its activity, vocabulary, relationships and posture the congregation will be intimidated at the thought of ever participating in a leadership role. They will assume that professional training is required in order to gain the expertise necessary to lead the church. On the other hand, if the pastor consciously never does anything in a way that the congregation cannot easily be taught to do themselves, he empowers them to strive for and grasp leadership in the church.

### Important strategic considerations

1. The Bible should be our guide
2. The strategy and methodology should be simple
3. The approach should be reproducible
  - Reproducible in the use of material things: the planter should not use anything which the people cannot provide for themselves.
  - Reproducible in strategy
  - Reproducible in leadership style

Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting*, p124-131

The leader who desires to develop and empower the congregation for leadership must operate with simplicity. This leader does not do ministry in a way designed to impress or secure his own position, but in a way that is easily understood and reproduced. This simplicity may be practiced in many areas.

- Vocabulary – the planter should use the vernacular of the congregation, not spiritual or theological jargon.
- Posture – the planter should carry himself as a common person, not special because of his clergy status.
- Teaching – the planter should use honest discussion, not pedagogical monologues.
- Preaching – the planter should be more conversational than oratorical.
- Praying – the planter should be short and conversational rather than long and flowery.
- Administration – the planter should be engaged in group discussion, not dictating from the position of expert.
- Visibility – the planter should be open regarding his own struggles, not presenting himself as something unattainable.

### *Discussion Questions*

- *What challenges await the planter who gives no thought to simplicity and reproducibility?*
- *Why does the clergy centered planter need not give much thought to reproducibility?*
- *What advantage is there in not doing anything for people in a way they cannot eventually do themselves?*

### 6. The Primacy of prayer.

Most planters, if not all, claim that prayer is extremely important in the success of their new church. However, many planters have no prayer strategy. If these planters truly believed that prayer is as important as they say, then they would pray more themselves and lead the new church to pray more.



The purpose of this section is to point out this issue to potential planters, so they can incorporate a prayer strategy into their larger church planting strategy. A prayer strategy may reflect a number of elements.

- ❖ Intentional personal prayer for new church by planter.
- ❖ Recruitment of prayer team.
- ❖ Making prayer needs known to all partners and soliciting their prayers.
- ❖ Modeling prayer to new congregation.
- ❖ Regularly gather new congregation to pray.
- ❖ Teach and preach on prayer.
- ❖ Communicate that prayer is essential strategy

My house will be called a house of prayer

Pray without ceasing

By prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God

Whatever you ask for in prayer,  
believe that you have received it, and it will be yours

### *Discussion Questions*

- *Why is it so easy to omit prayer from strategy considerations?*
- *What is the danger of underestimating prayer in your strategy?*
- *How do some people put more trust in their own models and strategies, than they put in God?*

Theology plays a huge role in strategy development. Church planters often sacrifice theology for easy results and end up with a church that is not what they think it should be. Many times they do not consciously do this, but incorporate practices that produce results contrary to their theology simply because they did not think through the theological issues on the front end. They end up with a church practicing cheap grace because they did not integrate the methods they used with their theology of salvation. Others end up stressed out and overworked because they never realized their initial methods communicated a message that the pastor does all the real ministry. Some end up with a church that does not fit their community because they never thought about indigeneity. The good church planter is able to work through his theology in these critical areas and develop a strategy that compliments what he believes. It is important that we do not become so functional that we lose our integrity. What a person believes about church and its practice is going to say a lot about what kinds of church he is able to start. That is why it is imperative that every church planter come to a clear understanding of these issues and their ramifications.

## **B. Church Planting Environment**

### **1. Culture.**

The myth of the American mono-culture is rapidly diminishing in light of the current wave of multi-cultural awareness sweeping North America. Until the 1980s there were generally two types of church plants: church splits and churches in newer areas. The field culture has been ignored for the most part with assumption that one type of church

was needed. Rick Warren and Bill Hybels were the first to go mainstream with what is now considered contemporary. Their pioneering spirit paved the way for their's and other innovative approaches to gain acceptance. Now culture is considered a serious factor in planting churches.

Domestic mission leaders are just now facing cultural issues that have challenged international mission leaders for centuries. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century foreign missionaries presented the host culture's version of Christianity as gospel. This was called colonization and was offensive to many natives and missionaries alike. People like Roland Allen and Henry Venn began to advocate for indigenaity in missionary enterprises. Today the idea of indigenaity has given way to contextualization. This concept proposes that as we attempt to plant the unchanging and non-negotiable gospel into a new culture, we must allow that culture to discover appropriate expression for the unchanging gospel.

This can occur as missionaries and natives work together to grow in Christ and explore the gospel implications for the culture.

