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SUPPORTING CHURCH PLANTERS AFTER LAUNCH

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ABSTRACT

Life After Birth: Supporting Church Planters After Launch

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This dissertation explores the importance of supporting church planters and church plants after they are started. Support is given and modeled by God, and it is vital for the maturing and survival of a church plant. This dissertation will outline possible ways for a church plant, church planter, network, denomination, or movement to identify and support key needs.

Church planters are seeking support. Like newborn children, church plants need a lot of attention and support after birth. They also need to be cared for when they are young (four to ten years old). Church planters serve as spiritual parents, nurturing and caring for the new church so that it will grow and mature to the point of supporting itself, its leaders, and future planting endeavors. More support is needed for church planters and plants after they are launched than what is typically given. This support is best when it is personal, organizational, and systematic, and when it addresses the specific needs of the planter and the church plant.

This dissertation will be based on a large-scale case study. Over seventy interviews were conducted with church planters, church planting directors, and denominational leaders in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Part One highlights the need for greater support to be given to church planters, especially after the birth of the church plant, with five main needs identified. Part Two develops a theology of support, exploring the challenges planters face and how support helps planters overcome; God himself provides support and a model for supporting others. The goal is for the Sent to become the Senders. Part Three offers suggestions on how the five needs can be met by the planter, the church plant, and the denomination/network, and how support responsibilities can change as the church matures.

Content Reader: Tim Morey, DMin

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To my supportive wife,
who is an incredible example of the power of support,
and without whose support this work would not have been possible.

To my five incredible kids,
who have been a huge part of the church planting journey.
I love that I get to be your dad.

And to my church family at Covenant Grove Church,
who have been crazy enough to follow Jesus
no matter where he leads us.
I love being part of a group of fully devoted misfits like you.
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PART ONE

THE NEED FOR GREATER SUPPORT
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about supporting church planters. Support allows planters to focus on the mission of the church. Support is a shock absorber that lessens the impact of the punches that planters take. Support is a shield in the face of spiritual warfare. Support empowers planters to run faster and reach more people. Support can be defined and time-limited. Support can also be open-ended, allowing the planter to move on when he or she is ready. Planters are required to receive some support as part of their network or denominational agreements, but most support must be actively sought out by the planters. The need for support, especially in years four to ten, cannot be minimized. My hope is that the findings of this research, and the suggestions of this dissertation, will be helpful in growing ongoing support for church planters.

About two years ago, I was asked to do a research project on church planting for my denomination.¹ The research was qualitative, based on open-ended questions about what could be improved in church planting. I had my own opinions about how planters needed to do more evangelism or communicate more clearly. Yet the research dictated that I kept my opinions silent; my role was to listen deeply, ask questions, and report on the findings. The findings were clear. Church planters need more support. Church planting movement leaders need more support. I reported the findings to my denomination, they made changes, and I support (in small ways) church planters through training and coaching. Supporting movement leaders allows them to pour support into church planters. When church planters overflow with ongoing support, they develop

¹ The Evangelical Covenant Church.
support in their church plants. Supported church plants can mature to become self-supporting and then overflow support to their leaders and future church planting endeavors. Support is important. God does not control his people, but he supports them and gives the perfect model for how to support others.

This dissertation is for church planters to identify their support needs and come up with a plan to seek out support. Support diminishes every year a church plant gets older. Planters can prepare for this reality, raising up additional support outside and inside of their church plants. This paper is also for movement leaders to raise up ongoing support for church planters after the birth of their churches. Movement leaders themselves also need to plan for their own support. I created a Support Plan, based on the research of the entire paper, that is discussed in chapter five. The Support Plan identifies areas of support need, enables seeking out of support, and coordinates communication around support responsibilities.

Part One focuses on the support that church planters need, especially after the birth of their churches. Chapter one explores the challenges that church planters are experiencing as “spiritual parents.” Denominations and movements do a good job supporting planters before the birth of the church, but planters are needing and seeking additional support. New networks have emerged that provide additional, long-term support. Post-birth metrics need to be added to measure the true vitality and health of church planting movements. Chapter two presents the results of a large-scale, North American (USA and Canada) case study done on church planting. Over seventy interviews were conducted with church planters, church plant directors, and denominational leaders. The research coalesced around five key ways that church
planters and plants need to be supported to grow, be sustainable, and live out God’s mission. Much of this support will come from the network, denomination, or movement. This chapter also will cover the needs of planters of young churches (years four to ten).

Part Two develops a theology of support, exploring the challenges planters face and how support helps planters overcome; God himself provides support and a model for supporting others. Chapter three reviews key literature for supporting church plants and planters, who need unique care. The chapter begins by highlighting the growing challenges of planting new churches, moving to the struggles that planters face, then on to practical ways to provide support. Chapter four explores a theology of support. God supports his people and asks leaders to seek him and receive his support. Leaders are called to receive God’s support, to point others to his support, and to follow his example in supporting others. The Sent need to be supported by the Senders. The chapter will end by reviewing the five key needs of church planters from chapter 2 and how biblical leaders met those needs.

Part Three offers suggestions on how the five needs can be met by the planter, the church plant, and the denomination/network, and how support responsibilities can change as the church matures. Chapter five discusses practical ways to support church planters and from where the support needs to come. Like children, church plants need support after they are born and beyond year three. As spiritual parents, church planters are called to raise the church to support herself and fully participate in God’s mission.
CHAPTER 1
THE CHALLENGE OF RAISING A CHURCH

Giving birth is hard. This is why we give so much support to those who are birthing. Church planters are like spiritual parents: they dream of their new baby, give it a name, and adjust their lives to prepare for its arrival. New parents receive much support to help their baby be born: medical checkups are given, extra vitamins are taken, and family or friends may throw baby showers. Church planters, similarly, receive an outpouring of support in preparation for the birth of the new church: assessments are done, training is given, coaching is offered, and finances are provided. Giving birth requires a huge amount of support, and the support given increases the likelihood of survival for each baby (or church) born. The support needs to continue after the birth so a church plant can grow, mature, and thrive.

This chapter will emphasize the importance of supporting church planters by describing the ongoing challenges faced by planters. It is more difficult than ever to plant a church. After three to four years, planters feel less supported because support levels have dropped, the planters are fatigued, their plants have not grown to the point of supporting themselves, and the planters have not sought out additional support. Church
planting movements need additional metrics for churches in years four to ten; this will raise awareness for the support needed in these years. The chapter ends by sharing my story of planting a church and receiving ongoing support. This support blessed my life, ministry, and church plant in countless ways.

The Importance of Supporting New Churches

What would happen if support for parents ended when the child was two? I have five kids, and I have appreciated the ongoing medical visits, family support, and parenting advice my wife and I have received. Parenting is difficult. Unfortunately, most church planters do not receive ongoing support after the birth of their churches. If they do receive support, it is only while their church plant is still a “baby.” This ongoing support is critical to for a baby church plant to survive and thrive. Support is also vital in years four to ten, the “young church” stage. These are some of the most difficult years of planting, pastoring, and leadership. Just like parents of teenagers need additional support, church planters need ongoing support in these years.

There are (at least) five main challenges that church planters face in the young church stage: finances, numbers, leadership, isolation, and fatigue. Church planters in these years are under-resourced, under-supported, and unprepared to deal with these challenges. As they face these five challenges, planters often lead out of fear rather than prayer, vision, and mission. These challenges arise whether or not a church has hit numerical benchmarks and is “successful.”

1. Finances. Funding support ends and the plant must be completely self-sufficient. Yet there is not enough money. If a church plant has not grown
enough, the planter begins thinking about a second job, or leaving the plant. This impacts the planter’s family, who has already sacrificed much. If the plant has grown, the challenge is to afford additional staff.

2. Numbers. Very few planters quickly achieve the numbers they dreamed about before they started. For those that do, new problems quickly arise. The planters in these fast-growing churches struggle to keep up with the growing needs and lack of leadership. Burnout begins to settle in as the planter asks, “How much longer?” Those who struggle to break key growth barriers ask the same question, while pondering being bi-vocational and reframing their original vision.

3. Leadership. For denominations that are congregational in their authority, the transition to this governance happens in years two to four. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a planter and plant to make, and very few planters are prepared for it. Most planters have not been lead pastors before planting. Further leadership challenges are volunteer turnover, staff hires and fires, and the planter feeling he or she is not a strong enough leader to take the church to the next level.

4. Fatigue. The above challenges lead to an overwhelming sense of fatigue.¹ The planter may have expended everything in the first three years, and there is

¹ Ed Stetzer writes, “Church planting is a rigorous task that leaves planters physically, emotionally and spiritually drained… Performance pressure overwhelms their theological moorings as to who they are in Christ creating an incessant anxiety which drives them even further into the work that drains them. It’s a vicious cycle. Finding rest in the presence of God is the only answer. “Starting a Church Without Losing Your Soul,” Christianity Today (January 27, 2009), https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/january/starting-church-without-losing-your-soul.html.
very little left in the tank. The family of the planter, who have sacrificed much, begin to ask, “Will this go on forever?” The church has an unending list of overwhelming demands.

5. Isolation. After one, two, or three years, official coaching ends. Most planters are thankful for the additional time back in their schedules and do not find additional support. The planter’s prayer life may have been neglected, and he or she feels isolated from God. Most planters isolate themselves from others.\(^2\) The planter feels alone and not understood—the age, size, location, challenges of the church plant feel unique, and so they do not seek additional support.

Unfortunately, there is little support available to church planters in the young church years. There is a lot of (needed) support given before the church is born and some (also very needed) after the church launches. But after three years, when church planters truly begin to struggle, few resources are available. Compared to the wealth of literature about starting a church, few books exist about pastoring a church plant after the launch. Denominations and networks work hard to plant churches but have few resources for planters after the first three years. The resources offered fit the context for older, established churches but not the realities of a young church. What is communicated is that after year three, planters are just pastors, and need the same types of support as any

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\(^2\) Ray Johnston’s fifth factor to raising a person’s “Hope Quotient” is “Refuse to go it alone.” *Hope Quotient: Measure It. Raise It. You’ll Never Be the Same* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2014), chap. 9. His other six factors include: recharge your batteries, raise your expectations, refocus on the future, play to your strengths, replace burnout with balance, and play great defense. Johnston’s point is that hope is the key (and often forgotten) factor in life and leadership: discouragement destroys but with hope, a leader endures (see pages 14-32).
other pastor. This is not true. Planters in young churches are facing unique challenges, including the survival of their church plants. For many, the fear of burnout or failure is so real that they consider leaving ministry altogether.

The Need for Additional Metrics

Metrics move movements. Metrics are important because they give a big picture of what is happening on a small level. Church planting is full of metrics. We know that the population of the United States has grown from 180 million in 1960 to 329 million in 2019, an 82 percent increase. Yet most denominations, especially mainline denominations, are in decline. From 1971, the Presbyterian Church, USA, declined 33 percent by 2000 and an additional 22 percent by 2010. The American Baptists increased 4 percent by 2000 but declined 27 percent by 2010. Most evangelical or Pentecostal denominations, most of which were growing until 2000, are now slowing their growth or in decline. The Southern Baptist Church grew 37 percent from 1971 to 2000, but only 0.1 percent from 2000 to 2010. Even the denominations that are experiencing growth are not

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3 While many pastors in “turnaround” churches face the same possibility of a church closing, the sense of failure is heightened for a church planter. A turnaround pastor came in to fix a problem that existed before he or she arrived. The planter has no one else to blame and struggles with this sense of failure and shame. “Planters in particular feel the pressure because new churches must grow to survive!” Stetzer, “Starting a Church.”

4 www.census.gov. This population growth is uncommon among developed, wealthy nations, which have a stagnant or declining population. Japan and the European Union are expected to lose 15 million people in the next 40 years, while the US is expected to add another 100 million. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 34.

keeping up with population growth. David Olson cites that from 2000 to 2005, church attendance in Arizona grew 7.3 percent, but the population grew by 15.3 percent, leading to an attendance decline of 7 percent of the population.\(^6\) Even when denominations are growing, they are not growing quickly enough to reach the population. Increasing percentages of the American population are claiming “none” as their religious affiliation. A 2019 Gallup poll said that the percentage of adults with no religious affiliation has grown from 8 percent to 19 percent since 1999; over the same amount of time, the percentage of church attenders has declined from 70 percent to 50 percent.\(^7\) Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im write that it is the nominal Christians who used to attend mainline and Catholic churches who are now checking “none.” But “Christianity in America isn’t dying and no research says it is.” From 2007 to 2014, the number of evangelicals rose from 59.8 million to 62.2 million. “Christianity is becoming less nominal, more defined, and more outside the mainstream of American culture.”\(^8\)

It is increasingly difficult to plant a church; more support is needed. Even Stetzer and Im’s research about nominal people leaving organized religion is not good news for church planters because the “none’s” want nothing to do with organized religion, though they may be open to a fresh expression of it. Church planting movements see the data, as well as the biblical mandate to evangelism, as a call to plant more churches. Metrics matter. Most church planting movements study and share their church planting metrics,

\(^6\) Olson, *American Church*, 37.


stating the percentage of church plants that survive. Yet few measure how many churches survive in years four through ten. This is the stage—when support runs thin—that church plants die.

This paper is a hope for new metrics to be added. Metrics move movements. True church planting success must mean survival to year ten. As the survival rate and growth (or decline) rate of young churches is measured, greater support can be given to church planters in the critical, young church stage of a church plant. This does not all have to come from the denomination or network. The planter must take responsibility to find and accept support; it just needs to be available when he or she seeks it. Five main types of support are identified in chapter two, based on a North American survey of over seventy church planters and denominational leaders: 1) the power of God, 2) vision refilled, 3) proactive care, 4) problem solving and prevention, and 5) systematic support (administration, finances, etc.). This support should be personal, organizational, and systematic. It should also be ongoing.

Metrics move movements. Christianity and church attendance are down in America. Church planting alone will not turn the tide; planting thousands of fledgling churches will not sustain a movement nor lay the foundation for the next decade of future church plants. It is not enough to point to a few large church plants that have “made it.” We need thousands of church plants that are missional and healthy enough to grow into maturity, able to support themselves and others. This will require additional support for church plants through the young church stage. This will require additional metrics and new questions: How many church plants are surviving at years seven or ten? How many are supporting the movement? How many participate in church planting? As these (and
other) questions are asked, answered, and measured, more support will be given to young churches (and planters), allowing more church plants to grow to maturity, able to support their own local mission as well as the larger work of the Kingdom of God.

**Defining Church Planting Success**

Success in church planting, based on the interviews conducted, is a healthy, missional church, with missional defined as evangelism, community involvement, and participation in further church planting. A successful plant must also be sustainable. “The question is not, ‘Can we start churches?’… ‘Can it be sustained?’ is the bigger question,” said a church planter. Alternatively, a church planter said, “Sometimes God says ‘No’ after a season; we need to be ok that some church plants will close.” A denominational leader said that a church “needs enough resources to pay for the pastor, have a facility, and do great ministry.” He further gave five markers of sustainability: Mission and Ministry, Salary, Facility, Giving Back (to the movement), and Giving Birth (or helping a network plant churches). A church plant in an under-resourced area may be sustained by the overall movement. But this still must be sustainable—there must be enough self-sustaining churches to support the under-resourced church or the whole network will come crashing down.

“There is a high failure rate for church plants in years six to ten,” said a planter. He emphasized, with many others, the need for support beyond years three or four, to help a church overcome later obstacles and truly be sustainable. Another planter stated, “We start lots of churches—but they are small and struggling. The system is not
structured to get them into midsize and thriving churches.” When church plants are unsustainable, and close, this hurts the church planting movement.⁹

Those interviewed defined a healthy, missional plant as a church that has evangelism, community involvement, and (to a lesser extent) participation in planting. Church planting is an evangelism endeavor. There is no success in church planting without evangelism. One Director of Church Planting (DCP) said, “We need to reclaim evangelism in the church today. When a church plant doesn’t make it, it is usually because there is the wrong planter who is not doing the work of evangelism. Some young pastors see evangelism as a dirty word.” Another said, “It is not hard for a pastor to attract a small group of people who love and support them. This is too comfortable. It is settling for less than the missional impulse to reach out.”

The majority of planters had no problem being held accountable for their numbers. “Numbers are not the whole story of what God is doing at my church. But numbers are part of the story—like child development metrics. They give insight into the health of my church.” The thought repeated frequently was that evangelism is different now. Planters said, “Evangelism is a slow, steady work, and most of the decisions people make will happen AFTER they are in community.” “Evangelism is different now, and we need new training on some things that are working.” “You still need to be willing to be bold and rejected in evangelism. You have got to keep asking and inviting and not get discouraged. You have got to keep going.”

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⁹ Stetzer writes, “One of the planter’s most important roles is leadership. Wise leaders…understand the need to remove oneself from the pressures of ministry and experience renewal and reflection. Planters who do this are personally and professionally healthier than planters who do not. And, they lead healthier, more biblical and more sustainable churches.” Stetzer, “Starting a Church.”
All the church planters interviewed believed their church needed community involvement. “This has to happen. Big town or small town, you have got to have connections with those outside of the church to make a difference,” as one planter put it. “Acts of generosity break down barriers,” said the planter. Urban church plants are starting non-profits to reach the needs of their communities. Another church started a nursing home ministry because a woman in their church got into a car accident. In eight years, over eighty people came to Christ through that ministry. “People think that the elderly do not need to hear the gospel, and that isn’t true,” said the planter. Another church cooks nine hundred pounds of pork and feeds their community once a year. This energizes the whole community. At this event, people ask the pastor how they can help the church during the year because they are so grateful for what the church has done.

Some warned that the church must do more than just serve in the community. Community involvement is not meant to replace evangelism; they work together. Many planters observed numerous other church plants close because they had no cause beyond being a “service organization.” “You have to have a church, a worshiping community, to really do justice,” said a Superintendent. A planter said, “You need to be an anchoring presence of Jesus in a community. This requires a congregation. Success is the presence of Jesus and a sustaining congregation. Success is the sustaining presence of Jesus in a community.”

Participation in planting means a church plant gives birth to another church or churches, or it sends people, resources, or finances to help other churches get started. Not all of those interviewed listed this as a defining marker of success, but most movement leaders did. Participation in planting is what it means to be part of the network,
movement, or family. “Big goals are part of church planting,” said a DCP. “We need to do more than 3 percent growth per year, or you are just in maintenance mode.” The goal for the Covenant Church is to plant fifty churches per year, for a total of five hundred churches in ten years. The Superintendent of the Covenant Church of Canada has a goal of doing twenty church plants over the next ten years. This is a “bold move” for them and will increase the number of churches by 25 percent.

It is harder than ever to plant a healthy, missional, sustainable church. Church planters are spiritual parents, seeking to grow their churches to maturity in Christ. They need—and receive—much support in the early years. But the goal is a mature church plant that grows strong and can support others—including their staff, missions, and future church plants. The goal is not just to survive but to grow from receiving support to giving support. For a church plant to grow to maturity, it must thrive in the young church stage. This is where church plant support is lacking, and young churches are abandoned like teenagers left to raise themselves.

A Story of Support

Behind every story of success is a story of support. My story is no different. I am the planter and the lead pastor of Covenant Grove Church, a ten-year-old church plant in Modesto, California. We started in 2009 with a launch team of forty-six people and we have grown to an average attendance of almost four hundred each Sunday. Our church has been consistently surrounded by support, and I have sought out additional support when needed. We were planted by a mother church, Modesto Covenant Church, who has consistently supported us. Before I was even called to be the planter, a team of people
were meeting monthly and praying daily for the church plant. The church had raised over $10,000 towards planting and had done research on potential planting areas. At the time, I was serving in the church as the Youth Pastor. When I was called to be the planter, the church allowed me to ask anyone in the church to join the Launch Team. For ten weeks, the Lead Pastor, Mark Krieger, and I preached a sermon series through the book of Acts. Each sermon ended with an invitation to join the Launch Team. More money was also raised at this time, and our mother church sacrificially gave over $100,000 to see our church launched. They further sacrificed by not hiring a Discipleship Pastor, a position for which they had previously been searching. Before we even launched, Modesto Covenant was supporting the church plant with prayer, leadership, and vision. On the day we started, the Launch Team was invited to come on stage to be commissioned as missionaries to Modesto.

As our Launch Team began, we were continually supported. Because we were planted out of vision and health, we did not seek to separate ourselves from the mother church. Our Launch Team meetings were held at Modesto Covenant; I met with the Lead Pastor weekly for mentoring, and I was given office space, which included internet, phone, and copier use. I asked and was allowed to attend the staff prayer meetings, which empowered me to continue a sense of connection with a team. After visiting with a group of over 30 seniors in the church, they committed to pray every day for me and the Launch Team of Covenant Grove. They did this for over two years.

I was also supported by my denomination. I was coached in church planting by someone who had a lot of experience in church planting. Whenever I met or called him, he sent me incredible resources that helped spark ideas and move me forward. I knew the
Director of Church Planting in my region, and I was able to call him and ask for quick advice when needed—and it was often needed. I also have an uncle who was a national Director of Church Planting for his denomination; I took time at family gatherings to share struggles and get new ideas. In addition to coaching, my denomination had a clear vision for church planting that was communicated and celebrated nationally. Denominational gatherings helped me connect with other pastors and church planters and fueled the vision that the Lord had put in my heart. I knew I was part of something important that was bigger than I am. This was important because I was sending in 10 percent of our offerings and income to the denomination. The denomination was financially supporting us, along with Modesto Covenant Church, giving a total of $160,000 over three years. Our Director of Church Planting continually pulled in new church planters (years one to three) into onsite training times—to connect with each other and grow our skills.

The support we were given was invaluable because church planting was (and is) a struggle. We thought we would quickly grow. We did not. In fact, the goal was for our Launch Team to double in size in four months. We did not grow by even one person; in fact, we lost two people. I was discouraged and afraid. Most of our Launch Team were experiencing a level of spiritual attack—expressed in depression, lost jobs, lost homes, marital struggles, and more. It was the middle of the recession and hope was low. Yet we had faith and determination, and as we shared our stories, we grew a new level of support from each other. We made a commitment to personal evangelism and began to share our stories—even the “failure” stories. As we got ready for the preview services, hope was
high, and our first service had over 120 people attend. By the time we had weekly services, we had over one hundred regular attenders.

Three years later, we had grown to an average attendance of 160 on a Sunday. Our denominational support had ended (coaching and finances), but we were still supported by Modesto Covenant, our mother church. And I still needed it. Once we had a couple of people on (part-time) staff, I stopped going to staff prayer. Once we added a ministry center in year five, we stopped using the office space. Once we began renting a good copier in year seven, we stopped making copies at Modesto Covenant. I have continued to meet with Mark Krieger for mentoring and connection. Each of these support items was not forced to stop; when I was ready, I “weaned” myself off them. We needed additional time, beyond year three, to fully support ourselves.

The support we received in years four to seven was critical because Covenant Grove was stuck, and I did not know what to do about it. Our fire for evangelism had cooled (or so I believed), and we were in danger of “loving ourselves to death.” We could not break an attendance of 175, and I knew my leadership needed to grow. It was at this time that I enrolled in Fuller’s Doctor of Ministry program, which surrounded me with new voices and mentors. Greater support translated into greater potential to live out the vision. I had not empowered enough leaders to support the size of the church, so too much had fallen onto me and other staff; this was a problem. I learned how to develop and deploy leaders, raising up greater support for the mission of the church. At this time, my wife went through clinical depression, which took a huge toll on our marriage. We sought professional counseling for her and for our marriage. Modesto Covenant helped
pay for part of this. Our denomination helped provide a counselor as well. This support helped us overcome a very hard time.

In year five, Covenant Grove was asked to leave the high school where we were meeting. We had nowhere else to go if we wanted to stay in the area God had called us to. We rallied the church in prayer. After months of prayer, an elementary school principal changed her mind and we moved locations. We had not been there for two weeks when a church property in our area went up for sale. We had to raise $150,000 (half our church budget at the time) in three months. People prayed and gave sacrificially. Modesto Covenant gave $10,000, as did another church in town. The money was raised, and we moved into our property. Even though we were being helped by others, by this point the church was learning to support herself. We started two services and quickly grew to 250 on Sunday mornings. Staff were added, including support staff. In year eight, a third service was added, and attendance grew to 375 by year nine. We just completed a capital initiative to expand our facilities, plant a new church, and give to a mission project. Our goal was to raise $750,000. The total amount brought in by the Lord, in money and three-year pledges, was over $1.1 million. We are ready to expand our facilities, plant a new church, and continue reaching more people with Jesus. Our goal is making disciples; we want to see lives transformed. Covenant Grove Church has learned how to support herself with humble and godly leaders. We support our pastors who guide and serve us. We also support our network and denomination and the larger work to which God has called us.

In the middle of all the growth (year seven), a door opened for me to do a research project with my denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church. I was to interview
church planters and denominational leaders about what was working and not working in church planting. Their answers were not what I was expecting. While many different thoughts were clear, and will be covered in the next chapter, one stood out to me the most: church planters were looking for additional support. Especially church planters in the young church stage are looking for additional support and resources for their unique situations. I have since become a coach for church planters and an advocate for increased support for all church planters, especially planters in young churches.
CHAPTER 2
CASE STUDY OF A DENomination

This chapter presents a large-scale, North American (USA and Canada) case study done on church planting. Over seventy interviews were conducted with church planters, church plant directors, and denominational leaders. The research coalesced around five key ways that church planters and plants need to be supported to grow, be sustainable, and live out God’s mission: 1) Power of God, 2) Vision refilled, 3) Proactive care, 4) Problem solving and prevention, and 5) Systematic support (administration, finances, structures). Much of this support will come from the network, denomination, or movement. This chapter also will cover the additional needs of church planters in years four to ten, the “young church” phase.

The Need for the Study, the Timing, and the Parameters

In October 2016, I was contacted by the Executive Minister of Start and Strengthen Churches, John Wenrich, and asked if I would conduct a research project on Covenant Church Planting. John had recently been appointed the Executive Minister, and
Alex Rahill had recently been named the national Director of Church Planting. They wanted to do a “fearless moral inventory” of Covenant Church planting.

The research is qualitative in nature, focused on interviews with church planters, Directors of Church Planting (DCPs), and denominational leaders (Superintendents, Executive Ministers, seminary leaders). Surveys were not used because they presupposed that the person writing the survey knows the right categories and right questions to ask. Rather, the format was to be open-ended interviews. ¹ Each interview began with the open-ended questions: “What is working and not working in Covenant church planting? What is working and not working in church planting overall?” This allowed those being interviewed to present the categories, which were often very different from one person to the next. Each person interviewed was given confidentiality, and names are only used when I was given permission. The categories that were repeated (even if there were different views on these categories) form the categories of this report.

Because of the geographical and time constraints present in this project, it was decided that phone calls would be used to conduct the interviews. While this gives the advantage of being able to hear voice inflection, it does not allow the researcher to observe body language and facial expression.

The following process was used:

1. I began by interviewing John Wenrich and Alex Rahill, separately, to understand the scope and goals of the research project.

¹ This is considered qualitative research. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Robertson, Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).
2. I emailed and then called each DCP (or the Superintendent if that person was serving as the DCP in the Conference). The phone call allowed the DCPs to give their answers to the open-ended questions, and it also let them give an overview of church planting in their Conference.

3. The DCPs then gave me a list of five to seven church planters in their Conference, who had planted in the last fifteen years, for me to interview. Because the DCPs were in close contact with the church planters in their Conferences, it was clear that they had the best insight into which planters would give the best feedback for this research project. A couple of the planters recommended were from plants that had closed.

4. I emailed each of the church planters given to me, giving an overview of the research project and asking for an interview appointment. Most church planters replied quickly. I made follow-up phone calls for those who did not. The interviews took place between November 2016 and March 2017. A total of forty-five church planters were interviewed.

