

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

A CROSS CULTURE CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

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**Thesis:** There is a biblical, foundational framework, albeit non-linear at times, for the work of church planting.

### **Introduction: The Essential Picture of Church Planting**

Before one can have a real appreciation for a method of cross-cultural church planting, they must first come to an understanding of what “church planting” really means. Church-planting is the action of stabilizing a new church. Furthermore, a “church” is an assembly. The word behind “church” is *ekklesia* and is found 118 times in the Greek New Testament, and it is translated “church” 115 of those times in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV).<sup>1</sup> A survey of the other three times in Acts 19 will show the reader that this was a word used for a gathering of people for the conducting of certain business.

A taste of this “business” is seen in the urgency of the “come out” to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 6:17. The practice of church planting, then, is a Godly practice. That is, it is a practice original to God. “...The essential theme of the whole Bible from beginning to end is that God’s historical purpose is to call out a people for himself; that this people is a ‘holy’ people, set apart from the world...”<sup>2</sup> So the “churches,” found in various locations, are miniature illustrations of both the “calling out” that takes place to the people of God at salvation and the “calling out” that takes place at the second coming when those “in Christ” both “rise” and are “caught up” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

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<sup>1</sup>Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *ekklesia* (Strong's 1577)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 24 Jun 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1577&t=KJV> >

<sup>2</sup>John R.W. Stott. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity, 1978), 17.

## **The Need for the Harvest's Lord**

The idea of talking to God may be outdated in some minds, but the believer who is hopeful of any success on another field should consider that missions is God's work and prayer is, no doubt, the "prepping of the beaches"<sup>3</sup> before the assault of the footsoldier. Marshall speaks of this necessity when he cites a young Williams College student in 1806 by the name of Samuel Mills:

"...He and four of his friends were walking through the countryside when a sudden thunderstorm drove them to seek shelter in a large haystack. Held Captive by the rain, they fell to talking about the 'moral darkness of Asia,' when one of them suggested that they pray for that continent. One prayer led to another, and the more they prayed and talked, the more they became seized with the desire to go to Asia as missionaries... Two years later..."<sup>4</sup>

Herein lays an example of what one finds in Matthew 9:38 when the disciples are instructed to pray for laborers to be "sent." The next two verses show the reader that these "sent ones" (apostles) were the answer to their prayer. Two years after these prayer meetings began, a missionary society was formed, and within the next two years, five missionaries were sent to the continent.

## **Walking the Land**

Marshall recorded Mills' later exploits in New England where he and a colleague search the states on a two-year "fact-finding tour." They were dispatched by two states' missionary societies—travelling down the Mississippi with General Andrew Jackson and his troops. They

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<sup>3</sup> This is a term which speaks to the usage of battle ships and bombers which condition the enemies land before the amphibious assault comes ashore.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Marshall & David Manuel. *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1986), 120.

determined the population to minister ratios in each region (or county).<sup>5</sup> Certainly there is time and place for surveying the mission field for the Gospel. While many believers will acknowledge the strategic structure of the opposing spiritual world as seen in the rankings of evil<sup>6</sup> and the placement of these echelons over particular regions of the world,<sup>7</sup> they are reticent to accept the reality that believers should be strategic in at least some point (finding the largest needs, for example). There is no guarantee that strategizers can determine the next place of God's direction in the missionaries' life, but they may have a place to start, nonetheless.

### **The Necessity of a Clear Message**

Church Planting is pointless without the clear message of the Gospel. The church is not a merely a clearinghouse for social programs; nor is it a place where disoriented congregants can find a sort of sense of belonging through inspirational speeches. J. Mack Stiles captures this well:

“The healthy evangelist is asking...questions and looking for answers so as to guard the gospel. Here is the critical test. Could you have preached that sermon if Christ had not died on the cross? Could you have developed that Christian leadership principle [or whatever principle you are sharing] had Christ not been crucified?”<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that “cold cups of water” (Matthew 10:41) are not intended for the lost world, but that these acts of kindness have the Gospel as their intended end. James 1:27 speaks of caring for the widow and orphan, but they speak of that in the context of “having the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 2:1) and professing this faith with adorning works (James 2:18).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>6</sup>Ephesians 6:12 speaks of four different types of non-“flesh-and-blood” foes.