The issues that international missions struggled with one hundred years ago, domestic missions are now struggling with. In no way can America's mission needs be addressed with a mono-cultural approach. We must never compromise the gospel; however, we must learn to contextualize our approach to the various cultures we are attempting to reach. 100's of cultures and 1000s of sub-cultures can be discovered in any large American city. A one size fits all approach will spell disaster as we attempt to plant churches among these various cultures. The breaking down of American cultures into definable people groups can go on nearly ad infinitum. We are becoming a tribal people. Few people relate to community geographically, but through a web of work and social relationships. We must identify and target these tribes. The era of the neighborhood church is over. Most people drive by many churches to get to the one they attend. New churches today are far more successful when they intentionally penetrate relational networks, or tribes, than when they attempt to stick to a single geographic community. The tribes in any American town are vast: the boy scout circle, the gay community, the law enforcement community, people who bowl, people who show dogs, people who race stock cars, hard core fisherman, artists, skateboarders and on and on. These people all tend to stick together. It is how they express community. In fact, many of these groups will contain many tribes and most people belong to multiple tribes that will in effect become a web of tribal relationships and people circles. The implications for missions and church planting are tremendous. We must learn to understand the structure and norms of American culture and plant the gospel in a way that compliments the makeup of our society.

*Missiology, over the years, has experienced its share of paradigm shifts. The change of focus from indigenization to contextualization is one of the most significant in contemporary missiology.*

*Contextualization can be viewed as enabling the message of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ to become alive as it addresses the vital issues of a sociocultural context and transforms its worldview...*

*The term contextualization, as compared to indigenization, conveys a deeper involvement in the cultural context in the missiological process and a greater sensitivity to situations where rapid social change is taking place.*

Danny Sanchez, Missiology, 318

## Layers of Cultural Exegesis

World View – modern, postmodern, Christian

Cultural of Origin – Asian, Hispanic, African American, European, etc.

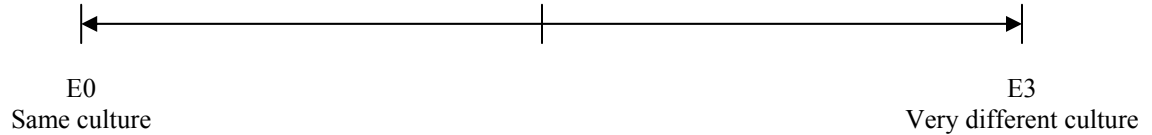
The layers of cultural exegesis that Linda Utilizes in San Francisco demonstrate the huge cultural diversity of the area. Furthermore, this tool only takes into account people's background and outlook, and does not take into accounts social structures and tribes of people. Linda would be unwise to try to reach the diverse population of San Francisco by starting only churches of one cultural expression. She must contextualize each church to share the gospel among the people groups she is trying to reach. Every church planter, regardless of their context, could benefit from Linda's approach.

It would be impossible to survey the strategic implications for all the various cultures of North America. However, there are some general observations that can be made. The P-Scale, introduced by Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch, is an international mission tool that has domestic application. The P-Scale indicates the cultural distance potential converts must move to join the nearest church.

E0 – People participating in a local culturally relevant church.

E1 – A people whose culture contains a local church.

- E2 - People without a church whose culture is similar to people with a church.
- E3 – People without a church whose culture is very different from that of the nearest people group with a church.



American church planting has long operated under the assumption that our culture was E0 or E1. In the past this was true for most Americans, thus little contextualization was needed. Recently, more American people groups are becoming E2 and even E3 in many urban, language and post-modern communities. Generally speaking, the more a planter’s target group culture is to the right on the P-Scale the more energy that must go in to contextualization and the more different the new church’s expression will likely be from the host church. Furthermore, the further right the target culture, the more the planter must rely on that culture to aid him in working out expressions of the gospel.

As planters seek to contextualize their approach they do better with some issues than with others.

Frequently Remembered Contextual Issues	Frequently Overlooked Contextual Issues
❖ Music & Worship Style	❖ Social structures & relational webs
❖ Church Name	❖ Church Structure
❖ Church tone and literature	❖ Leadership style & qualifications
❖ Public communication style	❖ Personal communication style
❖ Vocabulary and speech patterns	❖ What it takes to Build trust
❖ Ministries to address felt needs	❖ Gospel implications of native values and worldview

2. Sc

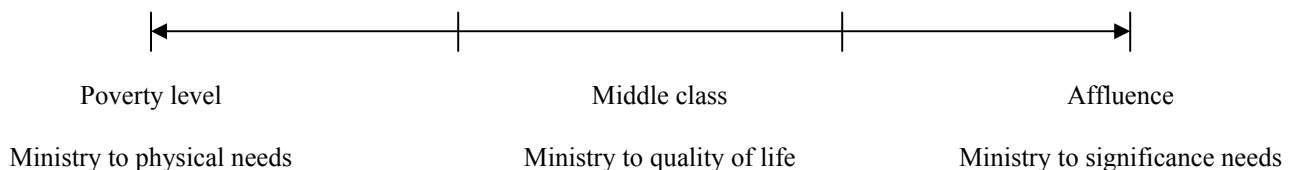
The level of affluence or lack thereof can have strategic implications. The two issues raised by this factor are trust and the types of felt needs possessed by the population.