5. John Wenrich also asked me to interview denominational leaders, including the Superintendents and DCPs. I also interviewed one former Superintendent. John wanted to make sure that everyone involved with church planting and church planters was able to give input. A total of twenty-six denominational interviews happened.

6. The interviews were open-ended and allowed those being interviewed to provide the categories. Each interview lasted between thirty and seventy-five minutes, with most taking forty-five minutes.
Contact Chart, by Conference

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* In three Conferences, the Superintendent was serving as the DCP.

There was great response from the denomination for this research project. I interviewed all the DCPs, ten of the Superintendents, and forty-five church planters. There were seven interviews with denominational and educational (seminary) leaders, for a total of seventy-one interviews.

The goal of this report is to present the thoughts of those interviewed using the categories given by those interviewed. Direct quotations are given throughout the report, as well as statements that summarize one or many thoughts where there was overlap. Because of the different perspectives offered by planters, DCPs, Superintendents, and other denominational leaders, I have noted which of these groups is speaking the thought written.
Any research report of this nature has limitations. It is my desire to state them here to be as objective as possible:

1. Forty-five minute interviews are not enough time to really probe the depth of each person’s experience with church planting. Planting often involves incredible highs and drastic lows. The interviews were only a snapshot of their stories and a summary of their thoughts on what is working and what needs to be changed.

2. No ministry staff or lay leaders were interviewed. While the core group and future leaders were identified by many as key to the success and survival of the church plant, time did not permit the interviewing of these important people. Insights would surely be gained in this avenue.

3. There were over 320 typed pages of notes from the interviews. While major themes were identified, each interview included nuances related to each individual’s story. This summary report cannot give enough of the complexity of each person’s experience of church planting.

4. There have been several Covenant church plants that have closed. I was only given names of two planters from church plants that closed or would be considered “unsuccessful.” Since part of this project was to discover what was not working in Covenant church planting, it would be a new avenue of research to talk more with the planters, staff, and lay leaders of churches that did not make it.

5. I was not able to look at any denomination-wide numbers to see how many church plants, and in which Conferences, have started or closed over the last ten to fifteen years. While this project is not statistical in nature, this would have provided a great overview of Covenant church planting.
Summary of the Findings

It is harder to plant now, and planters need more support behind them to get the seed into the hard soil. The right planters need to be found, new models are needed, and planters need more support to grow and achieve success.

Church planters and plants need to be supported. Support has not been consistent, and this has affected the survival and growth rates for church plants. Young churches (years four to ten) need additional support and training, in soul and family care and leadership development, to help them overcome the new challenges in these formative years. This support has been lacking, and many churches have closed during these years.

“Supporting leadership” means providing support for church planting leaders and leadership that itself is supportive. Church planters, especially as the church grows, need to provide supporting leadership to the leaders in their churches. The Directors of Church Planting (DCPs) need to provide or oversee supporting leadership to the planters. The DCPs also need supporting leadership from the national level.

Five main categories of support were sought by church planters:

- **The Power of God.** A deep connection to the Lord through prayer and study roots leaders worth and identity in Christ and allows his power to flow through them and prevents an over-reliance on technique.

- **Vision Refilled.** A clear and compelling vision helps leaders see how they fit into the larger picture. It is motivating and inspiring.

- **Initiating Relationships and Care.** Leaders need proactive calling, networking, and relationships. They want to be called and pursued. Leading in the world of church planting takes a toll.
• **Problem-Solving and Training.** Leaders need to be able to call someone, and get a quick response, when they have questions. Training develops leaders and sets expectations for the movement.

• **Administration and Systems.** The more systems and administrative work done at the support level, the more a leader can focus on his or her primary ministry.

  Supporting leadership communicates a clear and compelling vision, initiates relationships and care, provides strong coaching, networking, and training, and offers helpful and consistent systems. Supporting leadership allows the Covenant church planting movement, with the right leaders, to grow and thrive. Only with supporting leadership will church plants become successful: healthy, missional churches that are sustainable—reaching people with Jesus, transforming communities, and participating in a church planting movement that seeks to fulfill the mission at home.

  Success in planting is defined as a healthy, missional church that is sustainable. Only a sustainable church will have a lasting community presence, make a long-term discipleship impact, and contribute back into the movement so that more churches can be started. Healthy, missional markers for church plants include evangelism, community involvement, and participation in planting.

  Finding the right planters is the most important factor in church planting success. Pre-assessment and the Assessment Center are crucial in this process because so much depends on the planter. Key qualities given for church planters were: prayer and grit, healthy personal and family care, strategic vision and leadership development, evangelism, community immersion, preaching, and Covenant compatibility. Planters need to align with the Covenant’s definition of church planting success. Planters need to
have a history of successful ministry—this is true for all contexts, especially urban and multiethnic settings.

New models for church planting are emerging, and the Covenant Church is exploring many of them. Once the success in church planting is defined, models can be evaluated to discern how or if they accomplish success. The Covenant is approving many new models, but there is still a perception that only the “old, suburban” model is in use. This is partially because of the lack of different models presented in the training. Planters are aware of the need to contextualize any model into their specific setting; planters also need guidance in choosing and adapting the right model for their situations. This guidance needs to be done by someone who understands and has experience with the model being used. Metrics need to be adapted for the new models—some churches will need far fewer people to be a healthy, missional church that is sustainable; others will need far more. When metrics are not contextualized, planters feel disconnected, misunderstood, and not supported. There need to be metrics for community involvement. Reports need to be streamlined, read, and responded to by those who are supervising. New funding and metrics (benchmarks) are needed to match the new models. Many planters want financial support for a longer amount of time. Some are living a bi-vocational calling. Others see the need for more money in their context. Still others see the possibility that their plant will never be self-sustaining, but the movement could still sustain the plant if other metrics are in place.
The Needs of Church Planters and Plants After Birth

The research revealed key needs that planters and plants have after the launch of their churches: the power of God, vision refilled, proactive care, problem solving and prevention, and systematic support. These needs were not suggested but emerged through open-ended questions in interview format. The findings for the last four needs are summarized below, while the findings for the first need will be covered in the next section.

Vision Refilled

Church planters want to be part of something bigger. Church planting is not done in isolation or a vacuum. Vision is best when it is communicated from the top down and has buy in at all levels.

The vision needs to be communicated from the top down. An Executive Minister said, “Last year we closed more churches than we planted. When there is a larger narrative about church planting from the top, then every church can be part of church planting. Church planting is no longer the tip of the spear in the Covenant.” Another denominational leader said, “Twenty years ago, we had a system that was owned by the whole Covenant. The Covenant is at its best when the national, regional, and local levels are all on the same page.” A Superintendent said, “We need to be better about communicating our common mission. Planting needs to be funded. Everybody at all levels should be doing this.” The Covenant’s official mission is “We join God in God's mission to see more disciples, among more populations, in a more caring and just world.” The five priorities are the strategy for living out that mission. All five priorities, said the
Covenant’s former president, can be signature ministries, not just church planting. The dollars will not be equal in all five because the need, to complete the mission, is not equal: “Our denomination values church planting; it is core to our mission in the United States and Canada. To reach this mission field we need to start more churches.”

The role of the national leadership is not just administration; a compelling vision for church planting in a denomination or network needs to be clearly communicated from the top down and bought into at all levels of the movement. A DCP said it is important to set big goals: our denomination would need to plant forty to fifty churches per year to really be growing (the Covenant had fifteen Covenant Agreements in 2015 and the same number in 2016). Starting in 2018, there is a stated goal to plant five hundred churches in ten years. There needs to be vision and funding for church planting across the Conferences. A consistent vision that is valued across the whole movement is the only way to avoid church planting being a “denomination within the denomination,” mentioned by more than one denominational official.

Proactive Care

Newborns need to be nurtured. Support was listed by many of those interviewed, especially the DCPs, as critical to the success of a church plant. “Without support, church plants fail,” said a planter. A denominational church planting leader listed “coaching” and “soul and family care” as two of his six crucial elements for church plants (the other four being “the planter,” “the context of the plant,” “a well-conceived project,” “and spiritual warfare”).

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Church planting success is a healthy, missional, and sustainable church that evangelizes, is involved in its community, and participates in planting. What support is necessary to achieve this success? According to those interviewed, church planters need personal, proactive support, training and collaboration, coaching, and systematic support (administration, finances, etc.). Many also spoke of the need for a church plant to be supported beyond year three—in non-financial ways, to be able to thrive in the “young church” stage of a plant. Others said that perhaps we need fewer church plants with more support and training invested into them.

Church planting is hard on the planter, and many planters feel like they are on their own. “I felt like an island,” said a planter. “Aside from access to my coach, I wasn’t really connected to other planters. It sure felt lonely back then.” Another planter said, “The plant is in your mind almost every waking moment. It is mentally, spiritually, and physically exhausting. There is so much you have to figure out. This sets the planter up to be susceptible to temptation, neglect family and walk with Jesus, and distance themselves from other people.”

Planters want those who support them to take. The care needs to be proactive, with the coach or DCP taking the initiative to contact the planter, and not waiting for the planter to call with a crisis or problem. Also, the supporting person must respond when help is requested. Planters spoke about their frustration in this area: “I asked for help, and it wasn’t there. I got no ongoing training or support, which was promised. I didn’t know what to do next.” “I have only talked with my coach twice in ten months. I know I can call him, but there is no initiation on the coach’s side—and he is being paid.” “I had to make my own connections. Not one person checked in with me—no process, no calling.”
“I was tired of going to conferences and hearing about care, then I would call, and got no calls back.” More than one planter said they appreciated the training, but they wanted more one-on-one support from their DCP. “I was left alone after I signed the agreement.” “I was looking for relational and emotional support, and there was no checking in.” “It was a lot harder to hit the benchmarks than I thought. I appreciate my coach as a person, but he was totally absent.”

A denominational leader said that there needs to be stronger follow-up with plants that do not hit their benchmarks. “Benchmarks need to be measured sooner than one year. And there needs to be stronger follow-up if the benchmarks are not hit.” This was one of the strengths of a former DCP, said more than one person interviewed. If a plant was not hitting benchmarks, they were coached, challenged, and supported.

There also needs to be care for the planters whose plants had to close. “It costs too much when a church plant fails,” said a DCP. “It leaves a hard piece of ground you can’t go back to soon. There is also a loss of esteem and sense of call from the planter.” A church planter said that after he resigned, he received no follow up calls from his DCP or the Department of Ordered Ministry. “I didn’t feel heard or listened to.” Another planter asked, “How can we care for the planters who did not make it?”

Connecting with other planters, and those in the world of church planting, was reported as a big avenue of support for church planters. For some, this is accomplished in a network or cohort of church planters. For others, this is a connection with another Covenant church. “You need someone who is close enough to know what is happening at church, but not so close that they are in the midst of it,” said a planter. Another planter
said, “Connection is very important for church planters. The planters who are connected are thriving; those who are not are struggling.”

Collaboration is also important between the Anglo and Hispanic world, said a couple of church planters: “We need systems and procedures that will allow relationships to be formed, to bridge the gap. Relationships are the key to moving the mission forward.” Female church planters spoke of the struggle to have collegiality: “We are left out of the hanging out times. We are in it together, but not connected in the same way.” “We need to listen to how we speak. It should be ‘you [the planter] and your spouse, not ‘you and your wife’.”

Collegiality is “a big part of what it means to be Covenant,” said a planter. Collegiality was reported as one of the big reasons the Covenant draws in new planters. Multiple people spoke of the value of church planters gathering before Covenant meetings, with the right people in the room. When this was lost, it was harder to bring potential church planters to the event. Another planter said, “I like that the Covenant meetings were required, and it was in writing, so that the church could see it without me having to say it.”

However, other planters said that connecting outside of their context was not high in their priorities. “In a larger church, the community is formed on staff. I am not lonely. But when pastors of larger churches do not attend [denominational] meetings, it is labeled as not caring.” A different church planter focuses on connecting in his town. He said there are too many expectations with Midwinter, Annual Meetings, and monthly meetings: “I want to be united with my city and the pastors here. I do not want to add one more thing to the calendar.”
Problem Solving and Prevention

Church planting brings problems. Many planters are serving as lead pastors for the first time. Most are unprepared for the leadership, administrative, counseling, legal, evangelism, and preaching challenges (to name a few) that come with planting a new church. Planters need help identifying and solving problems; they also need guidance to prevent problems from happening. Unfortunately, many planters felt like they had to solve their problems on their own; they felt isolated. Two main avenues were mentioned for problem solving and prevention: training and coaching. Training happens periodically, when a group of planters gathers to specifically learn new skills needed in church planting. Coaching is an ongoing relationship; in the Covenant it lasts three years, with the frequency of meetings tapering off each year.

For many who were interviewed, training was a positive thing. Planters said: “I came from outside of the Covenant, and the training and coaching were very positive.” “The training has been good. Even the ones I was hesitant to go through—they were worth my time.” “I have gone to two trainings and brought leaders each time. They are really, really helpful. It is great to be encouraged and be with others.” “The training gave me a roadmap, and it helped that I went with others on my team.” “Bringing others allows them to own the experience.” “Training and coaching are good because we can learn from the pathways that others have explored and created. Humility is key. A lot of planters do not have this.”
A church planter in Canada appreciated how the training for Canadian church planters was now in Canada. This helped him better contextualize church planting to his situation. He emphasized, “Canada is a different culture.”

Two concerns were voiced about the training: the model that was presented and the people who were presenting. One planter said, “I threw the packet away. If we have urban planters at the training, we need to have people who have planted urban churches speaking. We still need to be together with those in the suburban context, though, so that we can speak into each other’s contexts and help build bridges for the future.” Another said, “You always have to adjust, but this didn’t fit the urban context, and all of the people leading were white.”

Even outside of the urban context, concern was voiced about the presenters. One planter said that a training presenter did not have much experience, and another was very vocal about political issues on social media: “We need to vet the people who are leading these meetings.” A female church planter said she went to a church planting seminar, hosted by the denomination, that was led by a leader who does not hold to women in ministry. “There are some church planting trainings I can’t go to,” she said.

Every person who mentioned coaching emphasized the importance of one-on-one coaching. “Coaching is so important,” said a church planter, “because you are out there on your own. You also need supervision because many of your ideas are not that good, and need to be checked.” DCPs are working hard to set up coaching networks or cohorts, or to be personally involved in coaching. Planters spoke about the need to have a close connection with their coaches: “I needed mentorship but didn’t get it. My leadership team left. How do I handle this? I had to figure so much out on my own.”
A former national DCP said that the Conference DCPs need to be the primary coaches for the church plants: “Having other people coach didn’t really work out. The coaching training didn’t happen well and some of the coaches weren’t good at coaching. The DCP needs to have personal ownership in the planter doing well.” Other DCPs have set up coaching cohorts or networks, and they have found this approach more effective and able to be scaled up. “There needs to be more coaches,” said a planter. “This used to be my DCP, but now he is so busy.”

While all of those interviewed said that coaching is important, many said that it needs to be improved. “My coaching was so bad, I cut it off,” said one planter. Another said, “I want to be coached by someone who is twelve to thirteen years in, not thirty since they last planted. This is better than one person doing an entire region.” “We need to hold our coaches accountable for taking the initiative,” said another planter. “I had a Korean brother who felt neglected. In his culture, he won’t speak up and seek the elder. This is a problem.” It is also important to have a coach who understands your context. Female planters mentioned the need for experienced female church plant coaches. A Superintendent said, “If the coach is working in a different context, it doesn’t work.”

Planters need to be coached, and the coaches need to be supported. In the same way, the DCPs need to be supported. According to those interviewed, when multiple transitions happened on the denominational church planting level, support broke down for the DCPs and the coaches. More than one DCP spoke about the faltering in the support. “There was a loss of attention to detail, and the structural needs were not met,” said one DCP. Others spoke about the transitions that occurred with DCPs: “When a key DCP moved on, many churches felt like they were parentless. Three years later they are
still struggling.” In another Conference, the DCP had to transition because of family issues. “The church planters felt adrift,” said one planter. “The transition with the DCPs led to a lack of consistency,” said another DCP.

Church planters have to fill out reports, and these can be used for problem solving and prevention. However, planters expressed their frustration and disappointment that the reports seemed inefficient, pointless, and unread. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Put the forms online. “Planters are the worst people to bog down with administrative overload,” said a DCP.
- Have one form for both the Conference and the denomination.
- Share updates among church plants in the same model or situation, for networking, support, and problem solving.
- Inform churches and church plants when a new plant is started in their area.
- Read and respond to the reports. One planter shared the frustration that he had when he asked questions on his reports, month after month, and got no response: “The report was useless. No one was reading it. I never got any feedback.”

Systematic Support

Church planters want personal and emotional support, and they also want systematic support: strong structures, provided by the movement, that allow them to focus on their mission as a church plant. One planter, coming from outside the Covenant, appreciated how the denomination was not rigid, but said, “The structure is a little loose. It felt like the wild west.” He wanted a turnkey solution for database, bank accounts, and
even how to give to the denomination: “Every church planter has to figure this out on their own. That is a lot of wasted time. I want to pass on the work of my wasted time to others.” A denominational leader said there needs to be standards across the whole denomination, and more cohesive administrative structures.

One planter said there is too little tangible return from the denomination for what is paid. He is part of a network that requires 5 percent of the church’s giving. 3 percent pays for the database, video structure, pastors’ gatherings, and more. The other 2 percent goes for new church plants. This planter loves the Covenant but said that the money he gives to the Covenant feels like a tax—too far removed from the ground level of what is happening.

Planters want there to be less paperwork: “There is so much redundancy. It is exhausting. We should maybe have the Superintendents or DCPs go through the process themselves. This would help them see what they are asking the church planters to do.”

Multiple planters asked why they filled out the same information for the Conference and denomination, and why nothing seemed to be online. There was also a desire for a national database.

Legal help and legal templates are needed, and they need to be communicated better. More than one Canadian church planter spoke about the difficulty in registering as a church in Canada. One church has a template that can be used as a model that would be approved by the government, but other planters interviewed did not know about this template when they planted.

Planters want a lot of help with systems and administration. The Northwest Conference was mentioned by many, even those outside the Conference, as doing a great
job in this area. The DCP of this Conference said they do Mission Insight for demographic studies, have a thirty-five-page well-conceived plan, and include six months of financial bookkeeping service. This Conference also takes care of legal work: incorporation and 501(c)3. “We want the planter focused on the people stuff,” he said.

One bi-vocational church planter is a businessman but said he does not want to run business at church; he wants to do ministry. He also said, “Business is harder in a church because there are too many people to answer to.”

One planter wanted a national person to help with church websites. He wanted there to be a basic template that a church plant can use. He also wanted help with lighting and sound. He was given an audio/visual lead from the Conference, but the contact did not have the best prices. He said, “Church planting is hard; you only have so much time. I had to figure out this stuff on my own.” Another planter lamented why there was not a website setup with a list of recommended vendors. “Most church plants are going through the same issues. This seems like it would be a simple service to provide.”

More than one planter mentioned wanting systematic support for finding places to rent and buy as a church: “National Covenant Properties was helpful, but there could be even more help for churches looking to find property.” Another planter spoke about the growth his plant experienced when they found a permanent home. He said, “I would love to see some method for helping churches go from sustainability to the next level. What are the numbers needed to pay for permanent space? A church plant is either going to be a temporary idea or a permanent part of the community.”

Strong systems are needed on the denominational or network level as well. When DCPs cannot count on systematic support from above, they spend time fixing these
problems, rather than supporting church planters and plants. This isolates church planters, 
hurts the success of planters, and slows down the entire movement. The denomination or 
network office need to provide helpful and consistent systems for church planting. A 
denomination leader said, “More work can be done with cohesive administrative 
structures.” People need to know who is responsible for what, and the Conference and 
national stuff needs to be “laced together.” An Executive Minister said the top level of 
the Covenant was frustrating to the DCPs. Phone calls were not returned. DCPs said to 
him, “I have to go around my denominational leader to get my job done.” Another 
Executive Minister said this led to low morale among DCPs: “The DCPs felt they were 
not served well by the office.”

Many national systems were mentioned in the course of the interviews: DCPs and 
Superintendents want guidance on new models. Training and coaching need national 
support and consistency. Networking can be improved so that more people know what is 
happening across the movement. Church planters want computerized reporting and less 
redundancy, as well as website, audio-visual, legal, administrative, and financial support. 
A Superintendent said a lack of systematic and technical support hurts the plants and 
planters. Planters are willing to help each other out, but networking must be facilitated on 
a higher level. A DCP said, “There is no handbook or training for DCPs. There are also 
no standardized reporting, forms, or contracts.”

Consistency is important. “There need to be standards across the board for the 
whole denomination,” said a denominational leader. There is now a standard for the well-
conceived project. The Executive Minister of Develop Leaders, the department that 
oversees credentialing and discipline of clergy, wants more consistency. “Procedures are
in place,” he said, “But too many exceptions are made. Training is done before the Assessment Center, planters are sent to the Assessment Center without their paperwork done, and there is an inconsistent understanding among DCPs about Covenant compatibility and expectations. A negative aspect of so much DCP autonomy is that they tend to do what they feel works for them without necessarily collaborating or checking in.”

However, there should not be too much rigidity to the system. A denominational leader in Canada said “the days of franchising are over.” Accountability is important, but quality assurance is better done on a regional level: “Headquarters has a role to play: helping those who make the decisions, not telling people what the decision should be. If the benchmarks are too hard and fast, a good ministry is axed after one to two years.” A Canadian church planter spoke appreciatively about his Superintendent and DCP “adjusting and bending the rules” to fit the Canadian context: “this made a big difference in church planting.”

**The Power of God: Additional Needs of Young Churches—Years Four to Ten**

Newborns need to be nurtured, and kids need support while they are still young. A lot of the planters who were interviewed spoke about the need for support after appropriations end, after year three. Years four to ten are formative years for young churches, and they need support. Young churches have different challenges, and new ways they need to grow. “There is a high failure rate for churches in years six to ten. We hit a ceiling, and I needed coaching. I asked for help and got nothing. I was emotionally unravelling.”
Many planters are unequipped to face the challenges and make the changes needed in these years. One DCP said he is working on a way to go from “plant” to the Vitality Pathway (a set of ten healthy, missional markers in the denomination) in years seven to ten. One Superintendent said the real question is, “Where is a church plant in year five?”

Church planters need to experience the power of God. While many people interviewed mentioned this need, the planters of young churches strongly emphasized this need. This is the first key need for all planters, which we will explore more in chapter four. Those interviewed talked about the need for God’s power in three key areas: deeper soul care, deeper family care, and leadership growth.

Deeper Soul Care

Surprisingly, few planters (in years one to three) interviewed emphasized the importance of intentional, deep soul care for the church planter. The planters who had made it past year five spoke of the importance of the spiritual life of the planter. They also revealed the intense toll the plant had taken on their souls. Some spoke of battles with pride and how they had to reclaim their humble walk with Jesus. Two pastors mentioned a new intensity of prayer that happened in their lives in this stage of the church plant, as they moved away from doing business or trying to “sell” Christianity: “I was exhausted and running on fumes. I was losing my soul in the process, for the drive to get bigger. Now my goal is to coach people so they will love ministry, have healthy spirituality, and a strong marriage and family life.”

“This is when you realize you are not going to be ‘X’ church,” said one planter, “and you do not need to be. You move beyond just wanting to get people in the room. See the big picture and put in healthy systems and rhythms of rest.” One veteran church
planter said the question is “not just how to get your church started, but where do you want to be in thirty years?”

Many planters spoke of the isolation they felt in these “young church” years. “I was struggling in year seven. It was like no man’s land,” said a planter. “Once appropriations are over in year three, you are on your own,” said another. One planter came from outside the Covenant and described his loneliness in these years. He said, “I wrestled a lot with whether I should continue, honestly. I had a desire at times to be in a more established church. We need to strengthen our support for churches in years three to ten, or a lot of those planters will burn out and leave.”

Another planter said he loved the times early on when he would connect with other planters, but this was absent later, unless he was very intentional about making it happen. He said that he needed support in those years because he was “not in the same situation as churches in years thirty to one hundred.” The support he was offered did not fit his context. Young churches are not quite church plants, and they are not quite established churches; they need unique support and resources to help them mature to a sustaining, healthy, missional church in year ten. A planter affirmed that more initiative is on the planter by the end, “but that is natural and good.” But another planter said, “I just wished I was called more. I was cutoff after year three. Our early growth led them to believe we didn’t need help, and we did. Stick with the support well past when you think you need to.”
Deeper Family Care

Church planters in the “young church” phase also revealed the intense toll that church planting had taken on their families. They frequently mentioned the need to care for family, be emotionally healthy, and have good boundaries. “Church planting is very stressful—especially for the spouse and the kids. I have seen plants fail because the marriage fell apart. The spouse holds it in and then ‘snap’—it is done.” This “snap” often happens in years four to six, when the high-drive, high-stress level of planting has not changed in the planter. Spouses of church planters often put a lot on hold for the first three years. They have their own need for care, support, and attention—which is often not given. Once a planter’s family enters years four to five, the situation has to change, or the marriage will be in trouble. This family stress only intensifies if growth expectations have not been met: a planter may be honestly facing a decision to save the family or the church plant. One planter said, “I had to put in systems of health and be relentless about rest. Family and Sabbath were no longer compromised.” A third said, “This has to start with the planter. Ministry does not have to happen so fast. See the long term. The church can feel the culture of health.”

Leadership Growth

Leading a young church is different than leading a newly birthed church plant. The biggest leader who needs to grow, according to the interviews, is the church planter. Church planters need new skills and training to meet the leadership challenges they will face in years four to ten. “Most churches do not close in years one to three,” said planter. “They close in years four to seven, when a new set of challenges arise, and the planter is
too exhausted to meet them.” Another planter said, “New challenges arrive when a church is three to five years old. Planters hit a wall and do not know what to do.” A different planter described feeling “stuck,” unable to grow past a certain point. He was not in crisis, but he was stuck and needed to grow as a leader: “I needed coaching in this phase. We start lots of churches, but they are small and struggling. The system is not set up to get them into midsize and thriving.” Typically, coaching for church planters ends at year one. The Covenant continues coaching through year three. Beyond that, coaching must be pursued (and sometimes paid for) by the church planter.

One of the challenges is caring for a growing church. “Early on, you are giving so much energy to the needy in the church,” said one planter. “You have to develop second-tier leadership that can cover that care so you can invest in higher capacity people.” Another planter spoke on the importance of growing a healthy staff culture in these years. “You have to ask, ‘Can I let go?’ This season for us was about managing staff and creating a great staff culture so that people loved working at our church.” Others spoke about needing to improve how they worked with others in leadership—what are the right expectations? How can a pastor delegate well? Who are the right people to have on these teams? Planters spoke about needing training for these questions in the “young church” phase.

Those interviewed also talked about the need to transition the leadership model of the church. One called this “moving from benevolent dictator to congregational governance.” He spoke of the need for a “bridge” in this time, and training for how to make the transition. This is a transition of power, and it needs to be handled well. A former Superintendent spoke about the “adolescence” of a young church and the
challenges of transitioning to congregational polity—not just in constitution and bylaws but in the way the planter and other leaders are functioning in the church. The goal is to move from a single-elder model in year one to a fully functioning democratic model in year ten, with decision making spread throughout the church. “Most planters do not know how to make the transition,” he said. “You need a charismatic leader to get the church off the ground, but after two to three years the leader has to ask, ‘How much ownership am I going to share with others?’” If the leadership is not shared, then leaders begin to leave, and the Lead Pastor begins to be known by his or her deficiencies, not gifts. Planters in young churches need training and coaching to overcome these obstacles and become successful, thriving churches.

The Church Planter

If church planting success is a healthy, missional (evangelism, community involvement, participation in planting) church that is sustainable, then what is the biggest indicator that a church plant will be successful? The answer is finding the right church planter.