<sup>7</sup>Ezekiel 28:12 and Daniel 10:13 speak of the “King of Tyre” and “Prince of Persia” and they are clearly not human beings of whom the prophets speak.

<sup>8</sup> J. Mack Stiles. *Marks of the Messenger* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2010), 41.

Stiles relays the story of a certain missionary to Guatemala who introduced new dietary ideas and farming ingenuity to the populace. After earning an amount of expertise authority, he was able to share the Gospel and men started to get saved. They stopped getting drunk, beating their wives, and misusing their children. Even the mayor of that town noticed that there was real change happening.<sup>9</sup> Why is this? The Gospel changes hearts through regeneration and appeals to the mind through the example of the Christ who died for others' betterment—after living years of spirit-filled, selfless service.

### *A Clear Message: Not Cultural Reformation*

Do sinners act sinful? This is not an issue of making other cultures act more American, more Baptist, more Western, etc...; “church planting” is not about making sinners act saintly.

“Jesus did not command us to change the world. As a matter of fact, it is evident from many passages that expect the exact opposite. We are not to expect lost, pagan, secular culture to act and think like Bible-believers...Churches are haven't appointed agencies for the salvation of men.”<sup>10</sup>

If an entire culture is made more like the culture of the missionary, the only thing that is guaranteed is that a sort of civilizing has been done (in the eyes of the missionary). Only those who have bloated, nationalistic ideals of “right” and “ethical” can assume their way is righteous and good before God.

### *A Clear Message: The Life Commitment*

In the spirit of 1 Thessalonians 2:8, the reader should get the idea that a commitment to the conveyance of truth should entail a commitment to invest one's life in one form or another. It

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>10</sup> James A. Alter & Dolton W. Robertson II. *Why Baptist? The Significance of Baptist Principles in an Ecumenical Age* (Sidney, OH: Ancient Baptist Press, 2008), 207.

would have been preposterous to tell the apostle that since they have now planted the church and have left it to the others to lead, then they are no longer under expectation before God to lead or account for the development of those who make up that assembly. Acts 16:5 records Paul and Silas as they survey the spiritual health of those churches already planted on preceding trips.<sup>11</sup> Even Basil Mathews is quoted in his surmising as to what made the New Testament church the “best-organized community in all the empire”: the travels of the bishops.<sup>12</sup> The disbanding of authority (Psalm 2:3), all in the name of the “spirit of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2), appears to be much more than a desire for autonomy. This desire for independence has become an idol in of itself and has severely crippled many church planting networks today. It is possible that many will see this as an appeal for apostolicity, but all that is being sought is an organized methodology—supervised by those who could be considered fathers of particular church’s faith. In angst over Roman Catholicism, many have forgotten the paternal language of the apostle over, for instance, the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 11:1-2).

### **Church-Planting Methodology**

Hesselgrave did a fine job charting a course for church-planting. It would be ill-advised to attempt a plan out of nothing. He says these steps (while not necessarily always separate or successive) of commissioning, audience contact, Gospel communication, conversion, congregating believers, confirmation, leadership consecration, commending of believers, continued relationship, and convening of sending churches are a very comprehensive plan for

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<sup>11</sup>David J. Hesselgrave. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally (Second Edition): North America and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 23.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 27.

church planting in a culture.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, it would be difficult to improve upon this plan. As such, this will prove to be a skeleton upon which the method will be hung.

### *Methodology: Commissioning*

This is the sending out from the church to plant a church. This commission was given by Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 1:22-23). Going forward to Acts' thirteenth chapter, the reader will notice that both the church body and the Holy Spirit are given credit for sending forth the missionaries Paul and Barnabas.

One of the implications in this sending is that the church and the missionary (church planter) have agreed on the location of this new work. To be sure that there is no confusion that this author is not speaking of the physical structure, the term "people group" will be used when saying, the "implication in this sending is that the church and missionary have agreed on the target people group." Colossians 3:15 should be employed here (and everywhere else) when determining God's will. "If peace is not present, then one must wait upon the Lord before he moves one step, lest he walk in the flesh and fall flat on his face."<sup>14</sup>

Research is a key to determining the place (humanly speaking). With so many places that would make good places, there are countless locations myriads of subcultures and people groups. There are lost people everywhere and the need is overwhelming without a location that seems right to Christ through His church.