1. Generally, both high and low income people demonstrate an extreme lack of trust. Wealthy people tend to isolate themselves from others in fear that everyone is after their money. They will guard themselves and seek their own, and they have the means to make access by others difficult.

Impoverished people tend to lack trust towards the system as defined by institutions of power. The established church can be viewed as one of those institutions. Thus, the church can be seen as part of the problem and may have trouble getting a hearing.

The implications here are that institutional approaches to church planting such as advertising, events and programs may not be as effective with lower or higher income populations. Conversely, middle income people tend to view institutions, including the church, as benevolent and may be more open to institutional approaches. In populations where trust is at issue, trust must be built through personal contact and relationship.

2. Most planters gain a hearing in their chosen community by addressing the felt needs of the population. The felt needs tend to shift from one level of affluence to another. This will impact the type of ministries provided by the planter and issues he addresses. Generally, lower income people will respond to ministries that address physical needs such as food, shelter, advocacy, medical, child care, drug prevention or neighborhood improvement emphases. Lower class people also tend to be responsive to the gospel because it provides a hope that is absent from their lives. Middle class people tend to struggle with stress, family and community issues. They will respond to ministries that address quality of life such as children's, youth, counseling, connecting, financial and marriage emphases. Upper income people tend to struggle with isolation and loneliness. They tend to respond to ministries that provide social depth and meaning to their lives such as peer groups, mentoring, philanthropy, alcohol and drug counseling and community building. These generalizations are certainly broad and each unique population will have its own issues. The key is to factor in the strategic implications of each community's socio-economic level.



### 3. Values/Lifestyles

A lifestyle analysis of a population can also be very helpful as planters develop their strategies. A typical lifestyle analysis such as *Acorns* or *VALS* can contain a wealth of information. The analysis will give demographic, employment, recreation, financial and consumer patterns. These patterns help planters understand the mindset of the people they are attempting to reach. It will identify the types of television shows, music, magazines and products the population prefer. Population preferences can then be integrated into the strategy.

Planters are also encouraged to familiarize themselves with the media patterns and habits

of the population. They should watch the movies and read the literature of the population. This will help the planter understand issues important to the population and help the planter relate. The planter can better understand spiritual, cultural, social and even emotional issues that need to be addressed and taken into account. When the planter has a pulse on the values, attitudes and lifestyles of a community, he can then develop relevant strategy. Strategy should be consistent with lifestyle. Many direct strategy decisions can be influenced by lifestyle data.

- ◆ Music in formal services can reflect the music of the population
- ◆ Church schedules can complement the population schedules
- ◆ Church fellowship activities can take into account the recreational patterns of the population.
- ◆ Planters can use media preferences for illustrations or talking points
- ◆ Planters can know and address specific spiritual challenges of the culture
- ◆ Church can better position for relevance in areas of dress, meeting place, food and overall style.
- ◆ Church can better know and address felt needs of the population.
- ◆ Church can better understand what programs the population may respond to.

**Trying to reach people  
without first trying to understand them  
is not only spiritually arrogant,  
it is unwise**

4. I

The demographic information on any community will tell you who lives there, what kind of homes they live in, how large the families are, how much money they make, how old they are, where they live, what kinds of jobs they have, what ethnicity they are, what languages they speak and many other population facts. These facts are extremely useful in knowing where to locate, what gathering approach to use and even how to posture the church. We have already addressed income, and with income typically goes education. We have addressed lifestyle issues that are generally related to employment. However, demographic studies can help in a variety of other ways as well.

- a) Demographic studies can tell how many distinct communities live in a single area. This is important since most churches will struggle to reach more than one community. Planters need to know if populations appear to have less potential than they really do. A community of 30,000 people may not be as good a place to start as a community of 15,000 people if the smaller community is homogenous and the larger one made up of three distinct 10,000 people populations.

Furthermore, if a community is made up of several populations the planter will want to target the one with the most potential. Potential can be discerned by size, church to population ratios or affinity.

Demographic and lifestyle information can be obtained from the internet, private vendors or the North American Mission Board if the planter is Southern Baptist.

A Southern Baptist Planter may call 770-410-6577 for information

- b) Demographic studies can indicate whether a community is urban, suburban or rural. Urban populations tend to be dense, politically liberal and cautious towards strangers. Most urban people are hard to approach and do not share a Christian outlook on life. They are, however, very accessible and plentiful. A planter may have to speak with more people for every prospect he discovers, but there are more people to talk to. The low trust level of city dwellers towards strangers indicates that networking relationally may be a preferred approach. Relation based, ministry based and affinity based approaches work best in urban areas.

Suburban populations tend to be politically conservative, family based and more open towards outsiders. Suburban populations also tend to be open to churches, especially those that genuinely attempt to aid families and improve the general welfare of the community. Program based, seeker based and purpose based approaches work best in suburban areas.