Finding the Right Planters

“The Covenant will be effective in church planting to the degree we find effective church planters,” said a denominational leader. A planter said, “The planter has the primary role in the church plant. Planting is a long, hard, demoralizing thing. We need to find the right people and make sure they are the right people before they start.” One DCP listed “the right planter” as the first of his four key ingredients, the others being heart for
community, the right core group, and denominational support. A Superintendent said, “Sometimes we have approved planters who were not mature enough, spiritually and vocationally.” Currently, the Covenant finds most of its church planters from outside the denomination. Potential planters are drawn to the denomination or grown within healthy, growing churches. There is a need to “have a burn for the lost and the community,” said one DCP. The Covenant also has several church planting networks that attract many future planters as well as help with pre-assessment. Most planters are not found from seminary. One DCP wished that seminarians would be trained for planting, but another mentioned that he would only plant with someone who had five years of a growing ministry. Multiple DCPs said it is important to look for planters with a proven history of fruitful ministry: “Past performance is the best indicator of future success.”

Assessing Potential Planters

It is not enough to find potential planters; they need to be assessed to discern if they are the right planter. Is the potential planter called to plant a church, with the Covenant, in his or her context, at this time? “The single most important thing is finding the right individual. The key is to be picky,” said one DCP. “We have approved too many people,” said another. “Just because someone is called and gifted doesn’t mean they are called and gifted for planting.”

The DCPs spoke of the need to be personally involved in vetting or pre-assessing potential planters. A Superintendent said there needs to be some sort of apprenticeship or residency; the DCP needs to see the potential planter in action. One DCP said that meeting with the Launch Team is part of his process: “Who are you planting WITH? This
is a very important question.” Even as church planting networks grow, the role of the Conference DCP is still crucial, especially in the areas of theology vetting and Covenant compatibility. “Covenant compatibility has to be in the pre-assessment phase,” said a denominational leader. “The DCPs are critical to doing this well.”

The Assessment Center itself was highly praised by those interviewed. “This is one of the most valuable tools of the Covenant,” said a planter. It is important that the planter and his or her spouse go through the Assessment Center together. The scenarios and tests are good, as well as making connections with other ministry couples. Even the food was praised. “The Assessment Center was intense but I think that’s really important to convey the rigorous nature of church planting,” said a planter. Another planter said, “The question is ‘Are you a planter at this time?’ The question should be ‘Are you the planter in this context at this time?’” The ministry has to fit the context, and the context should be part of the assessment.

Past fruitfulness in ministry is essential. “The best indicator of future performance is past behavior,” said several DCPs. They are looking for people with experience in growing things and doing evangelism. Glenn Peterson called the process “science and gut.” It is more than just size; it is also about character, he said. He is also looking for capacity, which is not the same as competency. A list of key qualities that were mentioned in the interviews is below.

Key Qualities for Church Planters

Finding the right planters is the most important factor to the success of a church plant. Those interviewed reported several key qualities for church planters, including
prayer and grit, healthy personal and family care, strategic vision and leadership
development, evangelism, community immersion, preaching, denominational
compatibility and education. Selections from the interviews are given below.

**Prayer and Grit**

“This is spiritual warfare,” said a DCP. “Satan is out to decimate any Kingdom work.” Planters need to be faithful prayer warriors who know how to raise up others to join them in prayer. This may be a church planting event that is just prayer. This may mean replacing your desk with a prayer kneeler, as one church planter did. Humility is key, said a planter, even though being entrepreneurial and humble do not always go together. “Not everyone is cut out to be a church planter,” said one planter. “You are constantly living on the edge of failure. You have to have thick skin.” Another said, “You have to be persistent to be in the community and build new relationships. This takes time, you need to be willing to stick with it. There will be unfruitful seasons.”

**Healthy Personal and Family Care**

“Our biggest problem is that we [pastors] want people to spiritually lust after us, to seek us for conferences, counseling, numbers,” said a planter. When the pastor is healthy, the church will be healthy. This planter has moved Emotionally Healthy Spirituality to the center of his church and has seen growth. He would like it to be part of the Assessment Center. Another planter said the unhealth of the planter is the number one reason why church plants struggle: “Overwork is killing us. Hubris is killing us. We are not dealing with our issues, and yet we are caring for others.” A Superintendent said that
pastors do not care for themselves and their own souls, and then they do not know how to care for others. “Once you lose your relational credit,” said a planter, “it is tough to get it back.” Church planting is very stressful, and this stress is often absorbed by the family of the planter. “In many ways, church planting is harder on the spouse, which makes it harder on the planter,” said one church planter. Family is important in church planting, and we need to invest more in families and check in more on how families are doing. “Sometimes the family gets sacrificed in the three-year window of church planting,” said a Superintendent. Other planters spoke appreciatively for the care their family has received from the Covenant.

**Strategic Vision and Leadership Development**

The church planter needs to have a strong and clear vision. “The vision should be so compelling that people want to get on board,” said a DCP. Some of those interviewed talked about the “apostolic gift”—the ability to gather people and start new things. “There will be competing agendas, and a planter needs to know how to deal with this conflict,” said a planter. The planter must be able to think strategically about his or her vision. In Covenant church planting this is often called “a well-conceived plan.” Strategic planning is a big part of planting in the Covenant. “Good systems are needed and helpful,” said a planter. “Church plants that have strong systems are thriving.” A Superintendent said there are eight systems of a disciple-making church: outreach, Sunday morning, Connection, Ministry Structure, Leadership Development, Stewardship, and Care. Most pastors, he said, can only do four well—which means the pastor will have to delegate so that all eight are done well.
Leadership development is a critical factor in the success of a church plant. This means the church planter needs to be able to gather high caliber people, develop them, and trust their leadership. It also means the planter must be able to continue to grow this group of leaders as the church grows and the mission expands. Planters need to be good at developing leaders. “A lot is on the main person,” said another planter. “And the pastor has to change from being the hub of the church. The pastor has to get past some of his or her leadership gaps.” One planter said he could not have made it without his “dream team” of core leaders. Another pointed to his lack of administrative abilities and his gratitude for leaders around him who are strongly gifted in administration. Others spoke about care, and how groups are crucial in caring for the whole church. “Otherwise the church will be limited to sixty people, a ‘big small group’, ” said a Superintendent. A planter said, “We need people who are all-in and can share the emotional load with the planter. It is almost a team of church planters.” “Very few planters are clear in their thinking and systematic about their leadership development,” said a former national DCP.

Evangelism

Church planting is an evangelism endeavor. No one who was interviewed, including smaller church plants or those with more of a missionary/incarnational model, spoke against the need for evangelism. In fact, many spoke strongly about the need and priority for evangelism in church planting. “Church planting is about evangelism. Only go for the evangelists. We need to clarify why we are starting churches,” said a planter. “Church plants need to have a system for doing evangelism and helping new converts grow,” said another. A denominational leader said that we need to call people to
commitment, to making decisions. “It is not just about process.” He also said everyone on staff should have a clear conversion story because this sets the direction of the church. The planter must be personally involved in evangelism. A DCP said, “a church planter has to be passionate, personally, at reaching lost people and working hard to do it.” More than one DCP spoke about “gathering capacity” as a key quality they were looking for in a planter. “If a church plant is not making it, it is because we have the wrong planter, and they are not doing the work of evangelism,” said one DCP. Planters talked a lot about how they have done the work of evangelism, personally. One planter said, “In the early days, I would meet with anyone and do anything to get someone connected and involved. A planter has to be able to rally strangers, to generate interest and excitement.”

**Community Immersion**

Church planters have a heart for their communities. Planters emphasized this point in many ways: “We need to be the church in the community around us.” “You need to be in the community. Early on we attended every community event that happened.” “Where you went to junior high is where your identity is formed, and that is where you should plant.” “Demographic studies are very important. There has to be a specific need that no one else is meeting. Once you identify this, then you know why you exist.” The planter needs to understand, personally, the community and have a passion for it. The Superintendent of Alaska said it is helpful to identify planters within the state who already understand the Alaskan context and are not just moving to Alaska for the adventure. A DCP said many plants have closed because the planters moved where they did not have networks—because it is where they wanted the mission field to be. Urban
planters in particular spoke about the many church plants they have seen closed because someone tried to do urban church planting without understanding the specific context—not just of urban church planting but of the specific neighborhood in which they were planting.

**Preaching**

Planters need to be good communicators. One DCP said, “Proclamation is a huge part of evangelism. If you do not have strong public ministry gifts, then you probably won’t be strong in planting.” Another DCP did not list preaching as the highest gift: “The person needs to be a B to B+, as a minimum, if their other gifts overtake it.” Preaching is important in a church plant because it sets the biblical direction and clarifies the vision of the church. A planter said, “Good preaching is important—telling people their identity in Christ. This shatters the myths that people have by sharing what is happening and what is being proclaimed.” “You have to be unashamed about generosity,” said another planter, “and share stories about how God is working through giving.” Another planter said that planters need to constantly be growing as preachers and need to get feedback on the sermon before Sunday. “Preaching is one of the key catalysts to growth,” he said, “and we need to be sharing our pain from the front. You have to share your sins and redemption up front. That is the only way to reach unchurched people. Pain does not discriminate.”
Denominational Compatibility and Education

The Covenant is not just looking for people who want to start churches, but for people who want to start Covenant churches, to be part of the larger movement. This includes theological alignment, missional values, and financial support. “We need theological consistency as we grow,” said one planter. “This is not a lone wolf movement, which is common in church planting,” said a DCP. Another DCP said it is the job of the DCP to orient people into the Covenant. “The magic bullet is time between the Assessment Center and appropriations beginning.” Even for those who align with the Covenant theologically, there is often dissonance in values. “There are two Covenants,” said one planter, using a phrase mentioned by others. “There is an old guarded group and then the church plants and adoptees. There is a vastly different degree of value placed on the church as institution between generations. Christendom is dead; the old guard may not realize that yet. The growth and strength of the Covenant is through adoption and planting.”

Since most church planters come from outside of the Covenant, they are required to go through a credentialing, and sometimes a degree, process. A DCP said all of this work, in the early stage of a church plant, is “undermining the success and thriving of the church plants. It measurably harms the plants.” He also added the other Covenant requirements for new planters, including pastor’s retreat, annual meeting (local and national), COMS (Committee on Ministerial Standing) interviews, Midwinter Conference, classwork, and Orientation. This loads up church planters, who are generally not administrative, with a lot of administrative minutiae. All of this time also pulls them away from their local context and ministry in the church plant. Other denominational
leaders spoke of the tension in any organization between the entrepreneurial and institutional wings.

There were different opinions among those interviewed about the importance of education for church planting. A DCP said education is good, but it is not what makes a plant successful: it is about finding the right person who can gather and develop others. Others spoke of the importance of education for clergy and church planting. The dean of the seminary said of the thirty largest churches, twenty-seven have an M.Div. “Education is still important in the next generation. There is a gap between theology and science that the church has neglected. Pastors need to be able to dialogue about bioethics and the environment and other subjects. Millennials want to hear this.” One planter said he started seminary in 2009 and will not finish until 2017: he found his classes to be relevant to his church work, he grew his connection with the denomination, and schooling enhanced his ministry and gave him new ideas. Another planter came into the Covenant ordained in another denomination. He said it was good to be around other Covenant people, and that made it worth it.

**Models, Metrics, and Money**

Once church planting success has been defined and agreed upon (and the research above shows that it is, for most in the planting world), the next question is: which models can be used to achieve this success? Which models are working in this new, harder context for planting? Different models can be used to achieve the success of a sustainable, healthy, and missional church plant. The need for new models was repeated
frequently in the interviews. Once new, successful models are identified, it is also important to have contextual metrics for them, and to fund them appropriately.

Exploring and Contextualizing New Models

The Covenant is discovering new models that can achieve success in church planting. Denominational leaders and planters reported having looked at the models of Acts 29, Vineyard, and World Impact (with TUMI: The Urban Mission Institute), as well as come up with their own models. The definition of parenting is being expanded to include multiple churches, and planting networks are being formed on the local level. Most of all, planters are living out new models with the support of their DCPs. The desire is for these successful new models to be communicated on a larger scale. Superintendents wished that there were examples of new models from the national office. The Conferences are trying new models, but they want help and support on the national level. Once the models have been shown to work, they need to be communicated to all the Conferences. This would also include new understanding about assessment, funding, metrics, and support.

No matter what model is used or adapted, contextualization is needed. Planters spoke of “exegeting a location,” understanding that what worked in one location (even in the same dynamics such as urban, suburban, or rural) will not necessarily work in another context. A Superintendent said it is OK for the Covenant to have a “center stream” in church planting, knowing which model we do best. “But we need other models as well.” Many planters (and urban planters in particular) outside this center stream struggled with the training times. One said, “It was good material for that context, but I often found
myself saying, ‘Hmm, that's not quite my reality.’ We were coming from a more organic, urban, multi-ethnic, non-linear way of doing church and ministry.” The DCP in Alaska wanted to see different models that will work better in an Alaskan context, such as bi-vocational planters, team pastoring, and the parish model. Many of the Canadian planters lamented that the American model carries the weight of so many cultural assumptions that are not true in Canada, and these burden the new plant. Below is a list of comments made in the interviews about various models.

**Modified Suburban**

Parts of the “old suburban” model are working, according to many planters. A denominational leader echoed this thought: “Do not throw it all out. Take the best from [the model] and innovate around what the best practices look like.” More than one church planter noted that what they appreciated was the flexibility of the Covenant and their DCPs to adapt the model to their context. “There is a good balance between structure and freedom.” Several of those interviewed appreciated the suburban model and the training they received on the model. It fit their leadership style and their context. Some of these churches grew to sustainability, with attendance at 150-250 people. Others experienced larger growth, into the 400-1200 range. Most of these have planted other churches or started church planting networks. From almost all of those interviewed in these sustainable churches, there was a desire for support and coaching beyond year three. Some Covenant churches have a model that launches large and grows even larger. According to a Superintendent, Bayside Church (in Sacramento) launches with three hundred people, a strong leadership team, and lots of resources devoted to the success of
the new church. “The coaches are actually doing ministry, including Ray [Johnston, the lead pastor].” Another Superintendent pointed to Life.Church and said that the Covenant can learn from what they are doing. “Life.Church satellites have a thousand people after a year, and young people are flocking to work at their churches. What about the strategy of Life.Church is transferable to Covenant church planting?”

Rural

“Church planting is like jumping out of an airplane and trying to build another one before you hit the ground.” This quote came from a rural church planter who felt like he was given only one tool—a model that was not made for a rural context. He was not shown any rural models that are working and had to figure a lot out on his own. Rural planters need training for their context, and they also need to have the right expectations. There are poverty issues involved in a rural context, said one planter, and rural planters need to be trained to address them. Frugality is critical, and you must make due. “It is a long and slow process; you need to be realistic about the growth.” 120 people in three years is one-tenth of the town, this is not realistic, said this planter. He added that rural church plants can grow, it just takes time. All the rural church planters interviewed valued rural church planting: “Rural planting is important, and we need to find a way to make this attractive.”

Urban

Cities are growing and youth are moving out of small towns and into cities. A Canadian church planter said that one third of the population of Canada lives in Ontario.
One Superintendent said that there is a different model needed in the urban context. More than one urban church planter appreciated the support of their DCP but felt like the advice they received did not fit their context. Another urban planter said, “The Covenant is ahead of others on this but is not realistic about the costs.” Plants in New York City are raising $1.5 million to start; the Covenant is raising $180,000 and then asking for 10 percent back. “That money gets vaporized too quickly. It doesn’t have to be a million dollars, but we need to be thinking more in the $250 thousand range,” he said. Quite a few urban planters mentioned that sustainability was not achieved at 150 or 200 people; more people are needed to be sustainable, “and by that point you need more staff.” Urban planters are finding new models and adaptations to achieve success—asking for more money, fund raising, grant writing, being bi-vocational from the beginning, having longer funding (five years), and forming partnerships with ministries that own property. “Those who live in the city need grit and agility,” said one planter. Housing and family are the hardest obstacles to overcome to have long-term, sustainable life in the city. Another added that idealistic planters are moving into the city and then hit with the hard reality of urban life. He added that systems are vital to the sustainability of an urban church plant.

Small or House Churches

One Superintendent said, “The future might be more expressions that are smaller. Large might become the anomaly. Millennials might want the smaller.” Another would like to see a national model for house church development; we need resources for this. Church planters who have a vision for “missional communities” appreciated that their DCPs were willing to allow their different model. Small or house church planters do have
a vision to grow. A planter said, “Success is communities multiplying and disciples multiplying.” “We are not a Sunday-centric model; we are calling it discipleship-centric,” said another church planter. He did not launch large. He started with a small group of people in an intensive discipleship environment—equipped explicitly to multiply, with a five to ten year arc. His church has seventy-five people at their “gathering” Sunday services. Another planter said the number of people needed for sustainability is lower than in a typical church plant: “We have a lower overhead because we only do gatherings twice a month. All of our giving is done electronically, too.” This planter said the biggest need is for coaching or cohort; he joined a cohort with the V3 Church Planting movement to connect with other pastors in a similar model. All of those interviewed emphasized the importance of discipleship and in practically engaging with their neighborhoods: “We want to follow the command of Christ by loving our actual neighbors.”

The Canadian Context

Canada is not a “model” of church planting, but it is unique. “Canada is a distinct culture. This needs to be taken into account. Church planting looks different here,” said the DCP of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) of Canada. Those interviewed from Canada emphasized this sentiment: “The numbers are too American. It is better to have milestones than fixed dates [to hit the benchmarks].” “Evangelism is much harder and slower in a Canadian context. You have to build so much more trust before someone will come to church.” Those planting in Canada reported that serving and generosity has helped grow this trust: “You need to become visible in the community and build relationships—it takes time. There will be unfruitful seasons; you need to be willing to
stick with it.” There are also distinct legal challenges in Canada. Non-profit status is much harder to get in Canada—each church must be approved individually. Many of the Canadian planters were frustrated at how much time they had to spend on business and legal matters. One even had to hire a lawyer at a cost of $12,000. These challenges took time and money away from ministry. The desire was for more help in these areas from the Covenant of Canada or the denomination. Canada also has a geographical challenge. Canada is big, and the churches are spread out from each other. One planter said, “There is a much higher chance of ‘parachuting’ [planting without a parenting church or local partnering church], but the Covenant is not open to that. This means in Canada there are places we will never go.” Parachuting may need to be an option, said this planter, or we need to find the right person who is already in the area.

**Ethnic Plants**

Planters and denomination leaders spoke about the need to contextualize the model or find new models to reach specific ethnic groups. A Korean church planter is reaching first generation Koreans, and he has a goal to reach the second generation. The Superintendent of Canada dreams about doing French ministry in Montreal. African-American church planters said that the Covenant is doing pretty well in listening and helping form peer connections for coaching and support. One appreciated how the Covenant is good on mercy and justice issues. Hispanic plants were a big emphasis for many of those interviewed. “This is a historical movement of people, with immigration into our country,” said one Superintendent. “The manuals need to be re-written, not just translated,” said a DCP. A denominational leader added, “Indigenous movements have to
be led by indigenous leaders.” One of the planters interviewed envisioned a paid position for a Hispanic DCP on the national level, working with the national DCP: “If we did that, we would see churches start to multiply.”

A Latino church planter wants to see greater collaboration between the Anglo and Hispanic world: “We say we are in it together, but we are not quite there; we need to bridge that gap.” We need systems and procedures that will allow relationships to be formed. As in all church plants, money is part of the need, but it is not as important as the support that comes from the relationships. A church planter said sustainability is not 200 people: “Take the average income of Hispanics in the area. That gives you a better metric of what it takes to be self-sufficient.” Another planter emphasized the need to train planters to train everyone in their core group to do the ministry: “Everyone has a gift and everyone is at work.” Other Hispanic planters emphasized the need to reach the whole family, especially the second and third generations. “Plant churches that will last generations. This is a good message for all churches.” This will mean finding ways of doing Hispanic ministry to those who do not speak Spanish. “Very few Hispanic churches are doing this well. When the first generation dies, the church dies,” said one planter.

**Female Planters**

“We need more women planting churches,” said one female church planter, “but it will be a different model for women who lead—like apples and oranges. That needs to be realized, and action needs to be taken.” We need to find more female church planters. One female planter said, “It didn’t seem like an open reality that women could plant a
church.” Another female planter said that even at the Assessment Center, she had to keep explaining that she, not her husband, was the planter. Others said that the Covenant is good in empowering and supporting female clergy, and they expressed their appreciation for Covenant Clergy Women. Female planters need leadership and training from other female planters. “The church planting world is very male. This has an impact on the church planting culture,” said a denominational leader. A planter said that the verbiage must change: there is too much “husband and spouse” and “he” references in the training. She added that a female planter needs to be at the training: “Confrontation is different. Personal space is different. How that is trained and talked about, as a pastor, is different. This need to be addressed.” She echoed the importance of having other female church planters and leaders in her life.

The Significance of Metrics

New models are being explored, and contextualization is happening in Covenant church planting, but the metrics—and especially the reports—have not been changed. More than one church planter appreciated how their DCP approved the vision for a smaller or missional church plant—even with less funding or funding spread out for a longer amount of time. They also expressed their frustration about the reports that they turned in because the report of the metrics had not been contextualized to their model or situation.

If success in planting is a church that is healthy, missional, and sustainable (evangelism, community involvement, participation in planting), then what are the numerical metrics that show this is happening? There is a desire to report more than
attendance, conversions, and income. Community involvement is critical to the definition of church planting success. This needs to be a metric: it needs to be measured, reported, and have accountability. A house church planter said, “Our success is that communities are multiplying and disciples are multiplying.” “The younger generation is not impressed by the same measures of success,” said a denominational leader.

Numbers are important, especially in church planting. The church planting world does not shy away from metrics, and those interviewed had no problem sharing their thoughts about numbers. A DCP said, “You have to quickly get to seventy [attenders] to achieve crowd dynamics. This creates momentum. You have to get over 120 or you will never be self-supporting. You have to get over 200 or more, or you will never be able to have a multi-staff church who can do ministry well.” Another DCP said, “If a church doesn’t get past thirty-five to fifty early on, it is very difficult to get past that inertia and move forward. Most stay under seventy-five.” “The longer a church is under one hundred, the harder it is to get over one hundred,” said a denominational leader.

Church planters shared their frustrations with the metrics. One planter reported being in a church of seventy-five that was in a small town: “The metrics were pushed on us by the denomination. Even though we were in a small town, making budget, paying Covenant dues, and reaching into the community, it was seen as bad that we were seventy-five. This caused my leaders to question me as a pastor.” One planter had a friend cut because he did not make the metrics: “He was doing a house church model and was bi-vocational. He didn’t want the denomination’s money, just their approval.”
Funding for Success

If church planting success is a healthy, missional church that is sustainable, then what funding needs to be in place for this goal? If new models are being used, what metrics and benchmarks should be applied to them?

Whenever funding came up, one of the most repeated phrases by planters was, “Funding is good.” Planters immensely appreciated the financial help. “I love being part of a denomination that values church planting. The financial support was so vital.” “Church planting is hard,” said another planter, “if you add the fundraising on top of that, you lose your emotional [reserve] before you even get started. You are starting with struggle, not hope, and this hurts your momentum.” This planter did see some value in raising money, though, because it gives ownership and weeds out those who are not totally committed to planting. A Canadian planter, though, said that gathering thirty people and $30,000 would never work in Canada—his church plant had thirty people for the first two years.

Still, many of the DCPs and Superintendents see the value in having the planter raise part of the money before they start. A DCP said that money follows vision, and that the Conferences have to find ways of raising money for church planting. A planter said that denominational funding is good, but it can also make a church overly dependent on outside funding, and not pay attention to how God is calling them to generate resources on their own.

Planters and denominational leaders asked if the funding model created a financial structure and burden on the plant and planter. “Are we growing into a structure we can’t maintain?” asked a planter. One Superintendent said, “It is irresponsible for us
to set up a system that cannot be sustained in year four.” Another Superintendent is working with urban planters to write grants and find new funding streams, saying, “Give more non-financial support. Participate in what God is doing. Do not let money be the reason you say ‘no’.”

Just as those interviewed had new models for church planting, they also had new ideas for funding the models to success. The feedback can be grouped into five categories: length of support; bi-vocational and team planting; parenting, partnering, and planting networks; larger investments; and missionary plants.

Length of Support

There was consensus that the Covenant needs to allow for a funding a church plant over a longer term. “Most church plants need money after year three.” “The Covenant needs a five-year model, not a three-year one.” “We need to keep rethinking the five-year model.” More than one planter spoke about fundraising (above appropriations) to help the plant become sustainable. When DCPs and Superintendents spoke about lengthening the time for support, this meant taking the same amount of money ($150,000 for example) and stretching it over four or five years. Urban and rural church planters, in particular, emphasized the need for longer funding and higher attendance to be a sustaining church. “It is harder to get to 125 in [under-resourced] areas, and they need higher numbers to be self-sustaining. It could be 300-400 people,” said one urban church planter.
Bi-Vocational and Team Planting

Many of the planters interviewed, who had gone from full-time to part-time, talked a lot about overcoming the sense of failure that they experienced. It would have been better to begin as bi-vocational. “Train people to be bi-vocational,” said a church planter. “Teach trades to those who want to go this route, and use the business to build relationships and serve the community.” Another planter said, “Bi-vocational is a good route to go. But the choice of the second job is critical: it must serve the ministry and help the pastor build new relationships to grow the church.” A Latino planter advocated the bi-vocational model, saying, “A church would need to be 250 people to pay for a full-time pastor, and by then you would need two Associates.” An urban planter said, “Most urban pastors will have to be bi-vocational long term. It would be better to begin this way.”

Planting as a team also needs to be explored more. One planter started his church as a bi-vocational pastor—with seven others. “It helped a lot. It spread the work. I could not have made it if we had not started as a team.” When his church grew, he continued to be part-time, and two others on staff became full-time, based on the needs of the church. Other planters also mentioned the benefit of planting as a team, even with three full-time planters, though this would mean fundraising more and that the church would have to be larger to be sustainable.

Parenting, Partnering, and Planting Networks

Planters and denominational leaders still want to plant out of parented churches. “Well parented plants are way more successful,” said one planter. “A parented church,
where you can hang out and do life together, helps more than a coach or DCP,” said another. “You need someone who is close enough to know what is happening at church, but not so close they are in the midst of it.” Another planter said parenting is helpful if the parenting church is healthy: “We inherit the health or unhealth of our parent.”

Parenting is preferred, but “there are fewer parenting churches now.” Most church plants do not plant other churches, he said, but it can happen in partnerships. One DCP’s vision is for the Conference to do the work together. Their line is “We plant churches together,” and they take time at their Conference Annual Meeting to show the fruit of church planting. He sees the partnerships growing, with established churches getting excited about what they can contribute to new church plants.

Planting networks were also highlighted. Bayside and Life.Church were mentioned as ways of starting new churches in a network. Many other planting networks were mentioned: Hope Church Network in New York, Sanctuary Network in Rhode Island, and LifeChurch in Michigan. The Latino churches in the Pacific Southwest Conference function as a planting network, with CHET and a Latino Assessment Center being a part of the process. Another network is the Highrock Family of Churches, in the Boston area. “A family of churches is fantastic—especially in an urban setting,” said the Highrock Network leader. Early on, they explored the multisite option, but liked the idea of an independent, autonomous family of churches.

Network planters reported needing less coaching from the Conference DCP because they had a network of support around them. But giving to the Covenant was a reported concern. Most networks require a portion of giving to go back into the movement of the network. One network leader was frustrated that so much of a new
church’s money went to the Covenant, where it seemed “so far removed…it feels like a tax. If the people on the ground could feel the return tangibly, it would make a big difference.”

**Larger Investments**

The comments from those interviewed about larger investments have already been reported above in the “Models, metrics, and money” section, under “Modified Suburban” and “Urban” church planting models. This is a funding strategy that was reported as a model to reach church planting success. One planter spoke about the need for larger, “resource churches” that would fund smaller churches. He pointed to the Hispanic movement in his Conference and said that they need to be funded from larger churches. “This needs to be a vision from the Conference that is caught by the planters.” He said these churches could be funded larger to begin, with the vision to fund many smaller churches moving forward.