"In any community it is important to find the most strategic location for building and evangelizing. Find out in which direction the city is growing, residentially. If at all

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Sumner C. Wemp. *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Shelbyville, TN: Bible & Literature Missionary Foundation, 1982), 53.

possible, secure property in that direction. The Chamber of Commerce, realtors, and developers can help you determine growth factors of a city.”<sup>15</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that the church planter should buy property first. However, the church planter should most certainly use factors like this in determining where to buy or rent a home for his family among the people group he is considering. In other words, using resources like Wemp’s is discretionary when both choosing a field and then choosing a location within that field.

### *Methodology: Audience Contact*

After the missionary is sent out, they must make contact with the people group to whom they are sent. Paul gives the believer some guidance in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 when he says “While working with Jews, I live like a Jew, but when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile becoming all things to all men that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible.” This guidance tells the believer to, within the bounds of righteousness, blend in with the culture to which they are seeking to make disciples. It cannot be emphasized enough that the missionary is not to impose his culture<sup>16</sup> or denomination on the people group.<sup>17</sup> Of course, there is a time when this is no longer enough. Culture is a gift of God, but the missionary must not

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<sup>15</sup> Sumner C. Wemp. *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Shelbyville, TN: Bible & Literature Missionary Foundation, 1982), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Kraft “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization,” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 401; Kraft defines “culture” as the label given by anthropologists to the structured customs and underlying worldview assumptions which govern people’s lives. Worldview is included in culture as the deepest level of presuppositions upon which people base their lives.

<sup>17</sup> Charles H. Kraft “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization,” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 400.

allow himself to become immersed in culture to the point where it becomes the end of the effort.<sup>18</sup>

This does not appear to occur much in churches as much as the opposite: Staying aloof from the culture and allowing it to exist with us on the outside pleading for westernization to make us feel comfortable.

“In the early stages servanthood may be best seen when we are willing to adjust to the local cultural patterns, including learning the language. Jesus came into our human context (John 1:14), adjusted to the Jewish culture (Luke 2:52) and lived among us so that when the time was right he would accomplish the redemption of all who would believe.”<sup>19</sup>

So Jesus did set the example as one who could have stood outside Jewish culture and demanded heavenly conduct becoming of the people of God, but He did not. Again, this is not “culture” in the sinful sense. This is the ability to refrain from worrisome judgment long enough to gain the ear of the audience.

### *Methodology: Gospel Communication*

This is, of course, the objective of going. The gospel, as communicated by the apostle Paul is the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). When a person believes on that truth for his eternal security, he is saved. Church planting—the process of organizing and establishing assemblies of believers—is pointless if there is nothing to...”believe.” There are, however, little previews of the Gospel with the lives of those who have “died” to the old man and are living examples of resurrection power. Romans 6:6 speaks of those who died with Christ and Romans 6:11 speaks of the new life made possible by the Gospel. In

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<sup>18</sup> Miriam Adeney “Is God Colorblind or Colorful?” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 420.

<sup>19</sup> Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2006), 13.

other words, the believer preaches the gospel when he can loudly say “Christ lives in me!” as Paul did (Galatians 2:20). “Such a realization will mean that wherever they may be over the course of a given day or week they really do represent Jesus Christ as his appointed ambassadors.”<sup>20</sup> So it is with every believer who “walks in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16)—the same “Spirit” who testifies of Christ (John 15:26).

One must not be quick to overlook the depth of this step. Hiebert points this out:

“Before missionaries go to another country for the first time, they often think of the great distance they must travel to get to their field of labor. But once they arrive on the field, the greatest problem to be faced is in the last few feet. What a shock! The missionary has studied for many years. He has traveled thousands of miles to communicate the gospel of Christ. He now stands face-to-face with the people of his respondent culture and he is unable to communicate the most simple message!”<sup>21</sup>

Apparently, the author sees human nature and the problems that lie with doing the exact thing which needs to be done. Perhaps the largest issue with sharing the life-changing message of the Gospel is actually “decoding the Biblical message”<sup>22</sup> and “encoding”<sup>23</sup> it back into the culture wherein the missionary has set himself.

### *Methodology: Conversion*

Here is where the church planter must be patient. Conversion is the work of the Lord. Man is required to “repent and be converted” (Acts 3:19), yet the reader is to remember that it is the “law of the Lord” that “converts the soul” (Psalm 19:7). This constant tension of

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<sup>20</sup> J.I. Packer & Gary A. Parrett. *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 169.