Rural populations tend to be spread out, socially conservative, community based and friendly to all people. They may, however, display a lack of trust to outsiders. The more rural the population the more relation based the approach must be. This is of necessity, both to build trust and overcome logistical issues. The more small town the population, the more program based the approach must be. This is due to the conservative nature of small, rural communities and the family needs they present.

- c) Demographic information can help identify major barriers in the community. If more than one population exists in the community, the planter can use that information to discover major geographic barriers that define the neighborhoods he desires to target. For example, freeways, railroad tracks and even major streets can completely separate one population from another. Planters must know this to avoid logistical mistakes like advertising to an unresponsive community or locating a gathering in the wrong part of town. Generally speaking, people will have a hard time crossing strong population barriers to attend church in the wrong part of town.

- d) Demographic information can identify ethnic or language populations in a community. This will help planters target more effectively and determine if new

churches are feasible among different groups.

- e) Demographic information can help identify the age of the homes in an area. Generally speaking, newer neighborhoods are more open to new churches than are older neighborhoods. Established people tend to have established religious patterns; where as newer people are in transition.
- f) Demographic information can help identify the age breakdown of a community. Generally speaking, builder populations tend to appreciate program and purpose based churches. Boomer populations tend to appreciate purpose, ministry and seeker based approaches. Busters populations tend to appreciate relation, seeker and affinity based approaches.
- g) Demographic information can help identify the types of homes people live in. Owner occupied, single family homes that support family populations will likely prefer program, purpose or seeker approaches. Apartment dwellers, especially those who rent will likely respond better to affinity, ministry or relation based approaches.
- h) Demographic information can identify marital status and family structure. Families tend to prefer program, purpose or seeker churches. Singles tend to prefer relation, ministry or affinity based. Single parents have a preference for ministry or program based churches.

Demographic information must be tempered with common sense. There are no genuine hard and fast rules for applying demographics. The preferences given in this section simply reflect trends experienced by the author. The author has also seen many exceptions to these trends. In fact, many communities may actually present conflicting trends. Church planting is not a research project with a definable solution. It is a spiritual process where God leads the planter to the strategy that best reflects how God desires the planter address the many variables involved in his context.

## 5. Spirituality

The

A wise planter will learn to read this climate and take advantage of it. Furthermore, spiritual climate cannot be assumed, it must be experienced. Not every community is what it appears to be. Sometimes, typically hard people are very open and very moral people very closed.

- a) Some communities can only be described as cold and closed. Planters in these communities need to especially focus on serious prayer efforts and relational strategies designed to build trust. Beginning public worship prior to building a significant core group is not recommended. Advertising the church will likewise be a waste of money. The planter had better plan to dig in for the long haul as starting a church in this area will



be slow. On the positive front, church planting in these areas can provide the greatest testimonies and victories for Christ. The potential for changed lives is significant and genuine.

- b) Other communities are very open to spiritual matters, but not necessarily Christian ideas. New age, Eastern religions, Paganism and spiritualism of all types are gaining a wider acceptance in mainstream American culture. Furthermore, some communities tend to include more alternative religious thinking than others. Such communities like to think of themselves as progressive and open. They will frequently dialogue with Christians regarding spirituality while secretly disdaining their worldview as rigorous and outdated. Planters in these communities may be pleased at the amount of quality contacts made, but disappointed at the lack of response. Like Paul on Mars Hill, planters must engage this culture and dialogue with it. These communities tend to respond with both relationships and time. They respect informed Christians who respect them. Planters in these communities must learn to discern genuine seekers from those who desire to waste their time.
- c) Most communities are moderately open to the gospel and are so as the gospel relates to helping them solve life issues. These communities need a reason to believe and can be reach with a combination of both relational and institutional approaches. Survey work, advertising, felt need ministries and gathering events can combine to effectively generate enough prospects to start a new church.
- d) Some rare communities are very open to Christianity and the gospel. Such communities may be geographic or affinity in nature. Furthermore, an authentic and assertive church may be needed to discover the openness of the community. Many very open communities are considered closed and hard by established churches in the area. A church that conveys genuine love can be successful with nearly any genuine approach in this environment. Public and mass appeals can grow great churches quickly. Planters must heed two cautions here. First, when God is moving, go with him. The window of opportunity may not be open forever. Second, recognize that God provided a special environment for your church and do not become proud or project similar results for churches in other areas.

## 6. Opportunities

God provides opportunities for a discerning church planter in every community. The opportunities may vary from community to community, but God will open doors if an alert planter is willing to walk through. These opportunities can be divided into several categories.

- a) Natural opportunities consist of logistical advantages one community may hold over another. Population base or homogeneity may provide an opportunity to easily target a particular population. One community may present accessible meeting facilities, while another has no meeting place available. A planned community may have set aside land for a church, where another did not. A community may have a large central park in which to administer programs. The list of potential opportunities is endless. Planters

must understand the lay of the land and strategize accordingly.