**Missionary Plants**

“There are plants that will never be self-sustaining,” said one planter. “They are missionaries. We need to find ways to fund according to the vision.” A denominational leader said that 80 percent of churches need to be self-sustaining, and then there can be a few that need more help. While they would not, individually, be sustainable, the movement would be sustainable (and therefore successful). A Superintendent said, “Some of our plants will be part plant, part mission. They will never be self-sustaining.”
PART TWO

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUPPORT NEEDED BY CHURCH PLANTERS
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW:
RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING NEWBORN AND YOUNG CHURCHES

This chapter reviews key literature for supporting church plants and planters, who need unique care. The chapter begins by reviewing the challenges facing current church planters. Stefan Paas reviews the history of church planting in Europe, examining why modern church planting efforts have not succeeded. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile examine the history of church planting in America, showing that there is a great unravelling in American society which greatly affects churches, church planting, and pastors. These challenges are keenly felt by church planters, who are seeking to find new ways to reach people. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im highlight the importance of planting missional churches; they also share many insights about the inner struggles that church planters face. Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson suggest pastors build a strong “immune system” of support; this system must be built into a church plant from the beginning. Dino Senesi and Lawrence Miller give practical ways that planters need to be supported. Senesi covers coaching, and Miller describes the changes that happen in an organization as it grows and matures.
The Increasing Challenge of Planting New Churches

Church planting is becoming increasingly difficult. Church planters are facing new obstacles as global culture becomes more secularized and Western culture becomes more post-Christian. Stefan Paas investigated church planting in Europe and described it “like laying out a garden in hard soil and an arid climate.” Paas uses the word “secular” to mean “not religious,” characterized by low and decreasing levels of church attendance, though formal membership may be high. Apart from church formation among immigrants, church planting in secular settings is difficult.¹ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, in their Participating in God’s Mission, contend that the foundations of faith have been unraveled in America. Therefore, the church in America can no longer change to fit the context but must realize and participate in God’s mission work in this context while maintaining Christian identity.²

Both books emphasize the importance and primacy of evangelism as well as understanding the context and culture in which any evangelistic work is being done. Paas advocates repeatedly that church planting is the result of evangelism, not the goal of evangelism.³ Evangelization is about the message of Jesus Christ. The “strategy” of the apostles was to proclaim this message; church formation was a result of the

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¹ Stefan Paas, Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 1, 5.

² Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

³ Paas, Secular West, 246.
proclamation—not the primary strategy of the disciples. Evangelism is commanded in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8); church planting is not. Paas believes that the distinction has been blurred, mistakenly elevating church planting to the level of evangelism, or equating the two. This blurring has resulted in unhelpful church planting strategies being applied into the secular European context with little evangelistic success. Paas still believes in church planting; indeed, the final chapter is titled, “In Defense of Church Planting.” He even writes that “the most natural consequence of successful evangelism, it seems, is the formation of a new community.” Church planting can be theologically justified, even in areas where churches already exist, due to reasons of theological orthodoxy and the expansion of mission. What he is advocating is a deeper level of theological reflection for church planting in a particular context. Evangelism and church planting are not the same thing. A justification for church planting cannot stand on pragmatic reasons alone but must be based on theological arguments.

Van Gelder and Zscheile write that God is missionary by nature; his mission is lived out in different contexts. The church does not have a mission; God’s mission has a

4 The language of church planting has roots in the New Testament, though Paas objects that 1 Cor 3:5-7 is not about “watering” the church plant but the message of the gospel.

5 Paas, Secular West, 245-247. Based on Romans 15:20, Paas believes that church planting is not a biblical mandate in an area that has already been evangelized.

6 Ibid., 261, emphasis original. This quote comes in a paragraph discussing Alpha, Christianity Explored, and Emmaus—courses designed to call people back to Christianity. These groups found that few of the people who attended the classes began to attend a local church. Rather, they preferred to remain connected with the group where they started.

7 Ibid., 256-265.
It is not the church plant’s (or planter’s) job to create a mission but to participate in God’s ongoing mission in any given context, and this will include evangelism. The right contextualization is key—it should be informed by the church’s rich heritage and the present contextual realities. “The challenge for the church is to bring the gospel into diverse contexts and allow for the leading and teaching of the Spirit to give birth to organizational forms that are informed by both the historical Christian faith and the realities of the context in which the church is taking root.”

Instead of how church can remake itself or recover a lost past, start by asking what God is up to in the local context.

Church planting and evangelism are increasingly difficult because the context is constantly changing. The nation has found itself divided into “micro-tribes,” fueled by the rise of social media. Van Gelder and Zscheile see a “Great Unravelling” that has happened in the United States, comprised of six elements: the changing composition of the U.S. population, the changing family makeup and economic realities, changing patterns in types of congregations (from neighborhood to attraction to megachurch), a changing (declining) number of adherents, a decline in white Christian America, a changing global context—the center of Christianity is moving to the global south.

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8 Van Gelder and Zscheile, Participating, Loc. 953, 3665.

9 Ibid., Loc. 1291-1293. See also locations 978, 1160.

10 Ibid., Loc. 1325.

11 Ibid., Loc. 520.

12 Ibid., Loc. 696.
church does not hold a privileged position in the West, as it had in the recent past. The church must adopt a missionary mindset *within* the United States and see itself as in a minority position.\(^\text{13}\)

Both books give a historical overview of church planting of their contexts to illustrate the increasing challenges of evangelism in a changing context. The authors, while critical of much of the church planting work done recently, are still in favor of church planting as a result of evangelism. Paas gives an overview of church planting in Europe; Van Gelder and Zscheile give an overview of planting in the United States.

As he surveys church planting in Europe, Paas identifies three paradigms that have been used for church planting: the Classic Paradigm, the Modern Evangelical Paradigm, and the Late-Modern Evangelical Paradigm. In the medieval period, the church and state were one; therefore, conquest and church planting went hand in hand. As new lands were conquered, a pattern of church planting emerged: proclamation, gathering, and planting. Planting in this context was the formation of an institutional church to shepherd and instruct the Christians who had been converted.\(^\text{14}\) It is important to note the distinction Paas is making here: church planting was not a method of

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., Loc. 354, 735. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im would agree with the missionary mindset: “God is a missionary God…Therefore, a missionary posture should be the normal expression of the church in all times and places.” Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 579; cf. loc. 898.

\(^\text{14}\) Paas, *Secular West*, pp.8-10. Paas states that the term “church planting” (*plantation ecclesiae*) is not found before the Middle Ages. After the Reformation, the “mission field” became unclear: should Catholics do “mission” in Protestant areas, and vice versa? Generally, they did—and this changed the concept of the mission field from being unreached areas to areas where the denomination was not represented or dominant. See pages 21-30.
evangelism but a means of (officially) shepherding the already converted and gathered.\textsuperscript{15}

This is (generally) the view that he espouses, and the lens through which he criticizes other views of church planting.\textsuperscript{16}

The Modern Evangelical Paradigm was born out of the fragmented church of Europe and the methodological thinking of the Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{17} At the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910), John Mott stated the goal: “The evangelization of the world in this generation.”\textsuperscript{18} The second and third stages of church planting (gathering and planting) were combined to accelerate evangelization: planting indigenous churches (rather than mission outposts) from the outset.\textsuperscript{19} The goal to evangelize the world was combined with a scientific (especially the social sciences) and a methodological approach: the Church Growth theory was born. Donald McGavran (1897-1990) stated that world evangelization is the greatest work of the church. Ecclesiological issues, such as baptism and church governance, were relegated to second tier importance, while

\textsuperscript{15} Simply put, there are (at least) two main issues at work. 1) Do unbelievers in a given context need to belong (to a certain level) in a faith community before they believe? 2) Ecclesiologically, can church planters reconcile using a “church”—which has (since the Reformation) been defined as a gathering of believers—as a method of reaching new people (unchurched or unconverted)?


\textsuperscript{17} Paas, \textit{Secular West}, 31.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{19} Paas notes that in the previous model, indigenous mission fields were tied too closely to the money and power of Western denominations, who often waited too long to officially form churches. Roland Allen (1868-1947) wrote that churches rarely came out of missions. Allen stated that Paul did not start missions; he started churches. Native Christians should be able to form fully organized (and recognized) churches. Paas, \textit{Secular West}, 33-36.
church planting collapses all three (previous) stages—church planting is the means and method of evangelism to the world. Mission was primarily identified with church growth, and church “success” was measured in terms of growth.\textsuperscript{20}

The Late-Modern Evangelical Paradigm sees church planting as a means of innovation: fresh ways of doing and being church to reach new people. After the Second World War, Europe was seen as a mission field: by 1954, about seventy denominations, organizations, and ministries were doing “missions” in Europe. The American denominational “marketplace” was introduced to Europe, though with very little effect: less than 5 percent of the general population joined a “free” (non-state) church.\textsuperscript{21} State churches emphasized evangelism with massive initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s. Though these evangelism initiatives were not (numerically) successful, church planting began to be seen as a means of discovering new, innovative ways to reach new people in Europe.\textsuperscript{22}

As he reflects on the history of church planting in Europe, Paas identifies three primary reasons for church planting: confessional purity, pragmatic growth, and innovation. Confessional purity has a long history, dating back to the Reformation (and before). Churches had always been started in areas where there were no churches, but only with the Reformation were churches started in areas that already had churches. The Anabaptists started churches in areas where people were already baptized and called for

\textsuperscript{20} Paas, Secular West, 38-42. In Europe, this meant (for McGavran) that the State churches needed renewal and new, vibrant churches needed to be planted to reach the “Christo-pagans.”

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 42f.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 43-46.
people to be baptized again. While a new church may be started in the case of perceived heresy or lack of growth impetus, this is not enough of a reason to plant many new churches in the West. Secularism has thinned the demand and desire for religious community, and established churches are already reaching out to lost people (though with limited results thus far).

Pragmatic growth has been a modern motivation to plant churches, especially advocated by Church Growth Theory (CGT). As with many other critics, Paas is wary of the theological basis of CGT, especially the homogeneous unit principle, because the church is called to be diverse. Paas also sees a link with Religious Market Theory (though CGT people have not used this much in their own writings); yet in Europe the “demand” for religious “goods” has gone down.\(^{23}\) CGT falsely equates evangelism with church planting, practically turning church planting into a biblical mandate.\(^{24}\) CGT also emphasizes the pragmatic and the strategic over the theological and communal. Finally, though CGT is primarily concerned with size and results, there have not been results using CGT in Western Europe.

Innovation is a great reason to plant churches but is not enough of a reason to fully justify planting new churches. Paas advocates ecumenical cooperation and release

\(^{23}\) Buntain’s review of Paas highlights that younger churches in the “market” can cannibalize the older churches. There is no true evangelism; church “growth” is only church migration. Further, the “market” in Europe has become saturated with other faith alternatives. Paas’s contextual question is “What kind of church must be planted in this soil?” Buntain, Review of *Church Planting*, 591. Buntain is writing from Singapore.

\(^{24}\) Wagner’s often cited quote is, “The single most effective evangelistic method under heaven is planting new churches.” See C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 11. Wagner does not himself conflate evangelism with church planting. He does lament that few books on evangelism list church planting as a biblical, effective means of evangelism (pp 11-21).
of (much) denominational control, without losing confessional purity or biblical ecclesiology. Renewal cannot be forced, but three areas where renewal can emerge are 1) free havens where artists and creatives can share ideas and life together, yet stay communicating with the outside world and the wider church, 2) laboratories where people of different thinking and backgrounds come together to discuss problems and formulate solutions, and 3) incubators, sponsored but given freedom by established churches, that pull emerging thinkers and leaders to try new ideas and expressions, knowing there will be many ways to reach the pluralistic Western world.

Paas covers a wide variety of church planting history, thinking, and methodologies, showing many of the reasons why they have not worked in Europe. Methodologies from other countries or eras have been uncritically applied in Europe and have not been effective. Though he does not give many indications on a way forward, his impetus for church planting (which he still advocates) is on theological grounds, born out of the biblical mandate to do evangelism. For Paas, church planting is a result of evangelism, not a means of evangelism (though they are often closely connected). Evangelism must be done to reach people groups (many of the nations have come to Europe), it must be done by communities not just individual speakers, and it must be done to discover the missionary nature of the church. Evangelism continually innovates and renews the church, and a desire for growth can be seen as one of the markers of a true church. Paas’s work highlights the increased difficulty in planting churches. As secularism increases, the soil of church planting continues to harden, and church planters will need more and more support in order to succeed.
Van Gelder and Zscheile explore the church and church planting in America, dividing it into five stages: the Colonial Experience (1600s-1780s), the Expanding Frontier (1790s to 1870s), the Church in the City (1880s to early 1940s), the Suburban Success (mid-1940s to mid-1970s), and Late-Modern Success Strategies (mid 1970s to early 2000s). Throughout their chapters, they fill in a helpful chart that can compare and contrast the different stages.25

The Colonial Experience years led to the birth of the United states—and denominations. The primary denomination was “ethic voluntary.”26 America was envisioned as “the noble experiment”—a Christian (though diverse) society, upholding morality, helping the vulnerable, and sanctifying society from the center. America viewed herself as unique in world; faith and church added to the America view of exceptionalism.27 This era included the injustice of slavery and the religious revival of the Great Awakening.

The Expanding Frontier era was full of problems for America: Native Americans in the west, immigration from other countries, and slavery on the inside. The Second Great Awakening led to a period of “Protestant nation building” which included social reform with an emphasis on rights, individual responsibilities, and revivalism. As opposed to the highly educated preaching that was common in the earlier years (and still in New England), simple preaching was done on the Frontier and had mass appeal. New

25 Chart 7.1, Van Gelder and Zscheile, Participating, Loc. 4400.
26 Ibid., Loc. 1611, 1936.
27 Ibid., Loc. 1722.
denominations were born, and the modern missions movement started (outside the established church). 28

The ending of the Civil War and the rise of the Industrial Revolution led to a time of urban growth. Immigration, which had previously primarily been from England, shifted to southern Europe. Legislation was passed to limit immigration; these laws favored Protestantism. Unjust “Jim Crow” laws were passed in the south, and Social Gospel leaders rose in response. Denominations and administrative systems grew in this time period, and global missions were on the rise. Denominations worked together to shape the national agenda, especially the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition). Yet with the defeat of Prohibition, the Protestant mindset shifted from a “Christian” nation to Judeo-Christian values. This era ended with World War II. 29

After the Second World War, there was a boom of economics, building, and babies. Colonialism began to fade in the world, while foreign missions continued to grow. Ecumenism and cooperation continued to rise among denominations and churches. Jim Crow laws were defeated, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 allowed neighborhoods to become more diverse. African Americans moved north in greater numbers. Towards the end of this era, a significant decline in birthrates contributed to a decline in mainline denominations; evangelicalism began to rise, with the figurehead of Billy Graham. A Judeo-Christian America was replaced with Civil Religion and the “American Dream,” centered on civil rights. Faith became privatized and the church marginalized in this area.

28 Ibid., Loc. 2089, 2124, 2362, 2445.
29 Ibid., Loc. 2910-2938.
Church plants moved from being started in neighborhoods to being attractional or lifestyle churches.\textsuperscript{30}

The last era of church (planting) history that Van Gelder and Zscheile cover is titled “Late-Modern Success Stories.” This includes the rise of the Christian political right, Reagan politics, postmodernism, the internet, and social media. Churches (and church plants) began to take their cues from the business and medicine (especially therapeutic) worlds: Church Growth Theory taught that the solution to church problems, including evangelism, was to be found in the use of systems, programs, and formulas.\textsuperscript{31} The environment, human rights, and human sexuality were unique concerns in this stage. The church, and especially the charismatic movement, grew in this period, and there was a desire to return to “Christian America,” though it was not successful. Missional church teaching changed the dichotomy between mission and church, seeing the local church (not just the foreign field) as the primary location of God’s work in the world.\textsuperscript{32}

Van Gelder and Zscheile describe five stages of church (planting) history in America and how the church changed in each stage. After describing how the American church adapted to each new context, one would have expected the authors to describe how the church can change to meet the pluralistic, individualistic, information saturated, and rights-driven context of today. Instead, they believe we must stop trying to fix the church. “The focus on trying to change the church in order to be able to respond to a

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., Loc. 3360-3835.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., Loc. 4211.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., Loc. 4387-4400.
change context has run its course." The tension is not with the church and culture; it is with the gospel and culture. The church must stop contextualizing, accept an outsider position in culture, and center the church’s identity in the triune God. In light of the Great Unravelling, any attempt to meet the current context will result in the church losing its identity. The church must return to its identity, understand the mission of God, and seek to participate in God’s mission in the current context.

*Participating in God’s Mission* underscores the increasing challenges of church planting in the current American context. Church planters are living in this more difficult reality—and trying to start new churches. Planters are working to figure out how to continue to do evangelism and start churches. Support is needed, but many of the people offering support to current planters started churches decades ago, when older methodologies worked, strategy was seen as the solution to every problem, and the culture was less opposed to the church.

It is increasingly difficult to plant churches in the West. The context is rapidly changing and the response of people to church and religion continues to decline. Church planters are seeking to start churches that innovate and reach new people. In his survey of church planting in Europe, Paas demonstrated that a century of church planting has not stopped the rise of secularism. This means that church planting innovation is not

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33 Ibid., Loc. 4531.

34 Ibid., Loc. 5466-5533. The current culture is not only hostile to the church; it is unwilling to accept the claims of the gospel. Therefore, the church cannot continue to change without losing its gospel message.

35 Ibid., Loc. 6478.
enough—because people just are not interested. Church planters need to be thoughtful and adaptable, able to do fresh yet biblical thinking that relates to a particular context, for the sake of evangelism.36 The coaches and leaders of church planting can only give so much guidance because what worked ten or thirty years ago is no longer effective. Van Gelder and Zscheile contend that the crisis of the church today is identity. The church is a faith community centered in the triune life of God, living out his mission. Church plants are not called to compete with entertainment but focus on the Jesus way of life, living in the habits that cultivate his rhythms, and sharing that way of life with the neighborhood and world.37 In a pluralistic, tribalistic world, potential church planters are struggling to define the identity of their new churches. Current planters, especially if they have not achieved numerical sustainability, are struggling with their identity as pastors as well: as they failures for not reaching more people? Should they change positions, become bi-vocational, or leave ministry all together? As church planting continues to increase in difficulty, support for church planters will need to continue to increase.

The Struggles That Church Planters Face

Most people understand that being a pastor is hard. Yet few people understand the actual struggles that pastors go through day in and day out. The two books that we will cover in this section do a great job unpacking the struggles that pastors and church

36 Paas, Secular West, 263-264. Paas still believes in church planting; indeed, the final chapter is titled, “In Defense of Church Planting.” Church planting calls people out of their comfort zones and is the best place to discover the missionary nature of the church.

37 Van Gelder and Zscheile, Participating, Loc. 4866-5078, 5672, 6478-6583.
planters deal with. Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson’s book *That Their Work Would Be a Joy*\(^{38}\) is not specifically about church planters but about pastors in general and the pressures they face. The subtitle of the book is very helpful: *Understanding and Coping with the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Their main idea is that Pastors (and churches) must understand their vocation, creating a sense of partnership in ministry and reinforced with limits, especially Sabbath rest, and boundaries, especially around family and workload expectations. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im’s book *Planting Missional Churches*\(^{39}\) is focused on church planting and church planters. The main thrust of the book is that God is a missional God and he has called churches to join him on his mission, specifically in planting new churches.\(^{40}\) While it is not a book about supporting church planters, it is a book about the very real challenges that church planters must overcome, and it highlights the toll that church planting takes on the planter. In this section, we will explore nine struggles that church planters face: family, finances, conflict, friendships, boundaries, calling, rest and health, leadership development, and theological training.

Ministry, and especially church planting, is tough on families. Church planting brings a flurry of pressure onto the planter, and much of this stress is absorbed by the planter’s spouse and children. Planting is also time intensive and financially risky; these


\(^{40}\) “God is a missionary God…Therefore, a missionary posture should be the normal expression of the church in all times and places” (*Missional Churches*, Loc. 579). There is a need for missional churches—more now than ever: for every 10,000 Americans, there were 28 churches in 1900, 17 in 1950, and 11 in 2011 (Loc. 357).
are also felt by the family. Pastor’s kids see the dark side of ministry when Christian men
and women treat their pastor (the child’s parent) in very un-Christlike ways.\footnote{Lee and Fredrickson, \textit{That Their Work Would Be a Joy}, 171.} Pastor’s
spouses are held to impossible expectations and invisible “job descriptions” such as “able
to get along with everyone, even women. Must be willing to work in the church kitchen,
teach Sunday School, babysit, . . . wait table, never listen to gossip, never become
discouraged . . . yet be fully aware of all church problems so she might ‘pray more
intelligently.’”\footnote{Ibid., p.67. The authors cite Lorna Dobson, \textit{I’m More than the Pastor’s Wife}, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 22. Dobson was quoting from Frances Nordland, \textit{The Unprivate Life of a Pastor’s Wife} (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 12. The final comment was added by a personal friend of Lee and Fredrickson.} Through all of the struggles, the family is expected to attend church
weekly and always be on their best behavior.\footnote{Ibid., 179.}

Perhaps most of all, church planters are driven people. They are driven to reach
more people and to grow their church plants. This often leads to prioritizing ministry over
the marriage and family.\footnote{Ibid., 182.} While the family understands the need for this “surge” at the
beginning of the church plant; it is harder to absorb after three years. For many planters,
the church is not yet viable, and not enough leaders have been developed. Financial
support has run out, and the church may be facing a true threat to survival. Planters and
their spouses are not aware or prepared for the struggles they may face, years into the
plant.
The cooperation and partnership of the spouse is critical for the success of the church plant. Stetzer and Im cite the Ridley Assessment, created by Charles Ridley, that lists thirteen characteristics in the church planter that contribute to the success of a potential church plant. The “spousal cooperation” metric measures the degree to which the spouses agree on ministry priorities, each partner’s roles and involvement, and the integration and balance of ministry and family life.\(^\text{45}\) Elliot Grudem, the pastor of church planting at Vintage Church, lists marriage and family as one of his five characteristics that promote healthy, sustainable ministry.\(^\text{46}\) Grudem’s list is based on a seven-year study performed by Covenant Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, and Westminster Seminary.\(^\text{47}\) His focus is less on what makes church planters successful and more developing and cultivating these habits in church planters. He set up a twelve-month residency to help planters connect and grow in these critical areas.\(^\text{48}\) Church planting is tough on families; to have healthy, sustainable church plants there must be healthy church planters with healthy family relationships.

\(^{45}\) Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 1286. The other twelve characteristics are: has a visioning capacity, is intrinsically motivated, creates ownership of ministry, relates to the unchurched, effectively builds relationships, is committed to church growth, responsiveness to the community, uses the giftedness of others, flexibility and adaptability, builds group cohesiveness, demonstrates resilience, exercises faith. Charles Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988), 7–11. Ridley determined that successful planters shared these thirteen characteristics. The Ridley assessment is used to assess potential planters; Stetzer and Im state that those who have gone through this assessment lead larger churches than those who did not.

\(^{46}\) Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 6867. The five characteristics are: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, leadership management (developing skills needed).

\(^{47}\) For further discussion, Stetzer and Im cite Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013).

\(^{48}\) Grudem’s organization is called the Leaders Collective. See www.leaderscollective.com.
Finances are another huge struggle that church planters face. Many people forget that church planting involves a job change. Before the services begin, most planters must raise funds for the new church; a task for which most have little to no training. Once the services begin, the planter must preach on stewardship and giving—another task which may be new to the planter, and one for which he or she may be hesitant to do with new believers. The survival and size of the church plant affect the income of the planter; this is a ministry pressure that few pastors have experienced. Planters are expected, especially early on, to create the budget and oversee the spending, requiring further administrative skills that may not be natural to the planter.

Pastors are expected to have professional levels of training and competence, but they are usually compensated at lower levels than others of comparable training.49 Church size is the single biggest determining factor in salary, which adds further pressure to the planter to grow the church. Most churches in America, including church plants, are small to medium sized, and most churches of these sizes struggle financially.50 Many pastors struggle to afford to live in the communities to which they are called, and this pressure is felt by the spouse and children. African-American pastors earn less and are less likely to have benefits; female pastors earn less than men overall, in part because they are more likely to be called to smaller congregations.51 Many pastors, especially

49 Lee and Fredrickson, That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 177.

50 Ibid.

church planters, find it necessary to work a second job or become bi-vocational. One study shows that 30-40 percent of pastors are bi-vocational; serving this way is common among Hispanic pastors, and 43 percent of African American pastors serve in this way.\textsuperscript{52} Stetzer and Im see more pastors using the bi-vocational model, and they do not see this as a bad thing. “God used the megachurch to reach Korea and the house church to reach China.”\textsuperscript{53} Few church plants have had an “Antioch” (parent) church that sends them out and supports them.\textsuperscript{54} Overall, finances are a second major struggle that church planters face.

A third struggle is conflict. All pastors face conflict in the church, whether with them directly, indirectly, or within the church body. Church plants face their own unique struggles with conflict. This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that the church planter may have left a church from a conflict situation and may be carrying past hurt or unrealistic dreams into the new church plant. Similarly, plants tend to attract unhealthy people who have not lived in community for years. Many of these people have been hurt by a church or pastor in the past; they are overly sensitive or have over-idealistic expectations on the church plant and planter. Stetzer said, “Every church planter I’ve known has experienced an attempted vision hijacking within the first three years of

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\textsuperscript{53} Stetzer and Im, \textit{Missional Churches}, Loc. 1499. They note that the “Constantinian” model, which is pastor plus building plus program equals a church, does not work well anymore (Loc. 1455).

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., Loc. 1047.
\end{flushright}
the church start.” 55 When there is conflict, if often goes “underground” in the form of gossip. This can happen even when a church is growing rapidly because the excitement of growth makes it harder for people to voice their reservations. 56 Gossip is such a catalyst for conflict that Lee and Fredrickson give multiple warnings about gossip, 57 stating that any church is only a matter of months away from its demise. 58 Their guidance is not to try to avoid all conflict—indeed, conflict is normal and natural in a church and in all relationships. Rather, they advise building a strong “immune system” that is able to respond to problems as they arise. 59

Pastors struggle to make close friendships. Loneliness is one of the most common reasons given for leaving the ministry. 60 For many people, this is hard to understand, which only increases the problem. Lee and Fredrickson ask poignant questions: can the pastor count on the same kind of love and support as others in body? When pastors or their families have needs, who rises to meet them? Is it even safe for pastors to admit they have needs in the first place? 61 Deep friendships are hard for pastors; it is hard to have a sense of mutuality with those a pastor is trying to serve. Pastors themselves also forget

55 Ibid., Loc. 4464.
56 Lee and Fredrickson, That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 163.
57 Ibid., 162, 165.
58 Ibid., 163.
59 Ibid., 151, 161.
61 That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 153. Lee and Fredrickson devote the entirety of chapter 8 to nurturing healthy relationships.
that they are first people, first children of God, called to live in a way that demonstrates a life dependent on the Holy Spirit. Planters are especially prone to “go it alone” because they may not have enough people with whom they can share the emotional and task loads. Overwork, though, does not embody a dependence on the Holy Spirit, and can lead to burnout, resentment, and disconnection. Lee and Fredrickson see that pastors are often held to a higher standard, and are therefore not given permission to struggle, doubt, or be weak. The authors also state that pastors themselves do not allow themselves to be vulnerable, for reasons of appearance, fear, or pride. Pastors who have tried to be vulnerable often have had their words used against them. Stetzer and Im cite William Hendricks who said that if people do not connect to seven people within six months of attending the church, they will leave the church. This puts impossible pressure on the planter to be the main connection point for every person. Although pastors serve in a public role and are subject to much criticism, they must strive to form deep, authentic relationships with people. Planters who begin their churches with a small group of close friends, as well as receiving coaching and other support, are more likely to endure the emotional and spiritual storms of planting. There will be relational losses: it is normal for half of the Launch Team to leave in the first year. Planters can also begin a culture that does not hold unrealistic expectations of the pastor and can learn to care for their

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62 Ibid., 35, 80.
63 Stetzer and Im, Missional Churches, Loc. 6211.
64 Ibid., Loc. 3438.
leaders. Churches must strive to encourage their pastors, allow them to genuinely follow Jesus, and have fair expectations.