<sup>21</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, “The Role of Culture in Communication,” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 426.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 427.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 428.

responsibility and faith in the work of the Holy Spirit does not go away in the midst of following the Great Commission. There are no believers to assemble where there are no converts. Baptists are typically distinguished because of their demand for regenerate church membership. Therefore, organizing a body of believers before any have shown fruits of conversion is futile. Throughout Paul's three church-planting trips as recorded in the book of Acts, there is a clear distinction between contact with unbelievers and strengthening of the assembly (Acts 14:22-23; 16:40; 18:23).

### *Methodology: Congregating Believers*

Of course this is a critical time. Helping those who are converted to understand the necessity of community life—building a group of converts around the idea of the conveyance of truth, the care for others, and the corporate worship of Christ. The consistent example of the shepherd in the lives of his specific people group is essential. This means he must have a measure of sanctified stubbornness. He will want to stay even without a salary for an amount of time. The apostle Paul knew this well. He continually reminded the churches at Corinth and Thessalonica that he provided for his own needs in their situations.<sup>24</sup> This probably allowed him to, through the collective actions of these congregations, meet many other needs of both the saints in Jerusalem and the needs of fellow church planters.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Bruce Steffes & Michelle Steffes. *Your Mission: Get Ready! Get Set! Go!* (Linden, NC: Dr. Bruce Steffes, 2010), 14-15; Steffes reminds the reader that “we are so used to the truth that Paul had a tent-making career in Corinth that we forget that Christians other than those in Corinth helped him financially and in other ways...He did receive assistance from other individuals and churches. In Romans 15:24, the original language was clear that he was talking about money when he wrote and asked for support.” However, from the viewpoint of the Corinthians and Thessalonians, Paul was supported by those other than themselves.

<sup>25</sup>Dennis W. Bickers. *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 10.

The number of congregants is not nearly as critical as the reality that some are congregating and that they are beginning to appreciate eternal things such as the purpose their new Savior and King has given them in the spreading of truth through multiple, like-minded (anchored in the one truth), heavenly-conscious assemblies of believers. This will mean that truth will need to be paramount—not programs. This will mean that the assembly will have to stay efficient through the dissemination of truth instead of robust through the dependence of programming, sporadic drives, and campaigns.<sup>26</sup> Corporate worship should not be underplayed either. This is, in view of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, worship at the feet of Jesus is the objective of redemption.<sup>27</sup> God is quite glorified when His people meet each Lord’s Day to partake of the four essential apostolic practices as listed in Acts 2:47.

If a pastor is to disseminate truth to groups of believers; and if this pastor is to preach the whole counsel of God; and if this pastor is to do so patiently—then a pastor can expect this process to take at least three years.<sup>28</sup> This love of truth; this joy of leading God’s sheep beside still waters is not a quick process.

#### *Methodology: Confirmation*

This is that process whereby the body of believers is settled in the doctrines of Christ. This does not mean that they are scholars and theologians. One must remember that they are still members of their cultures and subcultures. Again, Christ may be purifying them of the sinful baggage that comes along with these characteristics, but the truth remains that they will still have

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>27</sup> John Piper. *Let the Nations be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2003), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Bickers, 15.

accents, habits, desires, joys, and aspirations which may stem from cultural norms and may simply not be sinful. Patience is required or the missionaries will ostracize themselves from the people, and quite possibly give an undesirable representation of Jesus Christ. As the missionary understands this new flock, he will be able to communicate meaningfully to them the rudiments of the Christian faith.<sup>29</sup>

### *Methodology: Leadership Consecration*

Leaders must be led. Hudson Taylor knew what it was to live by faith. This faith was observed by others through sharing generously of that which he had. He was challenged by Scripture in front of those to whom he wished to minister and he, like those of his future flock, was faced with whether he would trust the truth.<sup>30</sup> Leaders will lead as they are led. Those whom God appears to be setting aside for the work of the Gospel will be challenged to live by faith as they see it exhibited before them. Those leaders who are being considered to carry on the work will be faced with whether they wish to lead a typically American way of life or whether the main thing in their life is the dissemination of truth through God's assemblies.