- b) Spiritual opportunities consist of those God things that can provide to give a new church a good start. Sometimes a bible study may already be meeting in the area, or a group of Christians must drive a considerable distance to the closest acceptable church and are open to coming. Sometimes resources will flow to a particular area because a church or donor has a heart for it. Sometimes local leaders are already in place and ready to work. Sometimes considerable cultivation such as survey work or children's clubs has already taken place. The community may be close to a seminary or college where students are open to helping. Planters can use this information as they not only discern where to start, but what strategy options are available to them.
- c) Relational opportunities consist of those divine appointments where God provides leaders or converts in unplanned ways. Sometimes these people may be key influencers in a strategic relational group. Wise planters make the most of these opportunities and spend as much time with these influencers as possible. Furthermore, divine appointments rarely happen to planters who stay in an office. Planters who are out in the community, involved in community activities and maintain a strong community presence are more likely to experience relational opportunities. Making the most of relational opportunities can make or break a plant in tougher areas. In fact, in closed, hard communities, this may be the planter's best strategic option. This is also one common area that many planters overlook in their strategy.

**Church planting does not happen behind a desk,  
it occurs in the trenches of life  
when the church planter rolls up his sleeves  
and gets real with people.**

Every community has trends. It may just be that the homes are getting older, but that is a trend. Trends mean that the community is changing and will not look five years from now what it looks like today. Planters must take trends into account as they develop strategy or they may be outdated in a short period of time.

Trends that planters may want to consider are as follows.

- Population trends – are there ethnic shifts, social shifts or growth?
- Building trends - where are the growth areas and who is moving in?

- Housing trends – which neighborhoods are declining and which are improving?
- Church trends – are local churches growing, plateaued or declining?
- Economic trends – are income levels shifting from one group to another?
- Generational trends – are the retirees, busters, boomers shifting within the community?
- Business trends – how are local businesses responding to the community and what can we learn from them.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. *Do you agree that most American cities have 100s of cultures and subcultures?*
2. *What are the dangers of paying too much attention to culture? What about not enough attention to culture?*
3. *Do you agree that we sometimes put too much stock in demographic information while ignoring other environmental factors?*
4. *Why is it easy to overlook subjective factors such as spiritual climate, opportunities and trends?*
5. *How does lifestyle information differ from demographic information? What types of decisions are made with each?*
6. *Can environmental factors in the same community lead to different strategic conclusions? Provide examples. How should planters deal with conflicting strategic implications?*
7. *Planters who focus too much on the community can become guilty of pragmatism. Why? How can planters avoid this mistake?*

An analysis of church plants will reveal that the single most important tangible factor impacting the success of a new church is the leadership ability of the church planter. David Palmer of the Home Mission Board did a study in the early 1990s regarding trends impacting the size of a new church after two years. To his surprise resources, worship style, structure, core group size or a number of other factors had little or no effect on the size of a new church after two years. The average church plant still boasted seventy to eighty in attendance, which is roughly the average church size in North America. When examining those churches that busted the odds, the only common factor appeared to be the charisma and leadership of the senior pastor. Leadership makes a difference.

An observation regarding good leaders is that they always play to their strengths. This section will examine various factors that make up the leadership team and suggest strategy issues to consider.

1. The culture and background of the church planter and team.

Most people do better reaching people that are like them, and struggle crossing cultural boundaries to reach and lead others. The exception to this being those who Peter Wagner refers to as having the missionary gift. This is that unique God given ability to easily build trust and relate with people of other cultures. Those with the missionary gift can start churches among many different cultures. Most planters do not have this gift and should seek at least cultural compatibility with the community they are seeking to reach. Planters who differ significantly from their target population may be seen as outsiders who are ignored, misunderstood or unwanted.

The planter and his team's culture should impact two areas: the target population and strategy. The planter should seek a target population that best matches him and his team. He should also strategize to maximize points of connection and minimize differences. People respond to those they trust and they trust those they understand.

### Cultural Connection Points

- ❖ Generational – builder, boomer or buster
- ❖ Community preference type and background – urban, suburban or rural
- ❖ Socio-economic comfort zone – lower, middle or upper class; blue or white collar
- ❖ Ethnicity – Anglo, Hispanic, African American, Asian, American Indian or Multicultural
- ❖ Language – English, Korean, Spanish, French, etc...
- ❖ Education level – little, high school, college, graduate
- ❖ Philosophical bent – Modern, Post Modern or Christian

Planters praying about a community in which to start a church may want to begin searching for compatible communities as opposed to a romantic notion of the optimum community. Most planters want to be the next Rick Warren, so they search for the next Orange County. Yet, most planters could not start a successful church in Orange County. Planters will have a much better chance of being what God wants them to be if they own up to who they are and seek to reach those like them.

Planters should also take into account their culture and background as they develop strategy. There are many ways they can do this.

- Note target culture areas they are uncomfortable with and take steps to overcome discomfort and relate. For example, if a boomer pastor seeks to reach a community

with a significant buster population he may desire to read books, speak with busters and buster leadership to better understand busters and how to reach them.