The fifth area where planters struggle is boundaries and roles. There is so much work to do in a church plant. Planters feel the pressure to be it all and do it all—from others and from inside of themselves. Here is the humorous but often truthful job description: “Wanted: Person to fill position that involves important but undervalued work; exact job description unclear. Long hours; must work weekends and holidays. Low pay. Master’s degree required; doctorate preferred. Must be accomplished at multitasking, including running an organization without clear authority to do so. The successful candidate will be skilled as a public speaker, manager, politician, and therapist, and will devote significant time each week to pastoral visits. The position reports to multiple bosses.”

Most planters are church planting (and lead pastoring) for the first time in their lives; they know they need to grow. Yet it is hard to handle so many expectations—from church attenders, planting coach, denomination or network, and the planter’s own expectations. Role overload is one of the biggest contributions to stress,

65 Lee and Fredrickson, That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 158.

66 Jones, L. Gregory, and Kevin R. Armstrong, Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 26; cited in Lee and Fredrickson, That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 66-67. Jones and Armstrong give a healthier job description here: “Wanted: Persons for a vocation that leads God’s people in bearing witness to God’s new creation revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Work schedule is shaped by relationships, focusing on what is important in people’s lives, and depends on regular rhythms of work, rest, and play. Compensation is shaped by a mutual discernment of what is necessary in order for the persons (and, where appropriate, their families) to have an appropriately well-lived life. The vocation involves cultivating holy dispositions, preaching and teaching, nurturing rigorous study, and shaping practices of faithful living in church and world. Lifelong education and formation is expected in order to enable others also to grow throughout their lives. The successful candidate will collaborate with others towards the same ends. The vocation reports to God” (p. 27).
along with a sense of isolation and intrusions into the private and family life. Evangelism will not happen by accident, and most planters—even with no church building—feel the need to get away from the church burdens and into the community. Planters are the first evangelists, and they struggle to meet the needs of their new church attenders with the need to do evangelism and be in the community. Lee and Fredrickson state that pastors cannot do it all—nor are they meant to. God does not give all the gifts needed in a church to a single person. Pastors should be willing to say no and ask their congregations for help. Pastors struggle with boundaries because they want to serve others. Healthy expectations come when a pastor understands his or her gifting, communicates this well, raises up others to lead alongside, and says no when needed. Planters struggle with each of these items because they are discovering their giftedness and role, and they are eager for new people to join their churches.

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68 Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 5179.

69 Lee and Fredrickson, *That Their Work Would Be a Joy*, 19. Lee and Fredrickson say that even through the ages, the expectations of a pastor have changed. In the early church, the expectation was to be an apostle, then a priest and chaplain during the Middle Ages. After the Reformation, pastors were expected to be teachers. In more recent times, pastors are expected to be therapists or professional leaders (p.73). See also Van Gelder and Zscheile, who give these stages of pastoral paradigms: resident theologian (colonial period), the gentleman pastor (1780s to 1870s), the churchly pastor (1880s to 1940s), the pastoral director (1940s to 1960s), the therapeutic pastor and entrepreneurial pastor (1970s to 2000s). Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating*, Loc. 6342.

70 Lee and Fredrickson, *That Their Work Would Be a Joy*, 139.

71 Lee and Fredrickson further discuss role overload (too many expectations for one person to meet), role conflict (differing opinions of how the role should be fulfilled, such as sermons being topical or exegetical), and role ambiguity (not having enough information to know if success is achieved). These three categories greatly increase the stress load upon pastors. See Lee and Fredrickson, *That Their Work Would Be a Joy*, 31-33.
All of this means that a planter must have a strong sense of identity, worth, and calling in God. Yet calling is the sixth struggle that planters face. Pastoral work is not just a job, it is a calling, a sacred vocation that emerges out of a person’s life. Thus, it is important for pastors to develop habits that form and strengthen their spiritual lives.\textsuperscript{72}

Planters, in the midst of building a new church with ever growing needs, often sacrifice their own prayer lives. Stetzer and Im write that most planters realized, through planting, a deep lack of prayer in their own lives. This realization led them closer to Christ. They later write that planters used the word “desperation” to describe planting, and this led them either to their knees or to the office.\textsuperscript{73} Planting is a spiritual endeavor, an intentional step into a spiritual battle; if a church is calling people out of the darkness, it can expect the darkness to fight back. Planters, who are burdened with the survival and success of their church plant, struggle to find their worth in Christ alone. Church planters are ambitious, and often have to be brought through a desert so that God can sanctify their ambition and faith for his purposes.\textsuperscript{74} “You cannot lead people to godliness when you are not regularly encountering God.”\textsuperscript{75} Although planters will struggle at times with their

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 63, 79.

\textsuperscript{73} Stetzer and Im, Missional Churches, Loc. 2897, 2900.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., Loc. 7505. Lee and Fredrickson note that self-centeredness becomes a huge burden for pastors, Lee and Fredrickson, That Their Work Would Be a Joy, 24.

\textsuperscript{75} Stetzer and Im, Missional Churches, Loc. 2888.
calling, they are planting because they feel truly called by God to his work, and the task of starting and serving a church is the greatest of joys for those who are called to it.\textsuperscript{76}

For a church plant to be healthy, the church planter must be healthy. Yet planters’ seventh struggle is with rest and health. 87 percent of pastors reported they were “very satisfied” with their jobs, yet another study reported 90 percent of clergy reported being frequently fatigued and considering leaving the ministry.\textsuperscript{77} Pastors struggle to take care of their bodies: sleep, diet, and exercise are often sacrificed to the “spiritual” demands of church planting.\textsuperscript{78} Planters often have to fill in the gaps for critical tasks that may not have been accomplished by Launch Team members, and this “filling in” may last for years.\textsuperscript{79} Planting is an intense endeavor, and planters know this when they start. What they may not know is that the intensity would last years, and the body is not made to be in a high stress, low sleep, poor diet situation for years. If a planter continues this pace for three to five years, they will face burnout, spiritual fatigue, and relational fallout. Pastors who struggle to have rest, create boundaries, and live into Sabbath also struggle to hold on to their calling.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Lee and Fredrickson, \textit{That Their Work Would Be a Joy}, 67. The authors list some suggestions for church attenders: affirm your pastor’s gifts and calling, and learn to serve within your calling—don’t just suggest new ministries, but learn to be fellow ministers (p.82).

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 8-9.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 115, 220.

\textsuperscript{79} Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, \textit{Launch, Starting a New Church From Scratch}, revised ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 2017), 161. The authors share a case study of a fictional church plant, but the example holds to real life: planters frequently fill in the needs of the church plant, and this leads to sacrificing rest and health.

\textsuperscript{80} Lee and Fredrickson, \textit{That Their Work Would Be a Joy}, 102.
systems of care, including commitments to rest and coaching. Yet no system of care is more important than self-care, and planters struggle to honor their commitment to self-care consistently.

Leadership development is the eighth struggle that planters face, and it is the most frequently cited challenge for church planters.\(^8^1\) Before a church plant begins, there are an overwhelming number of tasks to do, including many tasks that planters have never faced before including insurance, renting space, incorporation, non-profit status, and more. Even as planters form a Launch Team of willing people, planters are hesitant to delegate too many tasks to begin with, and for good reason: planters must make sure that potential leaders can lead well.\(^8^2\) Yet as services begin, the tasks become overwhelming, and planters struggle to delegate, empower, and develop leaders to help the church grow even more. In fact, leadership development is often the bottleneck of church growth. Early on, the Launch Team can help with many of the tasks, including administration; this helps prevent overload and helps keep the plant out of the office.\(^8^3\)

The ninth and last struggle that planters face is theological education. Some planters do not believe education is necessary to plant, and they struggle with the education requirements of their network or denomination, seeing it as unnecessary and distracting from the work of evangelism. Yet as planters begin to live into the challenges

\(^8^1\) Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 2973.

\(^8^2\) Searcy and Thomas, *Launch*, 167. The authors advocate not handing too much too soon to people, even if they are experts. Planters need to be wise in giving away power.

\(^8^3\) Stetzer and Im, *Missional Churches*, Loc. 3427.
of leading a church, preaching every week, and dealing with crisis in the lives of their church members, the need for deeper training and thinking becomes clear. Stetzer and Im believe that theological education is more necessary in the current context; as multiple narratives clamor for attention it is necessary to understand when a story is out of line with God’s story and to be able to communicate clearly God’s vision for the world.\textsuperscript{84}

Theological education is also a larger struggle in the church planting world. From 2004 to 2014, the number of enrolled in seminary education in North America declined ten percent.\textsuperscript{85} Churches are responding by creating residencies to train potential planters for fruitful ministry, and seminaries are responding by adapting the “delivery” methods for theological education, including distance and online learning.\textsuperscript{86} Theological training is important for planters, yet by the time many planters realize the need, they have already planted a church with weekly services and constant demands, and the time and cost of seminary are too prohibitive.

Church planters struggle. Lee and Fredrickson give numerous examples of how pastors, seminarians, and churches can help struggling pastors. Each chapter has a section with practical advice on how to care for a pastor, which makes the book an invaluable tool to preach from or give to others. They advise pastors to ask for help and build an immune system that can anticipate struggles and be resilient against them. Stetzer and Im’s book is a theological and practical calling into God’s mission; they also give many practical and personal tips about the struggles of planting a church, did not write a book

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., Loc. 6765-6807.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., Loc. 6748.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., Loc. 6811.
about the personal struggles of church planters. It would have been helpful if this book would have included some stories and lessons from church plants that have failed; what are lessons that future planters can learn from those who did not make it? Which struggles were so overwhelming that the planter could not make it?

Practical Help Needed by Church Planters

Church planters need help in so many practical ways: preaching, evangelism, culture, administration, leadership development, finances, business, teams, kids’ ministry, technology, state laws, and how much caffeine is too much for one person. Many helpful books could have been included in this section, and every person in the church planting world has their own list of books for practical help. Yet with an overabundance of information comes anxiety, and church planters have enough to worry about. Coaching is advocated, and even paid for, by many church planting denominations and networks. Therefore, the first book in this section will cover Dino Senesi’s *Sending Well: A Field*

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87 Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im’s book *Planting Missional Churches* is frequently cited. It covers a basic theology for mission, models of church planting, and many nuts and bolts. Another very practical book is *Launch* by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 2017). Stephen Gray’s book *Planting Fast Growing Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2007) is focused on growth, stating that if a church plant does not hit the 200 mark within 24 months, it is statistically unlikely to ever do so (p. 40). He studied over 2,000 church plants and found 93% of them did not break the 200 barrier (p. 51). *Exponential*, by Dave and Jon Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) changes the conversation from the survival of a single church plant to the creation of a movement (multi-site, multi-campus, networks, etc.). *Church Planting Landmines*, by Tom Nebel and Gary Rohrmayer (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2005) is one of the few books that addresses the challenges planters face after weekly services begin. They focus on the obstacles in years two through ten. Finally, my church planting team went through Tim Morey’s *Embodying Our Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009) and found it very helpful in understanding a changing cultural landscape, and how to live out God’s mission in community. I have recommended this book to many.
Guide to Great Church Planter Coaching. Church plants change over time, especially in the early stages. Unfortunately, many planters are not prepared for the changes that are ahead. The second book in this section will look at the business book Barbarians to Bureaucrats: Corporate Life Cycle Strategies by Lawrence Miller.

Senesi’s main idea is that Church planters need well-trained coaches to help them as they plant. In order to send church planters well, the planters need to be supported well. This can only happen with a coaching network in place. Ideally, the coaching network would be in place before the planting efforts happen. Sensei advocates coaching twice a month, four months at a time, for one year.

Coaching is not the same as other types of support that planters can receive. Mentoring is about pouring in; coaching is about drawing out. The goal of mentoring is to become like the mentor; the mentoring session often includes many of the mentor’s stories. Coaching is primarily about good questions, and the coach should not talk for more than 20 percent of the time. Teaching is about information; coaching is about implementation—coaches help planters move from truth to action. Bob Logan said, “A coach is someone who comes alongside to help others find their focus.” Coaching is also different than advising. An advisor’s goal is to provide formulas and solutions; the

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90 Senesi, Sending Well, 55.

coach helps the planter come up with his or her own solutions. Finally, coaching is
different than counseling. Counselors provide relief and usually look backwards. Coaches
ask questions that lead to action and look forward. While coaching is goal oriented, it is
question driven; coaches do not solve problems but help leaders solve their own problem
and own their solutions.  

Planters need support. The top seven challenges facing church planters, according
to Senesi, are 1) leadership development and reproducing culture, 2) financial self-
sufficiency and viability, 3) team development and volunteer mobilization, 4) systems,
processes, and cultures, 5) vision casting and avoiding mission drift, 6) evangelism and
discipleship, and 7) the spiritual, physical, and mental health of the planter and his or her
family. Senesi lists a series of questions that coaches can ask planters about these key
challenge areas.  

What is refreshing about Senesi’s book is that he faces the reality that
many church plants do not survive, and that planting is often a hard and lonely journey.
Coaching can help.

Coaches help by offering support over an extended period of time. The planting
process is assessment, training, coaching, and planter care. Coaches stay supporting and
cheering the planter when the crowds go away. Coaches focus on the actions needed in
the plant and on the planter. Planters find the help they want but not always the help they
need, so a good coach will help direct the planter onto the most important actions needed

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92 Keith Webb writes about the danger of “know-it-all-ism.” COACH Model, 17-25.

93 Senesi, Sending Well, 34-35.
for the plant. Good coaches ask about the planter’s spouse and children by name and help the planter hear the voice of God.94

The heart of the book describes ten coaching types: the Serving Coach, the Believing Coach, the Listening Coach, the Cheering Coach, the Praying Coach, the Pressing Coach, the Supporting Coach, the Relating Coach, the Planting Coach, and the Growing Coach. While there is a consistent coaching method, different coaches bring different things to the coaching time. Coaches should grow in their habits and make coaching as effective as possible for the planters. Each of the ten coaching types includes five practices, for a total of fifty great coaching practices, compiled together in Appendix B: Great Coaching Development Guide.

Coaching needs to be consistent for all the planters.95 This can only happen if there is a system in place to select, train, and evaluate coaches. Senesi’s book is not only to help coaches; it gives a framework to begin or strengthen a coaching network. A coaching network is crucial to the survival of church plants, and coaching must be done well. The author suggests four vital elements of a coaching delivery system: obsess over delivery (to planters), connect sending churches, create a coaching culture (with a pipeline for future coaches), and practice church planter coaching.96 Coaches need to be selected well, have rules and oversight, be trained, and be valued. There needs to be a

94 Ibid., 28, 83, 166. See also Logan, Coaching, 31-37.

95 Senesi, Sending Well, 196.

96 Ibid., 194. Senesi devotes a chapter to each of these four elements, chapters 15-18.
coaching system, and the system must routinely be evaluated.\textsuperscript{97} Coaching is about supporting church planters, and the coaches themselves must be supported. In order for a truly vibrant church planting movement to happen, there must be many layers of support—all being constantly evaluated.

There are many tools in this book, and the appendices have nine additional tools including a sample coaching agreement, a coaching development guide, a coaching checklist, and a church planters expectation worksheet.\textsuperscript{98} This book does a great job laying out the key metrics for coaching. Good coaching is one-on-one rather than in groups, sequential (scheduled) not random, integrated with other planting efforts (training, assessment) not competing, mission coaching not life coaching (though care for the planter is there), and by phone or video rather than face-to-face (which allows for more consistency).\textsuperscript{99}

Senesi does a great job explaining the need to coach planters, both for the plant and for the person. This coaching is needed beyond year one, though. While many planting networks may not be able to afford to pay for coaching beyond year one (or two or three), it would have been good for Sensei to advocate how to “offramp” from paid coaching. Planters need support beyond year one; planters face unique challenges for their first decade of existence. The last stage of paid coaching needs to be to train the

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 203.

\textsuperscript{98} Logan’s seventh chapter is about coaching guidelines, and includes establishing clear expectations, regularly schedule meetings, set a beginning and ending, accountability, confidentiality, setting goals, setting boundaries, defining roles, a coaching agreement, online coaching tools, and conflict. Logan, \textit{Coaching}, 95-105.

\textsuperscript{99} Senesi, \textit{Sending Well}, 58.
planter how to find another coach; the paid coach should add this to the list of goals and do everything possible to move the planter to this goal. Otherwise, the planter, may not feel the need to find a new coach until later when he or she is running on empty. In fact, planters must learn to gather a multitude of support around them, both inside of their church and outside (from a network or denomination). With the right support, planters who are struggling can get practical help and overcome. Problems can be avoided with good support. And those planters who are doing well, with the right support, can soar even higher.

Continued coaching will help the planter face the challenges and obstacles that lie in years two through ten of the church plant. In these years, the church plant will change multiple times as systems get established, leaders get settled in or leave, policies get formed, and traditions begin. Church planters, and the entire church planting world, are typically so focused on the first year of the church plant: making it to weekly services. Yet a church plant meeting weekly is very different than an established church meeting weekly. Church planters need support to be prepared for and overcome the challenges and changes of the first decade.

Lawrence Miller, in his book Barbarians to Bureaucrats, explores the life cycles of corporations.\textsuperscript{100} His main idea is that organizations go through life cycles, with that later stages of this cycle moving away from creativity and increasing control for those in

\[\textsuperscript{100} \text{Though the church is not a business, it is a corporation (body of people) and organization. Even though not everything in this business book applies to the church, much of it does. In fact, Miller writes that his greatest inspiration was derived from the work of Toynbee (pp. 3, 7-8), who emphasized the importance of religion and spirituality on the shaping of civilization. See Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, Abridged (Oxford: University Press, 1957).}\]
power. The early stages of creativity were what made the organization great and caused it to be successful. Yet the chaos of the early days cannot continue indefinitely. Over time, therefore, the bureaucrats—those who have not created anything but live in control of the systems—tend to gain in power, stifling the creativity of the organization. In order for renewal, organizations must move decision making to the front lines and be led by a synergist who can balance the need for structure and policies with the importance of creativity and front-line leadership.

There are six stages in the corporate life cycle: Prophetic, Barbarian, Building and Exploring, Administrative, Bureaucratic, and Aristocratic. Miller charts these ages on an inverse bell curve. The Prophet and Barbarian begin the organization, and—if they are successful—lead to the rise of the organization and the empowering of Builders and Explorers. The organizational decline begins when Administrators seize power, which will soon lead to Bureaucrats and Aristocrats running the organization, making self-serving decisions, and running out the very creativity that defined the greatness of the organization. In order for this to be prevented, a Synergist, placed on top of the inverted bell curve, must find a way to balance the organizational need for the Builder and Explorers on one side and the Administrators on the other. This allows the organization to meet the structural need for stability (Administrators) without becoming bureaucratic; it also allows new ideas to be explored (Builders and Explorers) without reverting to a Barbarian age that could destabilize and destroy the entire organization.

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102 Miller calls this the “Synergist Solution,” see chapter 7.
The organizational understanding given in this book is important for church planters. Church plants, like all organizations, change. Yet many church planters are unprepared for the organizational changes that will happen. Since many planters are the Prophet or Barbarian—the people with a new idea that gathers followers—they struggle to understand that these stages cannot last forever. Other planters have come from stable churches, and they struggle to live into the Barbarian Age—which is not driven by policy but intuition, new ideas, and charisma. Planters need to understand the organizational changes that will happen in their churches in years two to ten. They need to grow in Adaptive Leadership: changing leadership style based on the need or stage of the organization. Below we will explore the six stages of the corporate life cycle, as well as the Synergist Solution advocated by Miller.

Corporations are formed by the vision of one person or a small group of people. This vision “is exciting and unique—often one that others thought impossible to achieve.” This vision mobilizes others and the Prophetic Age begins. This age is led by the Prophet, the creative visionary. There is strong faith in this new idea and the goal is to get others to buy into this idea. The Prophet sacrifices greatly for the new idea and inspires others to do the same. The Prophet makes all the decisions and there is very little organization, or the organization changes frequently. Prophets are explorers of ideas, and often tend to be weak in the areas of management and details.

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103 Miller, Barbarians, 9.

104 Miller writes that businesses that are started with the sole aim of making money rarely contribute to the marketplace because they provide no new creation. He will build on this point later: the Bureaucrats and Aristocrats want to use or exploit the organization to meet their own (often financial) goals.
In the Barbarian Age, the organization is growing a little and shows signs of increased growth. The Barbarian believes he or she must carry the Prophet’s vision to the market, region, or world. The Barbarian is a “heroic” leader and is usually direct, in control, and leading the way personally. The Barbarian leads more by intuition than information, and he or she has deep connections with the people in the organization. In this age, the fight is for survival. Organization is very simple, and there are deep loyalties. He or she may not have a set plan but lives wholeheartedly towards a set of goals—a mission that drives every decision. It is not uncommon for Prophets to become the Bureaucratic leader. A warning is that many Barbarians tend to create an organization that fits their personalities, rather than adapting to meet the changing needs of the organization. In many church plant settings, the Prophetic and Barbarian Ages go together, due to the fact that the planter often serves as both the original visionary that birthed the church and the heroic leader that fought the fight for survival and winning new ground.

The Building and Exploring Age is marked by the organization growing and becoming ready to expand or diversify the original vision. The organization is no longer

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106 Ibid., 36.

107 Ibid., 52.

108 Edwin Friedman, having lived in Washington, D.C. for 40 years, believed that America was facing a leadership crisis that included two parts: a failure of nerve to make hard decisions (from self-defined and self-differentiated leaders), and a desire for quick fixes. His solution was to train leaders away from technique or strategy as the solution, and into their own character. Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in an Age of Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury, 2007), 1-23.
fighting to survive; systems and structures are beginning to take form, and specialization can begin.\textsuperscript{109} New leaders need to emerge, and the organization must no longer be driven by force of will alone. Humility and self-restraint are needed while the spotlight is shared.\textsuperscript{110} The Builder focuses on techniques to be efficient in delivering to the customer; the Explorer focuses on expansion—reaching more customers or offering more products. The Builder is detail oriented and the Explorer is highly interpersonal. It is crucial in this stage to build a team of gifted leaders that can move the organization forward; decisions need to be made together and build consensus. Now that the fight is no longer for survival, individual needs surface, bringing internal pressures and potential conflicts to the organization; leaders must address this reality and create unity.\textsuperscript{111}

With the arrival of the Administrative Age, the company has grown, is respected, and is secure. “There is an inherent conflict between the creative impetus to growth and the need for order. In this stage of a company’s evolution, order is increasingly the victor.”\textsuperscript{112} The Administrator believes in the company’s products but is more concerned with efficiency. Systems and organizations expand under his or her leadership and problems are solved based on facts and policies—not interpersonally. Organizational

\textsuperscript{109} Miller, Barbarians, 59.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 60. Jim Collins writes that “level 5” leaders in turnaround organizations showed a combination of humility and will; they were hard working and determined, but it was not about their position or glory. They worked and motivated others, holding them to high (results based) standards, because they believed in the mission of the organization. Jim Collins, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Do Not (New York: Collins, 2001), 22-34.

\textsuperscript{111} Miller, Barbarians, 74-75.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 84.
leaders must not allow the Administrator to become dominant, otherwise they will reduce the organization to numeric analysis and mechanistic functions; process will become more important than product. Administrators are important to the organization, but the leaders must continue to invest in growth and new ideas, empowering a culture of creativity, and overcoming new challenges with new solutions. Miller also sounds this warning: to the members of the organization, this stage feels like the healthiest period because the stress and urgency are gone, having been replaced by systems. Unfortunately, the decay has begun; the leader needs to create a constant sense of urgency or complacency will overcome the organization.

In the Bureaucratic Age, the company has slowed down and does not contribute new ideas to the market but seeks growth through acquisitions and cutting costs. Organizational energy is spent on internal struggles. The Bureaucrat believes all problems can be solved with financial management and strategic systems. Layer upon layer of approvals, committees, and reviews are added into the corporation, and creativity is squashed. Creative and self-driven people, including the Prophets and Barbarians, tend to leave an organization in this Age. Bureaucratic leaders enjoy control and comfort,

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113 Ibid., 96, 101.
114 Ibid., 91.
115 Ibid., 97-98.
116 Ibid., 110-111.
117 Ibid., 137. Edwin Friedman wrote about the fallacy of expertise, as “data junkies” believe that they hold the keys to success or turnaround (see Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, chapter 3). Friedman, like Miller, believes in unleashing of imaginative capacity. A quick fix mentality leads to anxiety, a desire to please everyone, and an inability of leaders to make decisions. Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 129).
stifling any chance of reform. Fear of the future stifles creativity, which leads to less results, which leads to greater fear. When reform is attempted, it is reorganization, greater controls, or cost cutting: the Bureaucrat seeks a “structural solution to a spiritual problem.”  

True change, which is generally not possible in the Bureaucratic Age, is led by leaders who create a sense of urgency to creatively meet challenges, inspiring people beyond their comfort zones.

The Aristocratic Age is defined by a company in decline because of lack of creativity and investment. Aristocrats are cynical and aloof; they believe their position has earned them rewards and benefits. They see their job to prevent the further decline of the company, yet they are unwilling to make decisions. Even a Barbarian can become an Aristocrat when he or she achieves a level of ease. The organization has multiple layers and is overly complicated, yet there is an invisible organization structure for the leaders who still want to get things done. The organization is in decline; this strengthens

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118 Miller, Barbarians, 120, 128. Facts are needed. As Jim Collins writes, “You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.” Collins, Good to Great, 70. Miller’s point is that the real problems are not addressed because they are hidden behind structural “solutions” that never work.

119 Miller, Barbarians, 135-136.

120 Ibid., 141. As a church grows, more people should be empowered to lead. This opens up the door for the pastor/planter not to live a life of ease or rewards, but to invest deeply into the work of others (wisely selected). John Maxwell describes the five stages (all of which build upon each other): 1) Position (based on rights), 2) Permission (based on relationships, 3) Production (based on results), 4) People Development (based on reproduction), and 5) Personhood (based on respect). John Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1993), 12. Maxwell believes that few leaders ever attain the fifth level.
the culture of fear, control, and self-serving. Creativity and risks are avoided, and cutting costs or services are the only solutions offered.121

The solution Miller offers is called the Synergist Solution. His solution is meant to help organizations that are in decline, but it can also be used before the decline settles in. The answer is not to return to the Prophetic or Barbarian Ages, but to find a Synergist who can balance the need for Administrators with the need for Builders and Explorers. This leader will have the right level of structure that balances the need for internal cooperation with external challenges.122 The Synergist is hard on performance but soft on people (less successful leaders do the opposite).123 He or she listens to people, creates a sense of ownership, and continually pushes decision making out to the front lines, where problems can be solved creatively.124 Talented, hardworking people are valued, and teamwork is formed for the sake of a common, challenging goal. Team leaders see

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122 Miller, Barbarians, 165

123 Friedman says that, in a hostile environment, empathy is used as a weapon to further sideline decisive action—the very action that could lead to change. Empathy as a word only entered the English language in 1922, and it is “a power tool in the hands of the weak to sabotage the strong.” Leaders who experience a level of success should anticipate sabotage in the organization—and not give into anxiety or cease to lead strongly. Friedman, Failure of Nerve, 23-24, 133-134.

themselves at skilled at making decisions, and decisions are made by those who are close to the people, product, or service.\textsuperscript{125} This allows the organization to continually grow.