Part of this faith will need to be cultivated in prayer. That is, it takes faith to pray—faith in the Scriptures that is. It also takes faith to keep praying. Is God able? Is God willing to fund and fuel His own program of multiplying assemblies? One thing is certain: if the church planter is not praying powerfully before he begins, he may find it difficult to get much done on the field.<sup>31</sup> Whether in the area of finances, or in the area of the changing of hearts, Hudson Taylor

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<sup>29</sup> Elmer, 128.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Thompson. *Hudson Taylor: God's Venturer* (Chicago: Moody Press, \_\_\_\_\_), 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

exhibited the power of God through prayer in England before departing for China. This was a faith that he would later teach through example to those first generation converts in his target people group.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Methodology: Confirming Believers*

Unquestionably, one of the undesirable traits of modern missions is the forgetfulness of church planters among the people to whom they served. “Out of sight, out of mind” should not be a comfortable style among God’s shepherds. A church planter has spent time and energy into people who have, in turn, spent trust in their leader. To hand over a body of believers to an indigenous leader is commendable, but to forget about them—never holding them accountable as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 4:15—is inexcusable. Isolating oneself from a church plant after one has moved on is not the Biblical pattern.<sup>33</sup> Autonomy should not have the price-tag of isolation. The fact that many are afraid of appearing “apostolic” is not excuse for this quasi-retirement from another ministry into which blood, sweat, and tears have been invested.

#### *Methodology: Continuing Relationship*

This is that relationship that exists between the church planter and the church following the giving over of the reigns to a pastor from among the church. While there is no “apostolic privilege, there is an expert respect that comes with honoring those who have gone before to do the work. This is a missing element in highly transient places where, oftentimes, former leaders are not known in the church. Once again, Paul leads by example when go goes among churches

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Elmer, 164.

that were planted on his first and second missionary journeys and ministers to them in a sundry of ways (14:20-23; 16:1-11; 17:14; 19:30; 20:7; 20:18; 21:4-7). Of course, this continuing relationship is carried on through messengers of Paul's as Epaphroditus and Timothy (Philippians 2), Titus (2 Corinthians 7:6), and John Mark (2 Timothy 4). One also should notice this continuing relationship that is carried on through letters to churches he had planted. Again, application would probably stop within certain limits as today's church planters are limited in the absence of "apostolic signs" (2 Corinthians 12:12), but the principle of accountability (such as 1 Corinthians 5:1 cf.) still remains.

#### *Methodology: Convening Churches*

After the work is complete, it is always proper to give a report to the churches who have supported you and have commissioned you. Paul, although commissioned by the church at Antioch knew there was also a level of accountability to the church in Jerusalem. Moreover, he explained his efforts for which he gained support to the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 8) and Philippian church. At the end of his first journey, he reported to the church at Antioch-Syria (Acts 14:26). At the end of the second journey he reported to the Jerusalem church (18:22) and then also to the Antioch-Syria church. Again, after his third journey, he reported to the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:19). This does not even count the respect he gave to the Jerusalem church following his conversion and years in Damascus (Acts 11:29) and following his first missionary journey when he and Barnabas journeyed to the church council to hear the verdict of those who demanded circumcision (Acts 15).

## **Culture Shock**

The world is not American. America is not even uni-cultural. There are subcultures within America's culture. It will take the grace of God in the planning stages to be fully prepared and in the actual mission work to be fully engaged while, in the planter's humanness, they may feel out of place.

You can only hope and pray that you are not too miserable while you grow through it and that it does not leave you scarred. Even if you survive relatively unscathed, you will see those on your...mission trip who are having a really rough time—and the most affected may even be the career missionaries you are going to work with.”<sup>34</sup>

It seems fitting, then, to say that it is an unreal expectation to feel right “at home” upon immediate integration with another culture. Taking the task a day at a time with a lifetime perspective seems to be the best approach. The marriage partner is doubtless the best “partner” one can have in the Lord's work. Metering the stress in your spouse is of utmost importance.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most refreshing thing about church planting is that there is no Scriptural directive for how long it is supposed to take. Speed up and slow down as God gives grace and refreshing.

## **Conclusion**

After following closely a biblical model structured by Hasselgrave and considering some really prevalent issues of culture shock and the ecclesiology and motives of church-planting, the reader of this paper should have a good place to begin when they feel they are ready to “preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest [they] build on another man's foundation” (Romans 15:20). The Great Commission is more than preaching the Gospel, it is planting churches—assemblies of Christ-like believers.

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<sup>34</sup> Steffes & Steffes, 186.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 189.

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