- Maximize similarities with the target culture. The population will feel more comfortable with a planter they understand. The planter should tactfully emphasize these points in conversation, advertising and activities.
- Maximize strengths valued by the target culture. For example, if a planter is seeking to reach middle class suburbanites who value family and a plant team member is an MFCC, the church may wish to offer conferences or counseling centered on family building.
- Minimize dissimilarity with the target population. For example, if a planter from the suburbs feels called to an urban population, he should not feel compelled to make that a selling point. He should not hide who he is, but simply emphasize areas of commonality.
- Avoid positioning to your weakness. Many planters will attempt to provide a needed service to a community they are not prepared to give. For example, if a survey turns up that a community desires a church with a strong youth ministry, a church plant without the experience or resources to necessary to provide a youth ministry may attempt to do so anyway. This will dilute resources, distract leadership, disappoint the community and keep the church from focusing on a real area of strength.
- Seek cultural compatibility on all major strategic points. Many planters will seek to insert pet interests into the strategy that do not connect with the target population. A planter who enjoys golf may want to sponsor a golf tournament with an urban population. A planter with a strong belief in door to door survey work may find it difficult in wealthy gated communities.

## 2. Resources.

The resources possessed by the planter will play a large role in the type of strategy he uses. Does the planter have a lot of money and workers? Are there people willing to donate supplies or services? A planter with few dollars may have a difficult time mailing a large advertising campaign. A planter with few helpers may have a difficult time pulling off a large event. Generally, the more dollars and workers a new church has the more public they can be to begin with. In other words, they can gather through advertising and large events. The less money and workers a plant has, the more private they must be. In other words, they must gather through personal contact and small, cost efficient ministries.

### Low Resource Gathering efforts

- ❖ Surveys and door to door
- ❖ Prayer walks
- ❖ Door hangers

### High Resource Gathering Efforts

- ❖ Direct Mail
- ❖ Block Parties
- ❖ Using well known personalities or entertainers

It does not take a lot of  
money to gather people,  
It may take a lot of money to  
gather people quickly.

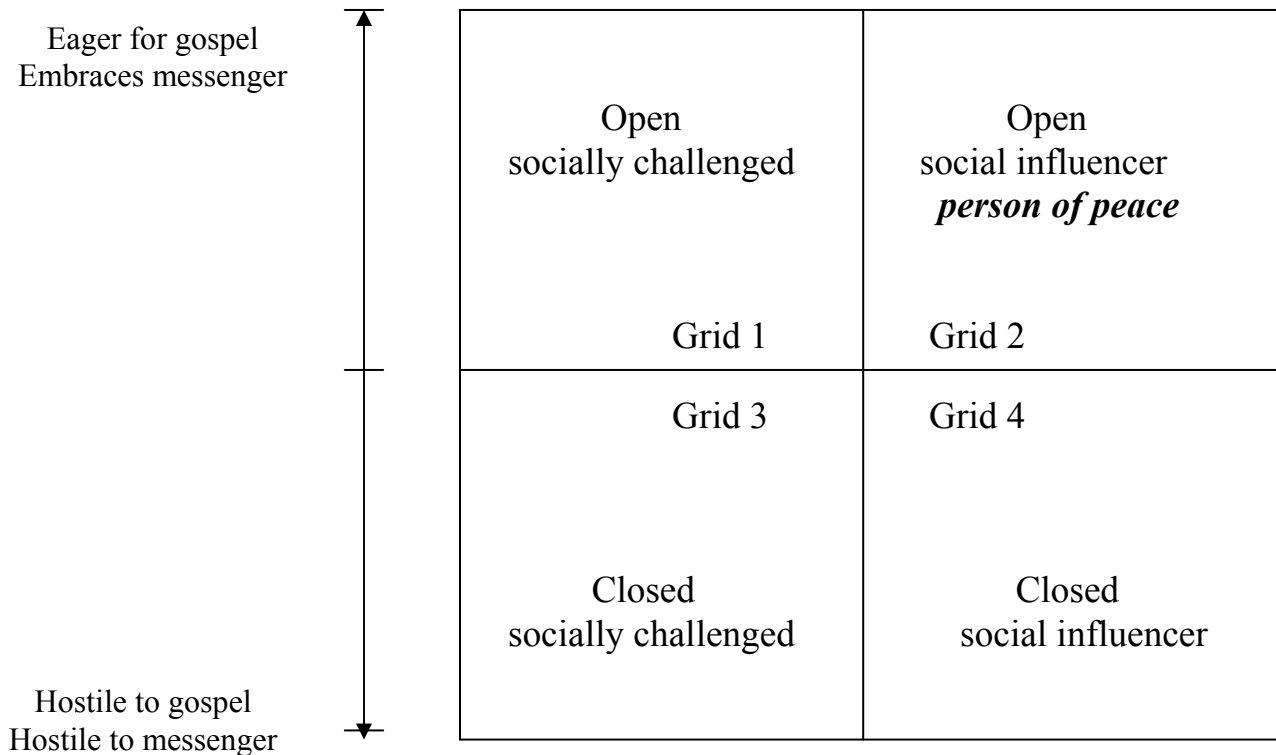
planter or his team has with the target population. The best case scenario is if the planter and his team are from the community. Thus, they possess a whole history of relationships from which to draw. Most people attend church because they are invited by someone they know and trust. Indigenous planters have a tremendous advantage since they should already be known and trusted by the community. Many times a planter is not indigenous, but people in his core group are. The planter should seek to take full advantage of this by developing strategies to influence those within the relational circles of his team. This should include social networking, personal invitations, rekindling lapsed relationships and even promoting local connections.