Church plants go through similar life cycles and are prone to the same mistakes.\textsuperscript{126} If planters are aware of these life cycles, they can embrace the change from the Barbarian Age and avoid the pitfalls of the Bureaucratic Age. At the right age of the church plant, planters can become Synergistic leaders who empower servant leaders to creatively solve problems and be responsible for ministry outcomes, rather than structuring church to run from the top down. Most church planters, however, are unaware of the organizational changes that will happen in their churches. Church planters need additional support and training in years two through ten to navigate these changes well. Church plant training does not include this teaching, nor is it fitting as the planter is so consumed with the start of the new church plant. After two to three years, church plants are “handed off”—either to figuring out leadership on their own, or to the overall pastoral support and resources of their network or denomination. However, as this book has made clear, the stages of change that a church plant experiences in years two through ten are unlike the organizational realities of an older church. Church plants experience organizational change at a rate that is foreign to stable churches. Church planters are unprepared for the changes that will happen in their churches. Church planters, in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 188-189.

\textsuperscript{126} Clinton describes five stages of leadership. God is moving leaders towards the last stage, convergence, from the very beginning. As leaders know this “map,” they can understand the changes God is doing in their lives and leadership. Clinton, \textit{Making of a Leader}, 25-32, 45. While Clinton’s book describes the lifelong process of leadership change, Clinton’s five stages of leadership also mirror many of the leadership changes that a church planter will experience in the first ten years of the plant. House and Allison have a helpful chart that shows the Organizational Lifecycle, applied to churches. Brad House and Gregg Allison, \textit{MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 125.
\end{footnotesize}
young church phase (years two through ten), need additional, specialized support to equip them to live into Adaptive Leadership that can move the church plant forward into maturity and continued mission.
CHAPTER 4
A THEOLOGY OF SUPPORT

This chapter will develop a theology of support, exploring how God supports his people. God does not control his people but gives them responsibilities while supporting them in significant ways. Church planters need to be supported first by God who supports his people and asks leaders to seek him and receive his support. Leaders are called to receive God’s support, to point others to his support, and to follow his example in supporting others. This chapter will show the ways God supports his people and how that support is seen throughout the Bible. Giving, receiving, and returning support will be show as vital to the success of the Sent to fulfill the mission of God. The chapter will end with biblical case studies, based on the five key needs of church planters from chapter two.

God Supports His People

“Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Jo 1:9). Our God is a God of support. He gives people responsibility and choices and does not seek to control them. He supports people
to be able to walk with him, make the right choices, and live out their responsibilities with wisdom and goodness. Throughout the ages, and especially in our day, people have complained that the Lord has not taken more control of this world or done more to stop evil. This has classically been framed as a question of theodicy: if God is all-good and all-powerful, how could he allow evil? While this is a valid (and oftanswered) question, the problem can be reframed. The Lord has given humans responsibility for the earth (Gn 1:28), and he will not fix all the problems that humans have caused. Rather, he will support humans who can—with his power and presence—lead the way in bringing solutions and restoration. Even for the problem of human sin, God required that a human solve that problem. Since no human was able to solve the problem (Rom 3:23), God

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1 C.S. Lewis stated, “The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. … God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease. God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 244. Lewis was right to point out the changing approach, yet the question of why God allows pain troubled the ancients as well. He tackled the question at greater length in his book The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems (New York: Collier, 1982).

2 The theodicy question can be thought of in terms of control: when humans ask why God does not stop all evil from happening, they are asking why God does not control everything. They are trying to control the responsibility of others and the choices and nature of God himself. By extension, this leads to questioning God’s goodness: if He would not control every decision (as they would), then He must not be good, or not exist at all. This section is positing the biblical view: God is not controlling but supporting; God gives choices and responsibilities, and He supports people in making the right choices.

J.I. Packer summarizes the basic arguments of theodicy, stating that evil is a lack or twisting of good. Basic pain is not evil but protection. Virtue is only possible when vice is possible. Humans must have moral choice and capacity in equal directions. Pain strengthens virtue as humans learn from consequences. Packer also reminds his readers that God solved the problem of sin, death, and pain at great (painful) cost to himself. J.I. Packer, “Theodicy” in New Dictionary of Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 679-70. Greg Boyd adds a further argument: God and Satan are at war, and there will be pain because of the battles. Greg Boyd, Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 292. See also Allister E. McGrath, Christian Theology. An Introduction (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 228-233.
himself became human to bring forgiveness and salvation.³ It was still a human, though, that took responsibility to solve the human mistake. Our God is not about control; he is a God of support. 

Control, responsibility, and support are very relevant issues in church planting. Church planters need a lot of support, yet often struggle to delegate responsibility well and then follow up with supporting their developing leaders. Planters are sometimes hesitant to admit mistakes, evaluate problems, and receive support. Planters often fix problems with a high level of control. This often works well early in the life of the church plant but becomes a disaster in the life of a young church when empowered leaders are looking for support rather than control from their Lead Pastor. This section will explore, through a brief biblical overview, the ways that God supports (not controls) people. The support of God is offered to all leaders, including church planters, to receive and to follow as an example.

God supports his people in four key ways: he is present with them, he speaks to them, he gives them support systems, and he raises up leaders. This support is seen throughout the Bible, even from the opening pages. The Bible begins with the words, “In the beginning God…” (Gn 1:1). God’s presence precedes creation, and God is present over and in creation. he walked in the Garden that he had planted (2:8; 3:8). God spoke, giving the first humans responsibility and clear instructions: be fruitful and multiply, rule

³ This was classically stated by Anselm of Canterbury in his book Cur Deus Homo, summarized in book 2, chapter VI. It was not only just that a human should die for human sin, but also fitting that a human (Jesus Christ) should take responsibility to solve the problem of human sin. Anselm of Canterbury, The Major Works, edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: University Press, 2008).
over and care for the earth and animals (1:28), take care of the Garden (2:15), do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). The Lord gave them a free choice to obey or disobey. God supported the first humans with a creation that systematically functioned—the first days of creation describe a system (light, earth, water) being created that could support humans in their task, including food coming from vegetation (1:29). The seventh day describes the rhythm of rest (2:2-3). God raised up a woman to support the man (2:18), also made in the image of God (1:27), and vital to the responsibility to be fruitful and rule the earth. In the first pages of the Bible, the picture is clear: God is present, speaking, sovereign, and supporting; humans are given responsibilities and supported by God.

The support that was given in the Garden continued. The Lord called Abram, made a covenant, and gave miraculous promises (Gn 12:1-3). He provided a wife for

4 This discussion also is relevant to the question of God’s immanence and transcendence. God is transcendent, He is separate from His creation, therefore He does not control their actions. Yet God is also immanent; He influences, guides, and supports His creation. Space does not allow a fuller treatment, but see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, second edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 327-345; Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume One: God, Authority, and Salvation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), 24-34.


6 John Walton’s recent monograph argued that Genesis 1 is not about material origins but the establishment of a cosmic temple; Genesis 1 is functional. Days one to three establish functions, and days four to six establish functionaries. Day seven is divine rest in the cosmic temple. Walton’s propositions have caused much discussion that we do not have space to discuss. Relevant to our topic is his idea that God is Creator and Sustainer; this will be a helpful category to keep in mind as we talk about the need for church planting systems and culture. Walton distinguishes between a college maintaining a physical campus and sustaining the function of the college by educating students. A church plant, especially after a couple of years, may not need support to sustain their functional ministries, but they need ongoing support to maintain their momentum and culture. This structural, systematic, and personal support is modeled on the nature of God. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 121.
Isaac (Gn 24). He wrestled with Jacob, changing his name and his ability to run from his problems (Gn 32:22-32). He did not directly speak to Pharaoh but called the fugitive Moses to be a leader and take responsibility to set God’s people free (Ex 3:10). The Lord supported Moses with his presence, his words, and his power, seen especially in the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the receiving of the Law. God gave Moses other leaders to help him (Ex 4:14-16; 17:12) and systems to help the people survive and be governed well (Ex 15:4-5, 35; 18:13-27) The people were not required to be saved from Egypt but were supported by God and his leaders. The people had to make the choices to leave their slavery, cross the parted waters, and trust in the Lord. Tragically, they often failed in their trust, worshiping the golden calf, questioning God’s provision in the wilderness, and not believing God could give them victory over the Canaanites. God gave them choices and responsibility; his support included punishing the disbelieving generation to perish in the wilderness so that a future generation of faith, led by Joshua, would conquer the Promised Land. God’s support includes discipline, consequences, and learning from mistakes.

Though the Israelites trusted in the Lord and conquered the Promised Land, they did not live into the fullness of all God promised. They wandered from God’s presence and left enemies unconquered; these enemies became a continual source of problems for Israel for hundreds of years (Jgs 1:19-2:3). Every time in the book of Judges that the

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people looked to God for support, the Lord supported them, sending judges to give them deliverance from their enemies and pointing them back to their Source of support. Yet they continued to reject God’s support. They rejected God’s final judge, Samuel, and asked for a king because they had rejected the Lord as their King (1 Sam 8:6-9). The people followed their kings: every time a king was godly, the nation was godly; every time the king rejected God, the nation turned away and faced dire consequences. God raised up prophets to warn the kings and nations. Israel, the northern kingdom, was destroyed by Assyria because they rejected the Lord (2 Kgs 17:7-23). When Assyria invaded the southern kingdom, Judah, King Hezekiah trusted in the Lord’s support, revealed through the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah reached out to the prophet, strengthened the walls of defense, built an underground water tunnel, and strengthened his leaders and people with prayer and words of support (2 Kgs 18-20). Hezekiah was a godly king, yet his son was one of the worst kings ever, and he reigned fifty-five years. God did not control the kings or the people; he supported them with prophets, blessings, and punishments.

Eventually the southern kingdom was destroyed, and God’s people were sent into exile in Babylon. A group of people returned under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple because God had stirred the hearts of the people and the Persian king Cyrus, who gave

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systematic support of protection, valuables, and documented support for the construction (Ezr 1). Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the priest were strong leaders, but they stalled in their construction when faced with opposition, so the Lord sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and strengthen them. God supported Ezra and Nehemiah with legal support from the king (Neh 2:7-9), support from the elders of Israel (3:18), and financial provision (cf. 5:10, 17-18). Nehemiah and Ezra looked to the Lord for strength, especially in the face of constant opposition and threat, and God supported them with his presence and his word which moved the hearts of the people (Neh 8:9-11; 9:1; 10:28-39).

The Lord is a God of support. He does not control people but gives support in his presence, in his word, with systems, and with the support of others. This support was revealed most fully in Jesus Christ; God himself came and revealed himself to the world in love (Jn 1:18; 3:16).12 The Son only did what the Father was doing (Jn 5:19; cf. Mt 11:25-27), and the Son brought glory to the Father (Jn 14:13) even as the Father glorified the Son (Jn 12:28). The Son chose to live dependent on the Father in prayer (Mk 1:35; Lk 22:42), and he modeled this dependence to his disciples. Jesus was present with them and would always be with them (Mt 28:20). Christ spoke the word of God to the crowds and the disciples (Mt 7:28-29); his words have power and are the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). Jesus did not do his ministry alone but empowered his disciples to continue his ministry (Mt 10:1; Jn 14:12), which would include suffering as he did (Mk 8:34-37; 10:39). He gave responsibility to the twelve apostles (Lk 9:1-6 and to seventy-two leaders

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(Lk 10:1-20), sending them in pairs so they could support each other. Jesus provided systematic support by having a clear mission to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10), giving his life as a ransom for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 20:28; 26:28).\textsuperscript{13} The followers of Christ had a clearly defined mission for their lives: to continue the mission of Jesus by making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all Christ taught (Mt 28:18-19). They would not be alone; Christ would remain present with them (Mt 28:20), and they could accomplish nothing without his support (Jn 15:5).

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples to fill them with his power for the mission (Acts 1:8). Following the example of Jesus, the disciples accepted the support of God. They proclaimed the Name of Jesus and the forgiveness found in him (2:38-41). They were devoted to his words and to each other (2:42-47; 4:32-35). They leaned into the importance of systematic support through the feeding of widows (6:2-4),\textsuperscript{14} the sending of missionaries (13:1-4),\textsuperscript{15} and the solving of larger problems (15:4-32).\textsuperscript{16} The disciples were dependent on the support of God, and this allowed them to speak beyond their education (4:13) or position (10:24-29; 26:1-32). The Spirit did not control them but

\textsuperscript{13} Ajith Fernando, \textit{Acts}, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 106. The above examples are “systems” in the fact that the disciples did not have to create them; they were enacted by Christ and accessible (globally) by the apostles. The disciples did not have to discover a mission; they were to continue Christ’s mission. They did not have to recruit powerful allies; they had the power of God. They did not have to create a religious or cultic system of forgiveness, like every other religion offered; they were to point people to the gospel: sins had been forgiven by God through the sacrifice of Christ. The “system” was pointing people to repent and put their trust in Christ to be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).


led them, empowered them, and supported them. Following the Spirit did not cause them to be spared of persecution; in fact, they suffered much as people made sinful and selfish choices (5:15; 7:58; 8:1; 12:1-4; 14:19-20; 16:22-24; 24:27; 28:30-31). Yet these Christians rejoiced (Acts 5:41; Phil 1:12-14; 1 Pt 4:16), trusting in the Holy Spirit to help in their weakness (Rom 8:26) and knowing that nothing could separate them from God’s love (Rom 8:18-39). This suffering, according to Jesus, will continue and grow even worse (Mt 24:1-28). God will allow his people to suffer, as he suffered, and he will support them through their tribulation (Mt 24:22; Rv 3:20-21). The Creator will send plagues and tribulations to get the nations to repent, but most will continue to reject the Lord (Rv 9:20; 16:21). The people of God are called to remain faithful, depending on the support of God (Mt 24:36-51; 25:14-30, 34-36; 2 Thes 3:15-17; Rv 2:9-11). Only Christ Jesus can provide the victory by his word and presence (Mt 24:30-31; 2 Thes 2:8; Rv 5:4-5; 19:11-21); he will judge the nations and every individual (Mt 24:14-46; Rv 20:11-15). In the new creation, there will be a new heaven and new earth (Rv 21:1). God will continue to support, not control, his people. We will dwell in the Father’s house (Jn 14:2), see Jesus face to face forever (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Thes 5:10; Rv 20:22-23), and reign with the Lord forever, even as the nations are healed (Rv 22:1-5).

From beginning to end to new creation, our Lord is a God of support. God does not control his people but gives them responsibilities and the choice to live well or foolishly. He supports with his presence, his words and commands, systems of support,

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and the support of leaders and others. The Bible consistently reveals the support of God and the blessing for those who accept his support in their lives and leadership.

**Supported and Supporting Leaders**

God offering support is not enough; his support must be received. God asks leaders to receive his support, point others to his support, and follow his example in supporting others. Christian leaders are not called to stand alone; rather, they are to stand in the Lord (Eph 6:13). They are also called to follow the example of God and support others. Jesus said, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Mt 10:8). Leaders are called to pass on to others the support they have received from the Lord, while remaining supported. Yet leaders are also supposed to point others directly to the support that only God can give. Jesus modeled this perfectly in his dependence on the Father. His disciples followed his example: they received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), they pointed others to the power of God (Acts 2:38), and they supported each other in the same way Jesus had supported them (Acts 2:42-47). In church planting, this means that planters need to be supported, even as they raise up leaders and support those they are developing. Those supporting the church planters (Directors, coaches, and others) also need to be supported. God offers support through his presence, his word, systems, and other people. At every step of the church planting leadership structure, support needs to be offered and valued, modeled after God’s support and constantly pointing others to God’s support.
The greatest support a leader can receive from God is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God (Acts 10:45), who confirms that we are God’s children (Rom 8:15-16) and gives us power to witness and bear suffering (Acts 1:8; Rom 8:26). The Holy Spirit is the *Paraclete*, the Helper, Advocate, Encourager, and Counselor. He lives in believers and leads into all truth, reminding them what Jesus has taught (Jn 14:17, 26; 16:13). Jesus is the Vine, and Christian leaders can accomplish nothing apart from him (Jn 15:4-5). The Spirit is a constant witness to Christ (Jn 15:26) and grows fruit inside of those rooted in Christ (Jn 15:16-17; Gal 5:22). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and tells Christians the words of God (Jn 16:5-15). There will be sorrow and suffering, but Christians are not alone, and Jesus has overcome the world (Jn 16:33). Christian leaders must be aware of their need for and dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives in them and also in others. Christians are called to receive the Spirit’s support directly from God and also from other believers.

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21 Beasley-Murray writes that the Fourth Gospel presents the picture of Jesus on continual trial by the world. The disciples are witnesses, and the Spirit is an advocate on their behalf. “By the power of the Spirit’s ministry, the ongoing trial of Jesus and his church becomes reversed in the trial of the world by the exalted Christ.” G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendriks, 1991), 59-84.

The greatest example a leader can follow in supporting others is the Holy Spirit. Like the Spirit, Christian leaders are sent by Jesus. In supporting others, they can be helpers, advocates, encouragers, counselors, comforters, guides, teachers, and ones who convict. They need to be supported by the Holy Spirit and pass on the Spirit’s support, living in them, to others. Yet a Christian leader, no matter how powerful, can ever take the place of the Holy Spirit. They cannot dwell in a human soul, whisper to the human heart, or transform the will. Therefore, leaders must not only support people with the power of the Holy Spirit but also point people directly to the support of the Holy Spirit. Only when the Spirit is living inside of a human soul is a person abiding in Christ and able to accomplish more than could be asked or imagined (Jn 15:5; Eph 3:20). Our God is a God of support, and the Holy Spirit provides the perfect example of how we are to receive, give, and point others to his support.

It is so important for the support of God to be received and passed on to others. The Bible is full of positive and negative examples of this principle. When support is passed on, there are incredible blessings. Moses had his hands held up by Aaron and Hur, allowing the battle to be won (Ex 17:11). Nehemiah was supported by God and the Persian king; in turn he supported the nobles as they led the construction efforts. He absorbed much of the personal attacks, came up with a plan to defend people from

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24 A study of the Greek verb *parakaleo* (request, urge) shows that asking for help, especially God’s help, is a normal and natural practice in the Bible. The verb is used 109 times. The “asking” can be in the sense of a request, a command, or even comfort. Johannes Thomas writes “Paraclesis speaks personally, persuasively, and directly (in contrast to popular philosophy and aphoristic wisdom).” *Paraclesis* is connected to asking believers to live out what they believe (1 Thes 4:1), and can even be equated with preaching (Heb 10:23-25). Johannes Thomas, “*Parakaleo,*” in *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 23-27.
danger, and personally fed many people every day (Neh 2:18-20; 4:11-14; 5:14-19). The wall of Jerusalem—which had been left destroyed for decades—was rebuilt in 52 days (6:15). The disciples of Jesus received the Holy Spirit and then passed it on to others, allowing each person to personally encounter the risen Christ and to continue his mission (Acts 2:38; 8:17; 10:44). The church in Antioch supported missionary and church planting work by obeying the Holy Spirit and sending out two of its pastors with prayer, fasting, and financial support (Acts 13:1-3).

When support is not passed on, there are dire consequences. Adam and Eve did not ask for God’s support; rather than supporting each other, they blamed each other and creation. The judges received God’s power but rarely passed on the legacy of faith to the next generation. This pattern continued with the kings: David loved God with his whole heart, but his son Solomon gave his heart to women (1 Kgs 11:4). Hezekiah was a great reforming king, but those reforms were not passed on to his son Manasseh, who was one of the most ungodly kings in the history of the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 21:1-18). The story of Ananias and Sapphira shows that there needs to be honesty when support is given. They sold their property to bless the church and those in need, yet they did not give the entire amount to the apostles (Acts 5:1-2; cf. 4:34-35). It was not wrong to hold back a level of support; it was wrong to lie about giving their all (5:3-4).25 It is not wrong to have limits in supporting others, but it is wrong to lie about those limits to avoid a hard conversation or to make oneself look better.

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To wrap up this section, we will look at the story of the feeding of the 5,000 as an example of how Jesus trained his disciples to receive his support, point others to his support, and to support others, all while taking responsibility as servant leaders. In Matthew 14:13, Jesus had heard the news of the murder of John the Baptist, his cousin and forerunner in the mission of God. He went off with his closest friends to be alone, yet the crowds found their way to him, and he healed the sick. The disciples could see the problem approaching: the people were not leaving and there was no food to feed them. They brought the problem to Jesus, seeking his solution. Instead, he challenged them pointedly: “You feed them.” Jesus was testing his disciples to help them learn how to receive his support and power. He had empowered them to leadership, and that leadership was dependent on the power of God. The disciples tried to solve the problem: they had five loaves of bread and two fish. They brought their small amount to the Lord to see what he could do. He brought the food before the Father, blessing it. He then passed it back to the disciples. Over 5,000 people were fed, and there were leftovers.

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26 Mark adds that this time away was to rest (6:30-31); Luke tells us the name of the town was Bethsaida (9:10).

27 In John, it is Jesus who asked Philip the question: “Where can we buy food to feed all of these people?” John writes that Jesus asked this to test Philip (Jn 6:5-6). Hagner highlights that the miracle, which is in all four Gospels, points to the day when Jesus will meet all need of hunger; it is a kind of messianic banquet (cf. 8:11). This miracle also happened in the desert, showing that Jesus is the manna from heaven who feeds His people. Christ is the fulfillment of the promises of God. Jesus is the Messiah who meets every human need. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1995), 414-419.

28 John’s account tells us that this food came from a small boy (Jn 6:9). In Mark and John, the disciples (specifically Philip) added the remark that two hundred days of wages would not pay for enough food for the amount of people gathered (Mark 6:37; Jn 6:7).

29 Twelve basketfuls (Matt 14:20; Mark 6:43; Lk 9:17; Jn 6:11). In John, Jesus commanded the leftovers to be collected so no food would be wasted (6:12).
was the responsibility of the disciples to solve the problem, yet they could only solve this problem with the support and power of Jesus. Christ showed them how to receive the support of God, how to point people to his support (Jesus received the glory for the miracle), and how to support others (the disciples supported the people with food so they could stay near Christ).

**Supporting the Sent**

Christians are sent people. Jesus was sent by the Father, and he has sent his followers just as he was sent (Jn 20:21). They are not sent alone but with his support. We have seen in this chapter that God supports his people in four ways:

1. He is present with them.
2. He speaks to them, especially through his word.
3. He gives them systems of support.
4. He gives them others, especially leaders, to support them.

His people are called to seek, receive, and depend on his support and power. They are to teach others to do the same even as they support and are supported by others. This section

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30 In Matthew, Mark, and John, this story is immediately followed by the story of Jesus walking on water, further emphasizing the power of Christ. In Matthew, the power of Christ to walk on water was passed on to Peter, who was miraculously able to walk on water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus (14:38-32).

31 While the case can be made that the people of God in the Old Testament were also sent people (Abram out of Ur and the nation out of Egypt), when the people settled in the land (and again after the exile), the image was less about being sent and more about being a light to the nations (Is 49:6) that would draw them to the Temple to worship the Lord (Is 2:2). Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume 2: Life Ministry, and Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), 164-170; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1061-1063.
will explore four biblical ways that the Sent are supported. These four ways roughly correlate to the support that God himself gives:

1. Prayer
2. Develop and deploy
3. Finances and systems
4. Sending others

The first way to support the Sent is to pray for them. The primary request is that the Sent would experience the presence and power of God. Jesus promised to be with his commissioned people forever (Mt 28:20). As he sent them, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit to give them power and remind them of everything they had been taught by him (Jn 16:13). Jesus modeled prayerful dependence on the Father and developed this dependence in his disciples (Mk 1:35; Lk 11:1). Jesus prayed for his disciples, praying that they would experience his presence, the glory and love of God, and unity (Jn 17:22-26). He also prayed for their protection and holiness and that the world would come to believe in the truth through their message and lives. Before sending out Paul and Barnabas, the church in Antioch was praying and fasting (Acts 13:1-3). Paul asked for prayer for the mission (Col 4:2-4) and he regularly prayed for his churches (e.g. 1 Cor 1:4-9), and his fellow, sent leaders (2 Tm 2:3; cf. Ti 1:4).

The second way to support the Sent is to develop and deploy them. Training is essential. Jesus took years to invest in his disciples before sending them out to the world. He invested his life into them and revealed himself to them in glory and weakness (Mt

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He gave them power for mighty works in his name and to proclaim his gospel (Mt 10:1). Not only did they first see “sent” ministry modeled by Christ (Lk 8:1), he also sent them out and brought them back for evaluation. Seventy-two were sent, and they returned with joy and ready to receive deeper development (Lk 10:1-20). Paul followed this pattern, returning to the church in Antioch that had empowered and sent him and Barnabas (Acts 14:26-28). This allowed time to celebrate and debrief of all that God had done—including addressing the hard question of what to do with Gentile believers (Acts 15:1-35).

Developing and deploying the includes personally investing in the Sent, empowering them, returning for celebration and debriefing, and having room to learn from failure. In Mark 9:14-29, there is a story of Jesus casting out a demon. Christ had just returned from the mountain where he was transfigured in the sight of Peter, James, and John. Coming down the mountain, Jesus was greeted by problems. The scribes were arguing with his disciples because they were unable to cast out a demon, though they had been given authority to do so (Mk 3:15). Jesus cast out the demon, teaching a lesson about faith to the boy’s father: all things are possible for those who believe (9:23). His


34 There is debate amongst scholars if Paul wrote Galatians before or after the Jerusalem Council. A helpful summary can be found in G. Walter Hansen, “Galatians, Letter to the,” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 327-329. F.F. Bruce opts, cautiously, in placing the composition of Galatians before the Jerusalem visit of Acts 15:6. He lists over fifteen scholars who have held this view, including Calvin. F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 55. McKnight also holds to this view. Scot McKnight, Galatians, New International Life Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 21.

35 Parallel Mt 17:14-21 and Lk 9:37-42.
disciples later asked Jesus privately why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus replied that only prayer could cast out that type of demon. This begs the question: why were the disciples trying to cast out demons without prayer? Perhaps they were relying on their own power. Though their authority over demons had been given by Christ, they were learning that they needed the continued support, presence, and power of God to live out the authority and calling that Christ had given them. Position is not enough; they needed prayer to fight the darkness. The work of Christ cannot be done without the power of Christ. Jesus had given them space to lead and room to fail. They learned from this failure to live in dependence on the power of God (e.g. Acts 3:6).

The third way to support the Sent is with finances and systems. Jesus and his disciples lived as itinerants, and he taught them to pray for food daily (Lk 11:3). They were given food and finances by supporters, and they were taught to trust the Lord to raise up those who would feed and house them so they could focus on his mission (Lk 8:2-3; 10:7). The Sent need to be supported. The church of Antioch was a “home base” for Paul early on (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15:35; 18:23), providing prayer, leaders, a home to return to, and financial support. The support they gave was sacrificial: they prayed

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36 This response is only found in Mark. In Matthew, Jesus replied that the disciples had so little faith, and taught about having faith like a mustard seed. In Luke there is no teaching after the casting out of the demon. Matthew and Mark emphasize the growth of the disciples and the need to be dependent on Christ. Luke emphasizes that there are things that only Christ can accomplish. Lane, Mark, 329.