Planters who have little contact with the community should seek points of contact, especially with community influencers. Planters should seek to become community insiders as soon as possible. Where this is not possible they should seek to influence those that are.

Doc Lindsey and Tom Wolff have introduced the *Person of Peace* concept into domestic church planting circles. This term is borrowed from Matthew 10 where Jesus sends out the twelve and asks them to search out a person of peace. A person of peace being one who is both

influential and open to their message. The classic example of this strategy being used in scripture is how Paul started a church in Philippi. Paul was able to work through the networks of two persons of peace: Lydia and the local jailer. Paul was able to start the church through their network of family and friends as they became the pillars of the church.

Although planters should attempt to reach all those God places in their path, they should give extra energy to persons of peace.



- a) Grid 1 prospects are by far the most common people that planters will spend their time with. These people are high maintenance and hurt people. They are social outcasts with no influence. They are the types of people that a planter can build a church around. If God provides such people the planter should make every effort to convert and disciple such people. The planter should befriend them and spend significant time with them. This will accomplish two purposes. First, the planter can reach additional people through this person's people network. Second, the planter will develop key leadership that can multiply his efforts.
- b) Grid 2 people are social, well liked and connected. They are the types of people that a planter can build a church around. If God provides such people the planter should make every effort to convert and disciple such people. The planter should befriend them and spend significant time with them. This will accomplish two purposes. First, the planter can reach additional people through this person's people network. Second, the planter will develop key leadership that can multiply his efforts.

- c) Grid 3 people are hermits and social outcasts. They desperately need God, but refuse any contact with God or the church. These people are typically angry and many barriers must be overcome to reach them. Sometimes, such people surface in families or church relational networks. All the planter can do is pray for such people, make overtures towards them and express love when the opportunity presents itself.
- d) Grid 4 people are those who are socially and professionally successful, but have no time for God or the church. These people are won to Christ all the time, but it takes time and relationship. Grid 4 people show up in the networks of church people. Grid 3 people are often the most committed and fruitful once they are won to Christ. Churches should definitely pray for these folks, seek to include them and express care and concern.

Each planter only has so much time, he must use that time wisely and strategically. The time each planter spends relating to others is important. He cannot avoid relating to those from each grid. The wise planter will ensure that he gives ample time to grid 2 people, or persons of peace. This will be time well spent as God will build his church around such people.

Whenever you enter a city or village, search for a  
worthy man (*person of peace* KJV)  
and stay in his home... If it turns out to be a worthy  
home, let your blessing stand... if a village doesn't  
welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust of that  
place from your feet as you leave.

Matthew 10:11-14

4

It should go without saying that the planter and his team should feel called to a community. Tragically, many planters will indicate they feel called to a community when in fact they are only drawn to the idea of planting a church. Any place will do. Some planters feel called to plant a church, and may respond to an opportunity that may not fit them. Other planters simply want to pastor and have no opportunity. Thus, they start a church. All of these scenarios are common and should not be confused with a planter being called to a specific community.

Sometimes a planter may feel called to plant in an area that appears inconsistent with who he is. This is acceptable if the planter has the missionary gift. If the planter does not possess the missionary gift, he should confirm what he feels God is asking him to do. In fact, all planters should seek affirmation of their call. This affirmation can come from many sources.

- ❖ Prayer and other spiritual disciplines
- ❖ Spouse
- ❖ Friends and family
- ❖ Church planter assessment



- ❖ Compatibility with target community
- ❖ Church family
- ❖ Mentors and spiritual authority figures

A planter's call may have strategic implications as well as spiritual. For example, many planters feel called to begin a specific type of church such as purpose or relation based. Planters may feel called to touch a certain group within the community such as single parents or retirees. A planter may feel called to assist with a certain need in the community such as advocacy in an inner city neighborhood. A call can go far beyond place. Planters who feel so called should confirm that call and then incorporate the implications of that call into their strategy. If it is a legitimate call from God they will be held accountable for their faithfulness in that area.

#### 5. Gifts, personality and temperament

Planters should seek to develop a strategy that plays into their personal strengths. If the planter makes friends easily and is outgoing, he should plan to maximize personal interaction with prospects. If the planter is an exception communicator he should seek to use seminars, preaching and teaching a key element of strategy. If the planter is an average communicator, but a great administrator he should focus the strategy on events and ministries. Planters should also note that focusing on one key area is not an excuse to neglect other areas of strategy. Many planters use team members strong in a particular area to compensate for weaknesses. The danger of that is it can backfire when planters delegate responsibility that should belong to them.

## Planter know thyself, be thyself, overcome thyself

- 1) Visionizing capacity. The ability to project a vision into the future beyond the present. To persuasively sell a vision to others. Approaching challenges as opportunities.
- 2) Personal motivation. Having a desire to do well. Demonstrating initiative and a commitment to excellence. Being a self starter and having a history of not giving up.
- 3) Creating ownership of ministry. Instilling in people a sense of personal responsibility for the growth and success of a ministry. Training leaders to reproduce leaders.
- 4) Reaching the unchurched. The ability to develop rapport, break through barriers, and encourage unchurched people to examine themselves and commit to a walk with God.
- 5) Spousal cooperation. Creating a workable partnership that agrees on ministry priorities, each partner's role in ministry and the integration of ministry with family life.

- 6) Relationship building. Taking the initiative in getting to know people and deepening relationships as a basis for more effective ministry.
- 7) Commitment to church growth. Valuing church growth as a method for building more and better disciples; striving to achieve numerical growth within the context of spiritual and relational growth.
- 8) Responsiveness to community. Adapting ministry to the culture and needs of the local residents. Identifying and assessing community needs.
- 9) Utilizes giftedness of others. Equips and releases people to minister according to their spiritual gifts. Effectively delegates to others.
- 10) Flexibility and adaptability. Ability to adjust to change and ambiguity, shift priorities when necessary, and handle multiple tasks at once.
- 11) Building group cohesiveness. Enabling the group to work collaboratively toward a common goal and skillfully handle divisiveness and disunifying elements.
- 12) Resilience. Ability to sustain oneself emotionally and physically through setbacks, losses, disappointments and failures.
- 13) Exercising faith. Demonstrating how one's convictions are translated into personal and ministry decisions.

## *Discussion Questions*

- 1. Why is it important that planters be a cultural match for the community they plant in? How easy is it for planters to convince themselves they are called to an area they are not? Who suffers when planters insist on planting where they do not fit?*
- 2. How is it possible to over analyze culture? What are some common cultural variables that are neglected in church planting strategies?*
- 3. What potential resources besides money and core group workers may a planter utilize in his strategy?*
- 4. Why do lower cost strategies tend to take more time to gather people?*
- 5. Does the person of peace concept lead planters to intentionally neglect certain types of people? Does it lead planters to be mercenary in their relationships? How does the person of peace concept shed light on the advantage indigenous planters have verses those that are not?*
- 6. How do planters find a person of peace? Does this carry implications regarding strategy flexibility?*
- 7. How does calling effect strategy more than just revealing a location to start the church?*
- 8. What gifts and personalities make up the best church planters.*

## D. The Holy Spirit

Church planting may be the race we are running, and God may use us as the vehicle, but the Holy Spirit is the driver. As we encounter the many variables involved, the Holy Spirit determines how to handle each obstacle. The cumulative plan of how the Holy Spirit intends to deal with all the race factors is our strategy. However, these factors do not simply plug into some giant church planting formula and spit out what your supposed to do. Each variable is not entered into a church-planting computer but taken before the throne of God in prayer. The Holy Spirit integrates the implications of each condition with all the others. Sometimes God genuinely leads the church plant leadership to do things contrary to some of the strategy considerations. There are exceptions to just about every implication I have mentioned. That is because church planting is a spiritual endeavor. God plants churches and God does not always make sense to us. Developing strategy is a spiritual exercise. During the strategy development process the Holy Spirit should be allowed to take all the unique considerations of your situation and create a strategy that is ideal for your team. Then, approaching the new work with the same dependency on God will lead to a new, unique expression of God's bride.

The Holy Spirit is the decision-maker, not the church planter. I must point out the necessity of the church planter having a radical dependence upon God. Sensitivity and yielding to God in one's heart is a condition the church planter must develop if he hopes to develop the optimum strategy.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, is church planting strategy development a science, an art or neither?
2. Most of the contemporary church-planting world functions by endorsing at most several primary models to be used in nearly every context. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
3. What role do contemporary church planting models play in contextualized church planting strategies?
4. Do you think the strategy for your new work would be stronger if you employed a model, a contextualized strategy or a blend between the two?
5. Which of the team factors do you believe plays the most significant role in developing your strategy? Which of the environmental factors? Which of the theological factors?
6. How would you define the Holy Spirit's role in church planting strategy development?
7. Are there areas in your church-planting situation where you feel tempted to violate the principles of a contextualized strategy? If so, where and why?
8. Evaluate the following statements in light of one another.
  - *Quality strategies for church planting evolve while on our knees.*
  - *Quality strategies for church planting evolve as we carefully consider all the variables.*
9. Comment on the following statement. *Church planting is the race, we are the vehicle and the Holy Spirit is the driver.*

What implications does each part of this statement have in developing a church planting strategy?