37 While financial support is not explicitly mentioned in Acts 13:1-3, there is no mention of Paul or Barnabas working (to provide for their needs) on the first missionary journey, either in Acts or in Paul’s letters. In Galatians (churches from the first missionary journey), Paul wrote about providing for teachers (6:6), but there is no indication that Paul had yet (or ever) received financial gifts from the Galatian churches. It is the Philippian church that routinely supplied for Paul’s needs in the second and third missionary journeys (Phil 4:11-18), and Paul made a special point to the Corinthians that he had the right, as all apostles did, to ask for compensation, but he chose not to claim this right (1 Cor 9:11-18; 2 Cor 11:7-9; cf. Acts 20:34-35). Stott, Acts, 217-18.
with fasting and they surrendered two of their key church leaders to be sent by the Spirit. Later, the church in Ephesus served in the role of supporting and sending church (Acts 19:8-10; 20:13-38). The Ephesian church planted the churches of Colosse and Laodicea, and likely had a hand in starting the church at Hieropolis (Col 4:13, 16). Though he would not demand support (1 Cor 9:12), Paul was willing to ask for it; he asked the Roman Christians to be a new home base of financial and systematic support for further missions work (Rom 15:24). The church of Philippi repeatedly and sacrificially gave finances to Paul’s mission work (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15-18; cf. Acts 18:1-5), though Paul was willing to work when needed to continue the mission (Phil 4:11; 1 Thes 2:9; 3:8). The support that Paul received allowed him to plant more churches (cf. Rom 15:19) and to send out others to plant as well (see Col 1:7; 1 Tm 1:3; 2 Tm 4:10; Ti 1:5).

The Sent need to be supported, and the Senders need to be supported by the Sent as well. The Senders need prayer, visits, and even financial support. Paul routinely visited Antioch and Jerusalem to give updates on the work of God through his ministry (e.g. Acts 15:4, 12; 21:18-19; Gal 1:18; 2:1). Paul was asked by James, Peter, and John to


\[39\] It is likely that these churches were planted by Epaphras (and fellow planters); see Colossians 1:7, 8; 4:12, 13. O’Brien’s view is that this happened while Paul was in Ephesus (Acts 19; AD 52-55). Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), xxvii-xxviii. Bruce agrees with this conclusion and notes that Eusebius records that Philip the Evangelist and his four daughters had moved to Hieropolis and were buried there. F.F. Bruce, “Hieropolis,” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 195-196.

remember the poor (Gal 2:10). The church in Antioch, where Paul were leaders, sent a gift with them to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30). Later, Paul spent a great effort in raising the Collection\(^{41}\) for the poor in Jerusalem amongst his church plants. He wrote about it in his letters (Rom 15:25-32; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9) and brought the gift to Jerusalem with representatives from the Gentile churches.\(^{42}\) Paul delivered these sacrificial gifts at great sacrifice to himself: in fact, had he not brought these gifts to the poor in Jerusalem, he would not have been arrested (Acts 21:10-14).

The fourth way to support the Sent is with other people. The Sent should never be sent alone. Jesus called his disciples to follow him together. He sent them out two by two (Lk 10:1), and they learned the importance of being together (see Lk 24:13; cf. Mt 18:20). Peter did his public ministry with John (Acts 3:1; 8:14) and others (Acts 5:21; 10:23), including his wife, who was also a believer (cf. 1 Cor 9:5). One exception was Philip, who traveled alone as a time of persecution broke out against the followers of the Way (Acts 8:1, 5, 26, 40). Later, though, Philip was accompanied in ministry by his four daughters, who were prophets (Acts 21:8). Paul was partnered together with Barnabas (Acts 11:30; 13:2) and Mark (13:5). When Barnabas and Paul divided over the question of bringing Mark on the second missionary journey, Paul did not choose to go alone but chose Silas and Timothy (Acts 15:40; 16:3). Paul routinely formed friendships and


\(^{42}\) In fact, it was his Gentile representatives that raised suspicion that he entered the Temple with a Gentile (see Acts 21:29). Felix, the governor who kept Paul in prison for two years, was hoping for a bribe from Paul—likely because Paul had shown himself able to raise large amounts of money (Acts 24:26-27).
partnerships for the gospel, and he was rarely alone.\(^\text{43}\) Paul regularly and boldly asked for support.

Support needs to be available by the Senders and sought out by the Sent. God supports his people with his presence, his word and teaching, systems of support, and others. Leaders need to deeply receive God’s support while passing on that support to others and pointing people directly to God for support. Church planters need to be supported in prayer, training, finances and systems, and with others. As the Sent, they need to boldly and unapologetically seek out this support and be ready to give this support to others. The Senders need to ensure that this support is constantly available so that the Sent can focus on the mission of Christ.

**Biblical Examples of Support in the Five Key Areas**

In chapter two, we discovered the five key needs for church planters: to experience the power of God, to have vision refilled, to receive proactive care, to have help with problem solving and prevention, and to receive support with systems and strategy. This chapter has established that our Lord is a God of support, that leaders are called to receive and give God’s support, and that the Sent need to be supported. We will now turn to the five needs and biblical examples of godly leaders who wisely met these needs with support. While most of these leaders, especially Jesus, met more than one of these needs, we will focus on the need under discussion and the tangible ways in which

this need was met by the leader. Church planters must value and receive these areas of support, and they need to be communicated and made easily accessible by the Senders. Planters need to pass on this support to others and create a culture of supporting leaders in their own churches; as a church grows, it learns to take care of and support itself. However, the focus on this section will be on the support that church planters, as the Sent, need to receive. As advocated in chapter one, this support needs to continue, though on a different level, into the young church years of a church plant. More specifics on how support changes as a church plant grows older will be discussed in chapter five.

The Power of God: Jesus

The greatest example for all support is Jesus Christ. We will narrow our scope to the power of God that Jesus passed on to his disciples. As God, he naturally held all power. As a human, he wielded a power that humans had never held. People were amazed at his authority in teaching (Mt 7:28-29) and his power over creation (Mt 8:27). He had power over sickness and demons. He had authority to forgive sins and declare people clean. Jesus empowered his disciples by teaching them to be dependent on his power (Jn 15:5). They were given authority—as humans—over sickness and demons (Mt 10:1). They were even given power to declare sins forgiven in the name of Jesus (Mt 16:19; Jn 20:23; Acts 2:38). Jesus is the perfect example of how to empower leaders.

44 N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 257. It is sometimes missed how revolutionary the act of declaring God’s forgiveness—as human beings—was in the Jewish Second Temple period. Jesus declared sins forgiven, without the need to go to the Temple. Peter, preaching in Jerusalem, said that forgiveness of sins was in Jesus’ name. This means that true forgiveness was not found in the sacrifices of the Temple but the fulfilled sacrifice of Jesus. Quoting Wright, “He was offering this final eschatological blessing outside the official structures, to all the wrong people, and on his own authority. That was his real offense” (p.272).
Church planters need to experience the power of God directly from Jesus, and they need to be empowered by those who are sending them.

**Church Planters Need to Personally Encounter the Power of God**

Before the disciples were called to be fishers of men and women, they were called to follow Jesus and be close to him (Mt 4:18-20). They spent time with him, traveled with him, served him, loved him, and knew his voice. They were his friends (Jn 15:15). The Gospels contain many of the stories of how Jesus personally changed a disciple’s life.

Peter caught a miraculous catch of fish and had his mother-in-law healed (Lk 5:1-11; Mk 1:30). Nathaniel had Jesus see into his soul (Jn 1:47-51). Matthew was loved and called out from his tax collector’s booth; Jesus defended him when he was verbally attacked by Pharisees (Lk 5:27-32). They loved Jesus and were loved by him. They knew Jesus personally and saw him revealed in glory and gore, in his shine and suffering. They understood that they could accomplish nothing in their own power; they had to be connected to Jesus (Jn 15:5).

The most important thing in the life of every Christian is to be connected to Christ. Church planters need to constantly encounter the love and power of Christ, or they will begin to serve in their own strength. Planters need to make it their first goal to grow

45 Wright, *Jesus*, 247.

46 Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 21-69. The disciples were given a new relationship with the Father through Christ. Jesus taught about this new relationship, but He also lived it out in His life with the Father and His connection to the disciples.

closer to Christ through prayer, study, silence, and rhythms of deep rest. Those who are the Senders—denominations, church planting movements, sending church, and coaches—need to talk first and most about the planter’s walk of faith. This should come before discussions about numbers and strategies. Planting is a spiritual battle, and the planter’s soul is often the center of the conflict. The Senders need to know how, from their own lives and experience, how to encounter God and see his power unleashed in church planting. Their first and highest support to the church planter is to point them to the power of Christ. Jesus’ words in John 15:5 apply also to church planting: we can do nothing without him.

**Church Planters Need to Be Clearly Empowered and Sent**

Jesus empowered his disciples to continue his Kingdom ministry. The disciples witnessed the power of God in Jesus as he performed miracles and cast out demons. Jesus demonstrated the power of God to them, including his prayer life. They saw the authority of Jesus in action, and they were given authority by Jesus. When Jesus gave them authority, it was not confusing but clear: they were given power to cast out demons, heal,

48 Wright emphasizes the victory of Jesus, stating His aims were to “evoke the traditions which promised YHWH’s return to Zion, and the somewhat more nebulous but still important traditions which spoke of a human figure sharing the divine throne; to enact those traditions in his own journey to Jerusalem, his messianic act in the Temple, and his death at the hands of the pagans (in the hope of subsequent vindication); and thereby to embody YHWH’s return.” Wright, Jesus, 651. What is lacking in this summary, though is how the mission of Jesus was passed on to His disciples. Wright lightly addresses the mission in his conclusion: “There was still a mopping-up battle to be fought, but the real victory had been accomplished…That was the basis of their remarkable joy” (p.659). However, this seems to be insufficient for something (calling, empowering, and sending out disciples) that was so central to the aims of Christ.

49 They were also given a vocation. In fact, McKnight lists vocation as one of the “costs” of following Jesus, along with family, possessions, and self-denial. McKnight, New Vision, 176-196.
and forgive sins (Mt 10:1; Jn 20:23). They did not teach on their own but continued the
teaching of Christ (Mt 28:19; Jn 14:26). They were not given authority over creation, but
Peter did walk on water briefly. Their power was dependent on their connection to Christ,
who had clearly empowered them to be close to him, connected with each other, and live
out his mission. Church planters need to be clearly empowered. There should be no
confusion about what they are allowed to do. There should be no disagreement about
what falls under the planter’s authority. The Senders need to be clear about their
leadership and authority. As churches plant churches, and especially in network church
plants, authority needs to be given and clearly communicated.

The disciples were clear about their identity: they were Jesus people and Sent
people. This identity had been given by Christ himself. Jesus called the Twelve, giving
them authority and sending them out (Mt 10:1-42). He sent seventy-two disciples as well
(Lk 10:1-24). After the resurrection, he sent them out to the ends of the earth (Mt 28:18-
19; Acts 1:8). They would not be alone: he would be with them always, and they would
be sent with the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:20; Acts 1:4-5). They would be sent
together (Jn 17:20-26). Church planters receive incredible support when they are clearly
and publicly sent out by the Senders. These times of sending affirm the calling and
sending of God in the life of a planter. This “sent identity” needs to be constantly
affirmed in the life of planters, lest they forget the call to the lost and themselves get lost
in the unending demands of church life.
Church Planters Need to Understand They are Continuing the Mission of Jesus, Not Their Own

Jesus trained his disciples to live out his mission and continue it when he was gone.\(^5^0\) It was not their own missions or agendas; the mission of their lives was to continue the mission of Jesus.\(^5^1\) They were to use the tactics of Jesus (see Mt 23:11) while they shared the teachings of Jesus. This was not a plan to get rich or fulfill their own desires; they were to follow Christ, taking up their crosses (Mk 8:34). Only in losing their lives could they find them and be truly fulfilled (Mk 8:35-37). Though they were empowered in many ways, they were always dependent on Christ. They learned not to attempt God’s work without prayer and God’s power (Mk 9:29). When they were commanded to feed (miraculously) a crowd of thousands, they handed their meager scraps to Christ to do the true work of power (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-7). Mary pointed the wedding servants to the power of Jesus, telling them to do whatever he told them (Jn 2:5).

It was his mission they were living, and they lived it out with his power.

The disciples of Jesus are called to live the mission of Jesus with the power and presence of Jesus. The greatest act of God’s power that the disciples witnessed was the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ gave his life as a ransom, just as he had foretold, and he rose again in power. He had conquered death, sin, and shame. In this authority and power, Christ sent out the disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim his victory to the ends of the earth (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). The Sent were not called rabbis

\(^{5^0}\) McKnight, *New Vision*, 127.

\(^{5^1}\) Wright, *Jesus*, 443-451.
but witnesses not rabbis; they were not primarily to teach a lesson but give a witness to the person and power of Christ. People could personally experience the resurrected Christ (1 Pt 1:8; cf. Acts 25:19), and the priority of the Sent is to remain close to him.

Church planters must understand the mission of Christ. Their church plants should have a clear connection to the biblical mission of Jesus. The goal of a church plant is nothing less than being a witness to Christ, so that people may experience his presence, power, and resurrection. All other agendas and goals must be secondary. Church planters need to be supported by the Senders by ensuring that their vision and mission is aligned with the mission of Christ. Planters need to be constantly challenged with good questions about their strategies and plans to ensure that it is the mission of Jesus—not the goals of the planter or the desires of culture—that are being lived out in the church plant.

Vision Refilled: Moses and Deborah

Planters are people driven by vision. They have a vision for their churches, a vision for what God is trying to do in their communities, and a vision for lives to be transformed by Jesus. Vision, though, is like water in a bucket with holes in the bottom: it slowly drains unless constantly refilled. Moses and Deborah will provide the biblical examples of how to support church planters by constantly refilling their vision.
Church Planters Need to Have God-Sized Vision

Moses was given a God-sized vision from God at the burning bush (Ex 3-4).\textsuperscript{52} Though he saw himself as a fugitive criminal, unfit for leadership and not good at communication, the Lord called him to a huge task: he was sent to the most powerful ruler in the world, to demand the free release of the nation’s slave labor, all in the name of God. It was not enough for Moses to have received this vision from the Lord; he needed to share this God-sized vision with the leaders of Israel (4:29-31). He performed signs for them, and they believed. They believed in the vision, but they need to constantly be reminded of it. When they were not, the leaders complained to Moses about how hard their lives were (5:21; 6:9). The leaders did not grumble to Moses when the plagues were happening because they could see the power of God at work. Before the first Passover, Moses communicated the vision of what God was doing: he would set his people free, change the heart of Pharaoh, and set up a day of remembrance for his people (13:1-16). Moses learned that vision must be constantly communicated. Deborah was a prophet and judge of Israel.\textsuperscript{53} People came to her from all over the country to allow her to give judgment. As the spiritual leader of God’s people, she clearly communicated the God-sized vision to Barak: call out 10,000 warriors to fight the mighty chariots of Sisera; the Lord will give you victory (Jgs 4:4-7). After the troops were assembled, she


\textsuperscript{53} Block, Judges, Ruth, 186-198. Block downplays the importance and role of Deborah, saying, “The presentation of Deborah as a savior of her people is more apparent than real” (p.193). However, only a few pages later he states, “The request [by Barak] to be accompanied by the prophet is a plea for the presence of God” (p.199).
communicated encouragement and vision again: “Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you” (Jgs 4:17).

Church planters need vision constantly communicated to them. Planting often feels very isolated, and planters sometimes isolate themselves. Planters need to be supported by being filled with a God-sized vision. Sometimes they need to be reminded of their own God-sized vision that sparked the beginning of the church plant; other times they need to hear the larger vision of the network or denomination of which they are part. The Senders need to ensure that vision is poured into planters for years. Vision must not stop flowing after one to two years. The Senders need to find ways to continue to communicate with their church plants into the young church years, understanding that young church plants still see themselves as church plants (though with unique needs), and still need to hear the God-sized vision for church planting.

Church Planters Need to See Their Leaders

When Barak was called by God, through Deborah, to raise an army and take to the battlefield, he only had one request: that Deborah would come with him (Jgs 4:8). Barak was a man of strong faith and courage, as is seen by his willingness to fight a near-impossible battle. Barak was also very wise: he knew that God was present and working through Deborah.\(^54\) Her presence would give incredible encouragement to the troops. The warriors on the battlefield needed to see their spiritual leaders. Moses, at the battle

\(^{54}\) Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 199-200.
against the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-16), did not go to the battlefield, but he stood on a mountain so the people of God could see him.\textsuperscript{55} Whenever his hands were raised, the army would gain the advantage. Moses needed the support of his fellow leaders Aaron and Hur, and Joshua needed the support of Moses as he fought and won the battle below.

Like Barak and Joshua, church planters are leaders that need to see their leaders. Without their leaders present and visible, it is easy to become discouraged, which leads to defeat. It is not enough to read a letter or email; the Senders need to be seen. As the stories here show, presence is powerful. When Moses was gone from his people for forty days, that is when they began to worship the Golden Calf (Ex 32:1-4).\textsuperscript{56} Without the presence of leaders, spiritual vision goes askew and begins to follow the tyranny of the urgent and the call of the crowd.

\textbf{Church Planters Need to Know What is Expected of Them}

Before he learned to delegate, Moses made it a point to personally handle most of the problems in the nation (Ex 18:13-27). This led him to the point of burnout. Taking his father-in-law’s advice, he began to raise up fellow leaders, empowering them and delegating meaningful tasks to them.\textsuperscript{57} When he appointed judges, it was clear what their responsibilities were. He chose capable leaders and put them in charge of groups of ten,

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\textsuperscript{55} James K. Bruckner, \textit{Exodus}, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 158-161. Bruckner notes that the previous passage also shows the value of visible leadership. The people were on the brink of dying from thirst and threatening to kill Moses. God called Moses to walk ahead of the people, and God himself would go before him; he was to strike the rock in the sight of the elders of Israel.

\textsuperscript{56} The true leadership failure here is not on Moses, who was called to this time away by the Lord. The failure is on Aaron and the other leaders who knew better but gave in to the pressure of the people.

\textsuperscript{57} Childs, \textit{Exodus}, 331-332; Bruckner, \textit{Exodus}, 166-168.
fifty, one hundred, and one thousand. All cases that were major were brought to Moses. Numbers 4 describes the duties of the Levites; they were set apart by the Lord to take care of the Tabernacle. The duties of the priests are described in many places (e.g. Lv 9). Reading these passages today may not be exciting, but the expectations were clear for these spiritual leaders. The expectations were communicated, written down, and remembered. Church planters also need to know what is expected of them. They need to know not only numerical benchmarks but also personal boundaries for success. They need to know what level of support they are expected to give back to the Senders, and how they can support those who will be Sent in the future. These expectations need to be communicated well and in advance of their deadlines; there is nothing worse than being delegated an unexpected task while fighting for the survival of your church.

Deborah was clear about what was expected of Barak: he needed to call out warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and fight against Sisera. When Barak asked for Deborah to come to the battlefield, she agreed but clearly communicated the warning: he would take no honor from the battlefield; victory would come at the hands of a woman. There is a double meaning in this prophetic word: Deborah was the leader who sang the song of victory, but Jael was the woman who killed Sisera and is remembered in the pages of the Bible. Barak was clearly told of the consequences, and he was willing to accept them to receive Deborah’s help. Church planters need to have expectations, including consequences, clearly communicated to them. Jesus communicated blessings and curses (Lk 6:20-26). Similarly, planters need to know the benefits of living up to

expectations and the consequences of failing to meet them. Of course, planters also need to be reminded by the Senders that their personal identity and worth are not dependent on the success of the church plant.

**Church Planters Need to Be Inspired and Know They are Part of Something Bigger**

When the people crossed the Sea, Moses led the people in a song of deliverance (Ex 15).\(^{59}\) When Deborah led the people to victory, she led a song with Barak (Jgs 5).\(^{60}\) These songs celebrated all the Lord had done and reminded the people of how these victories were part of something bigger. In Moses’ day, the Lord had hurled Pharaoh’s armies and chariots into the Sea; the most powerful army in the world at the time was defeated by the Lord, the Warrior who fought for his unarmed people. The Lord is unrivalled among the gods, and the people could be assured that he would give them victory in the Promised Land. Under Deborah’s leadership, the Lord had marched out, and the mountains trembled. Israel had followed false gods, and they lost their will to fight. Deborah arose as a mother for Israel, and the people of God rose up to fight. They did not fight alone; even the stars from heaven fought for them (Jgs 5:20). Those who love the Lord will rise like the sun in power (5:31). These songs give all glory to God for the mighty victories, they also help see the bigger battles that have been won.

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\(^{59}\) Bruckner, *Exodus*, 137-143.

\(^{60}\) This is one of the few times in the Bible where we have the clear authorship of a biblical, prophetic, and didactic passage by a woman. As part of the Bible, Deborah’s words are “God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tm 3:16). As Scripture, Deborah’s teaching has authority over all Christians, women and men. Block gives a discussion of the key issues, including the authorship and the importance of women in the chapters. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 175-186.
Vision needs to be refilled again and again. Church planters need vision refilled for years, including into their young church years. Church planters are looking for support and inspiration from their leaders; they are seeking a new song of celebration. This vision needs to help planters see that they are part of something bigger. Their victories on the local level help fuel the larger movement. Their struggles are part of the larger struggle between the light and the darkness (Eph 6:12). They are not alone but part of something bigger. Those who send church planters need to constantly refill their vision. Church planters need to be consistently invited into the bigger picture communication times so that their vision can be refilled.

Proactive Care: John

The Apostle John was one of the first disciples called by Christ, and he had a very close relationship with Jesus. He was the author of the Gospel of John and the letters of 1-3 John. His life was transformed by the love of Jesus, and his writings display a deep concern with community, truth, and love. It was not enough for John to experience Christ’s love; his concern was that God’s people also experience his love as they walked in truth (Jn 20:31; 1 Jn 1:3; 2:1; 5:13). His love bonds people together and forms true community. John proactively provided soul care with life, writings, leadership, and

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61 The Gospel and Letters are anonymous; except for the title “the elder” (2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1). Morris gives a great summary of the debate over the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. He takes the view that John the Apostle is the author; meaning that John was the one who (primarily) wrote down the words. Morris, John, 4-25. Marshall holds that John the Apostle was the author of the Gospel and the Letters, but not Revelation. I. Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 42-47. Brown believes the Beloved Disciple (a term used six times in the Fourth Gospel) was not John but a minor disciple of Jesus who had a special relationship with him. Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the Gospel of John (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 191. Irenaeus and Polycrates, early church fathers, both held to Johannine authorship. See Michael J. Wilkins, “Disciples,” in The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 180.
ability to share a unique perspective on Jesus. Church planters need care, and the care needs to be proactive. They need care for their souls and struggles, their faith and families, and their hearts and health. The care needs to be available and accessible to the planters. It also needs to be proactive because most planters will not ask for help until it is too late. This does not mean the Senders must provide all the care, they also ask challenging questions to the Sent to ensure self-care is happening.

**Church Planters Need to Experience the Love of Christ**

John personally experienced the love of Christ. He was one of the first disciples called (Jn 1:35-37). He was appointed as an apostle (Mt 10:1) and experienced all of Jesus’ ministry. He was part of the three disciples who were part of Jesus’ inner circle; these three only were chosen by Christ to witness the transfiguration of Jesus, the raising of a dead girl, and the anguished prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14:33; Lk 8:51; 9:28-29). He was at the crucifixion and was asked by Jesus to care for his mother (Jn 19:26-27). John ran to the empty tomb and experienced the resurrected Christ (Jn 20-21). He loved Christ and was very close to him. He leaned against Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper (Jn 13:23).62 John was able to abide in the heart (or bosom) of Christ, and Christ is the One who abides in the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:18). John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and he wanted Christians to be able to experience this love and fellowship with God (1 Jn 1:3-4; 4:7-10). He wrote his Gospel so that people would believe in Jesus

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62 The original verbiage of this verse is obscured by most modern translations: John was not sitting next to Jesus but reclining on Jesus’s bosom (chest). Brown, *John*, 574.
and have life in his name (Jn 20:31). John experienced the love of Christ, and proactively worked for others to experience this love.⁶³

Church planters need to know that they are loved. They need to experience the love of Christ directly, and they need to feel this love flowing through the Senders. Planters need to be asked how they are abiding in Christ. They need to be able to provide specifics, and the need to be provided with opportunities to deeply soak in the love of Christ. In the rush of planting, the rest of Christ is often forgotten or forsaken. Planters need to be proactively asked and challenged about their lives in the love of Christ, including times of prayer, Bible study, solitude, community, and rest. Church planters are willing to sacrifice much for the mission of God; unfortunately, they often sacrifice what God forbids: their homes and health. Self-care is vital for spiritual leaders who are pouring out so much care to others; an empty cup has nothing to give. Jesus is the Vine and planters can accomplish nothing apart from him (Jn 15:5). All other love flows from the love we receive and give in him (Jn 15:12).

One of a church planter’s most important jobs is self-care. Their first calling is to draw near to Christ; the first soul they are given responsibility for is their own. One of the most important ways to support church planters is to ask about their plan (and follow through) for self-care. Church planters need advocates because they are willing to sacrifice so much for planting. Planting can be incredibly soul damaging; it can also be incredibly soul developing because God can use the fire of planting to transform the soul

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of the planter. Planters need people in their lives who will support them by asking deep, soul-focused questions. These support people will need to be persistent because planters are very practical and results oriented. Life in the Vine is slow, and pruning often hurts (Jn 15:2, 5). There need to be people who sign up to care for the soul of the planter, constantly asking about the planter’s plan and helping to facilitate deeper times away with the Lord. When the tank of the church planter’s soul is overflowing, they can run even faster with Jesus on his mission to the lost.

**Church Planters Need a Community Centered on Love and Truth**

John deeply valued the importance of community in Christ. 64 John was not a loud or vocal person. In fact, he is so silent in the Gospels and Acts that it is easy to forget he was there. Even in the Fourth Gospel, he refused to name himself, referring to himself as “the beloved disciple” (e.g. Jn 20:2). 65 While Peter was bold and outspoken, John focused more on the personal love of Christ and the power of community. He had been a follower of John the Baptist, and he and his brother James were immediately drawn to Jesus and the close community of disciples forming around him (Jn 1:35-37; cf. Mt 4:18-22). He experienced the fullness of Christ-centered community, including formation (Lk 5:9-11), leadership (Mt 10:2), training (Lk 9:1-6), people leaving (Jn 6:66-69), times away (Mk 6:31; 9:2), foot washing (Jn 13:1-5), betrayal (Jn 13:18-30), suffering and loss (19:25-

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65 See note above about authorship of the Gospel and the Letters.
27), resurrection (20:19-23), forgiveness (21:1-19), and sending (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; cf. Jn 20:21-23). John was not outspoken, but he was a leader and pillar in the community of Christ followers (cf. Gal 2:9). Only a few years after the Ascension of Christ, John lost his brother James, who was martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2). John, who would outlive all the apostles (see Jn 21:22-24), understood the importance of belong to the family of God. John formed communities focused on Christ and full of his love (1 Jn 4:7). John wrote his Gospel in community and with the help of his community (Jn 20:31; 21:24). John understood that community itself is a powerful witness to the world (Jn 17:21).

Community is so important in the life of a church planter. Christ-centered community is powerful. At the beginning, the planter will need a level of community to come from outside the church plant, as he or she draws in new (often unhealthy or hurting) people. Supportive community needs to be built into the church plant, and this support should extend to the planter, other leaders, and their families as well. However, a true culture of supporting godly, missional leaders may take many years to establish, and planters will need additional support from Christian community to model and motivate them as they form a new community. It is often forgotten that, before forming a new faith community, church planters (and their families if married) have left a faith community. Often there is much pain and loss involved with losing the previous faith community,

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67 Burge sees a history of writing and editing by John and his community, with the Letters written to correct misunderstandings about an early draft of the Gospel. Burge, Letters, 38-40.
especially if that community was healthy, missional, and provided security and stability. Senders play a critical role in supporting the planter’s need for community.

First, they can allow the planter to remain in (a level) of community in the Sending community. This could be in a church, network, or even a small group. If the planter has children, this would be allowing them to participate in a great Kids Ministry or Youth Group. Even as the planter is forming new relationships in their location, seeking to form a new faith community, they need to be supported with an existing community. Second, Senders can help form a new community of spiritual support around the planter, including coaches and other planters. The best support is not only giving suggestions but also providing structure and facilitation, such as a monthly gathering or yearly training. It is critical to support the planter’s spouse with community as well. Planter’s spouses are often overlooked when support is offered; this isolates the spouse and adds an additional burden to the planter. Planters acutely feel the loss of community, and they need a community of support around them. Finally, Senders can support planters by regularly asking about the planter’s support system and community. This is especially important beyond the third year of a church plant. In the young church stage, a new faith community has been formed, but the planter may be on the verge of burnout. Senders can ask key questions about self-care, helping the planter value rest and time away with people who are not “work.” Planters constantly need someone to pour into them as well as others who are responsively following their leadership. They also need a great group of friends who can love them as a person before their position as a pastor.
Church Planters Need Guidance on Conflict

Communities of faith are based in the love of Christ; they are also based on his truth. Both are vital for communities to experience the fullness of eternal life. John wrote his letters\(^{68}\) to proactively deal with conflict, pointing his people back to the love and truth of Christ.\(^{69}\) True fellowship with Christ is the only way to have true fellowship with others (1 Jn 1:3-4; 2:28-29; 5:20). This means that the community must live out love and truth (1 Jn 2:7-17; 2 Jn 1-6), living in the light (1:5-10) and overcoming sin (2:1-6; 5:16-19, 21). John warned against false teachers, reminding his people about the importance of God’s truth (1 Jn 2:18-27; 4:1-6; 2 Jn 7-10). True love does not accept false teaching. John’s life was transformed by Christ because Jesus loved him enough to rebuke him more than once (Mk 10:35-40; Lk 9:54-55). John learned—through rebuke, foot washing, witnessing betrayal, Christ’s sacrifice, and forgiveness—to be a humble servant (Jn 13-21). A Son of Thunder (see Mk 3:17) was changed by the love of Christ into a gentle leader.\(^{70}\) Though John became less outspoken, he was still willing to firmly correct false teaching. He wrote boldly about issues that could break fellowship. He knew that, if left unconfonted, these issues would break fellowship. Those who have fellowship with God know their identity as his children (1 Jn 3:1-10; 5:1-12), and Christ’s love lives in them as they sacrificially love each other (1 Jn 3:1-24; 4:7-21; 3 Jn 2-12). In the security and

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\(^{68}\) Brown also sees in the Gospel “echoes” of apologetics against those who were antagonistic to the Johannine community: adherents of John the Baptist, Jews, and rival Christian communities. *Introduction*, 151-188.


love that believers have in Christ, problems can be addressed, dealt with, and overcome. This is love.

Church planters are often idealists. They have big dreams for their church plants; they may even dream that their church plant would never have conflict. Planters need guidance on how to deal with conflict that is sure to come wherever there are people involved. This could be vision collision with leaders, frustrated people in their plants, hurting people who want the church to have no boundaries, or their own family. Planters need to be asked probing questions to ensure they are not covering up the problems with a smile. They also need to be encouraged when walking through the storms of conflict; the storms are inevitable, and they will pass. Senders can go out of their way to prepare planters for conflict and help them proactively avoid some of it.

Problem Solving and Prevention: Paul

Church planting is full of problems. Perhaps nobody in the Bible understood that more than the Apostle Paul. He not only planted many churches, he also raised up others to be church planters. With plants comes problems. Paul supported his church plants with his presence, with other leaders, and by sending letters to address their problems. He strove to create systems of financial support. Paul worked to solve and prevent problems. He began with a home base of support and later worked to create those home bases for future church planting. Church planters need to know the general problems that arise with church planting and how to prevent or solve them. They also need ongoing support, for years, to help solve the specific problems that are arising in their specific contexts.
Church Planters Need Training and Development

It took a vision from God for Peter to realize that a Gentile could become a Christian without first adhering to the cultural rules of Judaism (Acts 10). The Christians in Antioch, however, needed no vision: they shared the good news directly with Greeks (Acts 11:20-21). These early Christians were living in a day of new spiritual realities: Christ had come, death had been defeated, the promised Spirit had come, and they were called to go to the nations. Missionary work beyond ethnic boundaries was basically unheard of until Christ sent out his apostles.71 Needless to say, these new realities created new problems. The Paul, Barnabas, Silas and others were trailblazers in figuring out how to address these problems, even as they forged new trails to plant churches. They poured out what they had learned into the next generation of leaders. Barnabas invested in Mark; Paul poured into Timothy.72

Timothy grew up in the town of Lystra and became a Christian on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 16:1-2). His grandmother and mother were Christians, but not his father (Acts 16:3; 2 Tm 1:5; 3:15). However, he received the spiritual gift of leadership when Paul placed his hands on him (2 Tm 1:6), and he joined Paul on his missionary journeys. Paul invested so much into Timothy that he could write, “You certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. You know how much persecution and

71 See especially Scot McKnight, A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 7.

72 He had a similar mentoring relationship with Titus, though he is not mentioned in the Book of Acts. For more on the possible reasons why, see John Gillman, “Titus,” in Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 581-582.
suffering I have endured” (2 Tm 3:10-11). Timothy helped Paul and Silas establish churches at Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica (Acts 16:1-17:14). He was sent to Thessalonica to strengthen the believers (1 Thes 3:1-2), to Corinth to solve problems (1 Cor 4:17), and to Ephesus to stop false teaching (1 Tm 1:3-7). He had a strong reputation among the believers (Phil 2:19-24). He is listed with Paul as co-author (or possibly scribe) of six of Paul’s letters (1+2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Paul’s final letter was to Timothy, his spiritual son and protégé. Paul not only trained and sent out Timothy; he invested his life into him.\textsuperscript{73}

Church planters need training about leadership, self-care, church planting, and pastoral work. Most church planters have never planted before; they have also never been lead pastors before. They need significant skill development to help them grow and meet the new challenges in their lives and ministries. Our culture is changing, much as the world of the first Christians was changing (and they were partially changing it). Church planters need up to date training to address the intersection of the timeless mission of Christ with the ever-morphing world of today. The training must be done by those who have proven experience. Church planters also need people to deeply invest in them, as Paul invested his life into Timothy. However, the deeply personal care and the highly skilled training do not necessarily have to come from the same person. It is important for the planter to receive them both.

Church Planters Need Help Preventing and Solving Problems

Experience can often spot problems before they happen. Unfortunately, church planters do not have much experience in planting churches. They need help in preventing problems before they happen and solving them once they arise. Paul prevented and solved problems with his presence and by sending others (e.g. Acts 17:14; 1 Thes 3:3; Phil 2:25). He also wrote letters. He prevented problems by teaching sound doctrine, drawing people to their roots in Christ (Col 2:7). He challenged Christians to live out what they already knew and were already living out (e.g. Phil 3:1; 1 Thes 4:9-10). And he wrote to address specific problems occurring in the churches. He wrote to the Galatians to warn them against compromising the gospel, to the Thessalonians about laziness and the second coming, to the Colossians about false teaching, and to the Corinthians about sex, marriage, food to idols, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection. Sometimes his churches asked for advice (1 Cor 7:1); sometimes he gave it unasked for (but needed, see 1 Cor 5:1). Church planters need proactive problem solving and prevention. This training needs to be rooted in the word of God, helping the planter look to Christ.

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75 N.T. Wright, “The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology,” Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 205–36. Justification is about the unity (table fellowship) of God's people (declared to be right). The law is good but meant for a limited time; it separated people and thus could not fulfill the Abrahamic promises of a worldwide people. Galatians speaks to the theological issues of who God is and to the question of knowledge. There is a truth: to be loved and known by God; this changes our pride and power (as postmodernism asserts that all knowledge is only used for power, leaving only a "knowledge" of impressions and feelings). Christians need to be filled with the Spirit (chs. 5-6 are theological and ethical combined), being transformed and bearing some of the pain of the world.

76 Wright places the problems in a larger frame: “It is the creator God who has a ‘problem’, namely that the world seems not to be in the condition that its creator might be supposed to have wanted.” Paul, says Wright, takes the vision (election) of Israel and reinterprets it in light of Jesus and the Spirit.
will be in person and seminars, and some will be through articles and books. The Senders need to have a plan to help prevent and solve problems. This needs to be done for the entire network of planters, and also for specific problems that come up in specific settings. Rather than problem preventing and solving coming only from the Sent, the Senders need to present their plan and resources for ongoing support in these areas.

Paul repeatedly addressed the challenge of appointing leaders. He himself appointed elders for his churches (Acts 14:23) and spoke against false teachers (Gal 1:8-9). He wrote to Timothy and Titus about the qualifications for elders (1 Tm 5:17-20; Ti 1:6-9).

Godly character prevents innumerable problems. Paul also wrote about the qualifications for overseers (or bishops, Greek work episkopos; see 1 Tm 3:1-7). While the meaning of this role in the apostolic era is debated, it is clear that new levels of leadership were needed by the time of the Pastoral Epistles. Paul wrote to help Timothy navigate the changing leadership needs of the growing and multiplying churches. Similarly, as church plants grow, they increase in leadership complexity. Some church plants even change their governance after three or four years. These are massive power shifts being navigated by church planters who have little to no experience in working with church boards. This also happens to be the time when most church planters stop

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This is the larger framework for Paul’s theology, which bursts forth even as he is writing letters to address specific problems in the churches. N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 775-776.


receiving official support: coaching, finances, training, and connection. Church planters need help in these years to make these leadership transitions well.

**Church Planters Need Financial Support and Systems**

Paul was not sent without financial support, nor did he neglect financial needs. The book of Acts (chs.13-14) does not mention he or Barnabas working, so we may safely conclude that the church of Antioch sent them out with financial backing for the mission to make disciples and plant churches. Later, the church of Philippi sent gifts to Paul, more than once, so that he could focus on preaching and not have to take on additional work (Phil 4:10-20; cf. Acts 18:1-5). Paul taught that pastors should be paid (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tm 5:17-18), and he was willing to ask for help (Rom 15:24), though he never demanded it (1 Cor 9:18). Paul warned that the love of money can shipwreck one’s faith (1 Tm 6:10) and warned against those who preached for selfish reasons (Phil 1:15). He also worked hard to raise money from all of his churches for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-29; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). He created a system for this support: training the churches to gather the money each week, to give in proportion to their ability, and to send the gifts along with representatives.

It practically goes without saying that church planters need financial support. They need healthy systems so they can access the finances. They also need ways to ask

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for financial help when needed. Planters need to be trained to teach on stewardship; they also need guidance on setting up strong financial systems in their church that are above reproach. The Senders need to ensure these systems are taught and checked on. Planters need to be asked about the church budget, and also their personal, family budgets. Different family situations, including number of kids, debt, and location, change the financial pressure on the planter.

**Church Planters Need a Home Base of Constant Support**

Even though Paul was constantly on the move, he established home bases of support for his missionary church planting activity. He was sent out from the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1ff) and returned to this home base many times (Acts 14:26-28; 15:30; 18:23). As his mission moved west, he established a new home base at Ephesus, staying there for over two years (Acts 19:8-10).\(^{81}\) The church of Ephesus was part of planting other churches,\(^{82}\) and was the center of Paul’s apostolic ministry as he sent out leaders, wrote, and traveled.\(^{83}\) He also invested heavily in the home base: doing evangelism, preaching, and suffering; he was deeply connected to the Christians in this city (Acts 19-20). Paul planned on moving his mission work even further west, even as he sent his

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\(^{81}\) Most scholars put his stay there at three years, from AD 52-55. F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 475.


\(^{83}\) Most of these activities are not described in the Book of Acts, which is focused on Paul’s activities in the city. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus, and he sent Timothy to Corinth to help guide the church through their problems (1 Cor 16:8-11). He also traveled from Ephesus to Corinth in what turned out to be a “painful visit” (referred to in 2 Cor 2:1).
leaders north (2 Tm 4:10; cf. Rom 15:19), and he wanted the Roman church to be a new home base for further missionary work (Rom 15:24).  

Having a home base of support is so important for church planters. Even if planters are doing pioneering work, it is critical that there is more than one coach or director who is pouring into the planter. Church is family, and support comes best from systems of relationships. We can see that the church of Antioch’s fire for evangelism and truth was deeply moving for Paul. The church of Ephesus was a place of incredible emotional support in the face of many struggles. Church planters need both from their home base. Paul received the support of Antioch; as he grew as a leader, he helped create a home base that launched mission activity to the entire region (Acts 19:10). Church planters need systems of support to help them prevent and solve problems. The Senders need to provide some of these systems. They also need to ensure that the planters are building up constant systems of support around themselves. These systems may first come from outside the church plant, but eventually (as in Ephesus), they should come from inside the church plant so that the plant itself becomes a home base of support for

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84 N.T. Wright, “Communion and Koinonia: Pauline Reflections on Tolerance and Boundaries (2002),” in Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 259-271. Part of Paul’s reason for writing and personally investing in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome was to have strong home bases for missionary support. It is important that the home base is strong. Wright makes it clear that, though Paul was very tolerant (to use our modern word), there were clear boundaries. “If you want to know why Paul insisted on tolerating some differences of opinion and practice within the people of God, and on not tolerating others, the answer is that the ones that were to be tolerated were the ones that carried the connotations of ethnic boundary lines, and the ones that were not to be tolerated were the ones that marked the difference between genuine, living, renewed humanity and false, corruptible, destructive humanity” (pp. 259-260). In Galatians 2, Paul was insistent because Peter was going against the new humanity made by the cross/resurrection of Christ. Paul gave concession to basic ethnic issues, but not to ones that threaten the new humanity/creation that comes from the Spirit. These are core. In today's (western) world, there are no absolutes, just "tolerance", which means feelings or impressions. And yet the West can imperialistically impose their new morality on other cultures while exploiting those same cultures economically (and with war) (259-260, 271).
planting and church planters. For this to happen, church planters will themselves need a home base.

Systematic Support: David and Nehemiah

Systematic support is so important for church planters. By systematic support we mean administration, advertising and design, finances, leadership structures, and policy. These areas are not the front door of ministry, but they are the building blocks to a ministry that is larger than a single person. Church planters can be supported by the Senders by being given systematic support. This support can and should be time-limited so that the Sent live with a sense of urgency to build systems of support within their church plants. As these systems grow, the Senders give ongoing support by offering resources and best practices; they also keep systems on the radar on the planter so that the planter is building systematic support ahead of the growth in their church plant.

For our biblical examples of systematic support, we will look at David and Nehemiah, king and governor, respectively. David lived for years on the run from Saul, but once he came into power, he set up many strong systems of support for the military, worship, and the future Temple. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and experienced cultural dysfunction. He had to work to turn the systems around to further the mission of God. He did this with his own prayer life and hope; he also raise up other leaders and systematically supported them.
Church Planters Need Strong Systems of Support

David learned the importance of systematic support while on the run. Though he was a fugitive, he rarely was alone. He organized the outcasts that gathered around him in the Cave of Adullam (1 Sam 22), learned to negotiate with enemies (chs.24-26), and even lived among the Philistines (ch.27). When he became king, he began to delegate (2 Sam 2:13), he captured Jerusalem for his capital city (5:9-12), he moved the Ark to Jerusalem (ch.6), and he defeated the Philistines (ch.8). David worked hard to bring the victories and stability needed to establish strong systems of support in his kingdom. Perhaps the greatest example of support from David is found in 1 Chronicles 28-29. David could not build the Temple, but he laid all the support for the leadership of his son Solomon. He instructed Solomon to trust God alone. He planned the Temple down to the details, and set aside gold, silver, and building materials for the work. David personally gave from his own money and inspired the leaders to give. He challenged the leaders of Israel to support the future leadership of Solomon. The Temple could not have been built without God’s blessings, Solomon’s leadership, and David’s support.

Nehemiah was moved by the Lord for a monumental task: he needed to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The people were living in shame and seemingly unable to

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87 At the time of writing (446-445 BC), most of the Ancient Near East was under the control of the Persian Empire. It is likely that Nehemiah’s mission would have been viewed by the Persian king as a way to gain greater control in the area, overseen by a loyal governor. The action of rebuilding the wall was twisted against Nehemiah by his enemies. Knowing this was a possible interpretation was what gave Nehemiah such a pause to pray and fast before asking the king. He was also wise enough to secure the
accomplish this critical survival task. Their own systems were dysfunctionally stacked against them. Nehemiah began and continued in prayer (Neh 1:5-11; 2:4; 4:4-5; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 9:5-38; 13:14, 22, 29). This anchored his leadership in God’s hope, which he would need to overcome the helpless despair in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was sent with the support of the king: he asked for and was given official letters, a military escort, timber for the construction, and the position of governor (2:7-10; 5:14-18). He arrived in Jerusalem and found the elders were eager to help but quickly discouraged and afraid (2:17-18; 3:10). Nehemiah’s example of prayer, systems of defense, and frontline leadership gave hope to the people to continue the work (4:11-23). Nehemiah was given systematic support even as he worked to build systems of support in Jerusalem.

Systematic support is often overlooked, yet they are critical to the growth of a church plant. Financial systems need to be in place. A database needs to be established that can scale as the church grows. Websites need to be designed, and advertising needs to be designed and delivered. Most church planters are not wired for this level of minutiae, or they try to live as administrators and die in the details. Planters need to be given systems of support that are simple to use, easy to give to volunteers, and scalable. Planters need to be given a basic set of policies around finances, background checks, hiring and firing, and leadership requirements. Rather than each planter rediscovering the same systems that have worked in countless other church plants, it would be far more time efficient and kingdom-minded to deliver a set of systems to the planter when they

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begin. This should be done by the network, denomination, or church that sends the planter.

**Church Planters Need a Culture of Systematic Support**

David worked hard to create a culture of support. He did this with his administration, military, and tribal leadership (1 Chr 27:1-34). He especially created systems to support the worship of the Lord is Israel. David had learned to get the right people (the Levites) to do the work of moving the Ark (chs.13, 15). When the Ark was moved, he led his people in dance and worship (2 Sam 6). He counted all the Levites (38,000) and supported them as they did their duties, including construction of the Temple, judges, gatekeepers, and musicians (1 Chr 23-26). The priests were also supported. Four thousand people were dedicated and financially supported for the worship of the Lord. David himself wrote many of Israel’s songs (his psalms). When David’s reign had come to an end, not only were the people of God ready to build the Temple, they were experiencing a culture of worship that was valued and supported. It is when this culture of systematically supporting worship diminished that the kingdom disintegrated and was destroyed.88

Systems of support were created from scratch by David; Nehemiah had to transform a toxic culture that included greed (Neh 5:1-19), lies (6:10), and false prophets (6:14). Though the leaders of the people were quick to support Nehemiah’s vision, they

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also undermined him, collaborating with the enemies who opposed the work of God (6:17-19). They did this because of their own desire for power and position (see 13:4-5). Nehemiah, rooted in prayer, dealt directly with this systematic unhealth. He divided the labor of the people and organized them to protect themselves and build the wall. He used the victory of the wall being completed to change the culture of the city.

Immediately after the wall was completed, he (and Ezra) focused the people on the Lord in worship, His word, and obedience (chs.8-10; 12:27-43). Ezra read the law and the people confessed their sins and made a commitment to follow God’s ways. Nehemiah systematically organized the people (7:4-61), the priests and Levites (7:63-69; 12:1-25), and other leaders (11:1-36). He made sure the priests were financially provided for (7:70-73), and he reinstituted the system of financially supporting the house of God, including support for the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and musicians (10:32-39; 12:44-47). When these systems were neglected, Nehemiah personally fixed the systems and put new leaders in charge (13:10-14). Before Nehemiah, a culture of self-preservation left the wall unbuilt for over fifty years. Under Nehemiah’s leadership, a culture of devotion and systematic support was created, and the wall was built in fifty-two days.

Planters do best when they are sent out of a culture of support and when they are constantly working to build a culture of support. Senders can ensure that planters have financial, organizational, administrative and prayer support. This support is best when it is not sporadic but systematic. Strong systems are easily accessible and readily available.


Systems work quickly and provide security. Church planters should not have to worry that promised financial support will arrive. In most cases, the systematic support of the Senders is not meant to last forever; it is a temporary support while the planter works to build systems of support in the church plant. This can take years for a true culture of systematic support to be raised. Often, church plants begin by creating systems to support those who are hurting or in need. This is very important. To be able to grow and reach more lost people, additional systems of support need to be put in place to support leaders, ministries, and initiatives. Ministry itself needs to have systems and structures. Established churches have established systems for worship, discipleship, outreach, kids’ ministry, and other ministries. These ministry systems have to be set up by church planters and their leaders. The planter must help the congregation understand that he or she is not meant to do the work but to be supported as he or she does the work of equipping the saints (Eph 4:12). Church plants that develop a strong culture of support for mission are able to send support back to the Senders and forward to new church plants.

**Church Planters Need to Be Surrounded by Capable Leaders**

Systems of support cannot be built or maintained by one leader alone. David had his mighty warriors, including a group of thirty and a group of three (1 Chr 11:10-47). King David had the support of officials, prophets, generals, captains, and the priest (cf. 1 Chr 13:1). David had known many of his chief leaders for years, including Joab and
Abiathar.\textsuperscript{91} Nehemiah was also supported by many leaders. Though he was attacked on all sides, he was surrounded by capable leaders. Ezra was a spiritual leader and partner in reforming the people to be devoted to the Lord (Neh 8-10). Nehemiah surrounded himself with loyal guards and servants (4:23). He enlisted the help of his family to lead, even putting his brother in charge when he was away (7:2).\textsuperscript{92} When leaders did not fulfill their duties, Nehemiah dealt with the problem, removing weak leaders with strong ones (13:10-14, 22). David and Nehemiah were both godly, gifted leaders with strong gifts to set up systems. But they could not do it alone. The Bible emphasizes repeatedly the myriad of leaders that surrounded these devoted servants of God. Because they empowered many godly people around them, strong systems were established for the worship of the Lord and the security of God’s people.

Ideally, church planters will begin their church plant with faithful, capable leaders in their core group. The Senders can help recruit leaders, and they can help the planter not try to do everything in the church plant. The planter should not do everything, but everything (at first) can be communicated to the planter to ensure it is in line with the vision. Most planters have never delegated or developed leadership on this scale before, and they need guidance, advice, and tools. As the church grows and ministry becomes

\textsuperscript{91} Abiathar was the son of the priest Ahimelech, and his entire family had been killed under orders from Saul (1 Sam 22:20-23). Abiathar fled to David and became a priest for David and his men. He remained loyal throughout David’s lifetime, including in the rebellion of David’s son Absalom (2 Sam 8:17; 15:24-29). However, he disobeyed David’s wishes and supported Adonijah’s claim to the throne over Solomon (1 Kgs 1:7). Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, \textit{Background}, 355.

more complex, they will need additional training so that their leadership does not become the bottleneck for the church plant. Church planters especially need support in the young church phase because the ministry situation of their church is neither a new church plant nor an established church. They have some leaders and support systems but not many. In this stage, planters need to seek out additional training and personal support for their leadership. They also should bring along others to receive this development with them, or quickly pass on the development they are receiving to their top leaders. The Senders can help prepare the Sent for the unique challenges that arise in the young church phase by coaching and training in years three and four. They can provide networking, events, and resources for churches in this stage. They can also provide a platform for young churches to connect and share resources with each other.
PART THREE

SUPPORTING A MOVEMENT
CHAPTER 5

OVERFLOWING SUPPORT

This chapter offers suggestions on how the five areas of support can be met at all levels, providing ongoing and overflowing support through all stages of church planting. As a church plant grows older and matures, it will be able to provide more of its own support, hopefully becoming self-supporting. Planters are like spiritual parents, providing protection, guidance, and nurture to their baby churches. They do not need to be told what to do as much as given support to live out the vision God has given them. They also need to understand the support they need and seek it out. Planters typically receive strong support up until the birth of their churches; networks or denominations usually require potential planters to be assessed, supported, trained, and coached. As time goes on, the support diminishes unless the planter seeks it out.¹ Similarly, when a church plant begins, it is the job of the planter to provide strong support. As the church grows, the goal is for it to support itself and its leaders.

¹ “Planting a church will magnify every weakness you have. It will sift you. This is why it is so important that you know who you are, where the thin places in your armor are found, and what the best plan is to fortify them.” Brian and Amy Bloye, It’s Personal: Surviving and Thriving on the Journey of Church Planting (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 179.
It is important for everyone involved to know what support is needed and who is responsible for providing that support. The greater the amount of support, the greater the chances of success. Support is needed at all levels of church planting. It is more comprehensive than care and not the same as development. Developed leaders still need ongoing support, and the more support they receive, the faster they run after the mission.\(^2\)

Network leaders need to be supported; as they support others, their own support is often neglected. Church planters need support, and they need to advocate for the specific support they need in their situations. Church plants also need support when they are first born and also when they are young. It is imperative that the five needs of support are met at all levels of church planting. There needs to be a Support Plan that documents what support is needed, who is responsible for meeting it, and how it will be met.

In this chapter, we will explore a tool that helps leaders at all levels of church planting develop a plan for support. The best plan of support is personal, organizational, and systematic. It should also be ongoing. The tool is a documented Support Plan, and it can be used for the Senders (what support they will be giving) and the Sent (their plan to receive and seek out support). This tool helps the Senders and the Sent ensure that all the key needs are being met, and it allows clear communication about responsibilities. As time goes on, support will shift from the Senders to the Sent and from the planter to the church plant. Senders need to support church planting leaders so they can support church planters. Church planters need to seek support and easily find it. It needs to be ongoing.

Planters need to be aware that support from the Senders will diminish over time. Planters need to support vision, leaders, and systems so that their church can mature to become self-supporting and even support others. Church plants need to mature to the point of supporting themselves, their leaders, and future church plants and planters. The goal is for the Sent to become the Senders.

**Developing a Plan of Support**

It is not enough to talk about support; there needs to be a plan. Support is often overlooked until it is too late. This paper has explored the importance of support. The Lord is a God of support who calls his people to receive his support and pass it on to others. Church planters and leaders are seeking greater amounts of support, and church plants are needing more time to become self-supporting in finances, ministry, leadership, and systems. Church planters need ongoing support after the birth of their plants; this support needs to continue into the young church stage, though it can come from different sources. Our culture is changing, and it is harder than ever to evangelize and plant churches. Pastors, planters, and spiritual leaders are struggling and looking for more support. Our God, who gives endless support, has equipped the Senders to support the Sent.

The best support plan is personal, organizational, and systematic. Planters need support from people with a high level of expertise; it is important to receive support from

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3 House and Allison have a helpful section about limiting ministries early on and only adding more ministries as the church grows or more sites are added. *Multi-Church*, 167.

4 Brian and Amy Bloye write, “You’ll still need to plan for the marathon. It’s important to have a tangible plan for personal maintenance.” *It’s Personal*, 224.
those who have planted before, preferably in the same general context. However, it is far more important that the support is personal. An expert from far away is less helpful in the long run than loving support that is consistently close. Personal support focuses on God and the soul. It can come from a coach, a mentor, or peer relationships. Support is also best when it is organizational. This allows support to come from more than one person. More connections can be made, training can be done collaboratively, and networking can happen among planters with best ideas being shared. Organizational support also takes a lot of pressure off one or two people to provide all support. Finally, support is best when it is systematic. Systems are supportive because they are not personal; they are automatic, easily accessible, and always available. Systems of support need to be communicated and known. It is best if systems of support can be set up for each of the five key needs. If nothing else, people need to know how to handle crises that can come in each of the five areas. As we explore the Support Plan, the goal is for the support to be personal, organizational, and systematic.

Support needs to be ongoing. Support is always needed. God never stops supporting leaders, leaders never stop needing support, and leaders must never stop supporting others. Support changes over time, but it is always needed. Below is a simple document that can be used to plan out support. The Support Plan tool should be updated at least yearly, if not quarterly, so that the Senders and the Sent have clear communication about support. Over time, support will shift from the Senders to the Sent, as the Sent take more responsibility for seeking out and receiving support. This tool, if filled out and followed, will help keep support as a priority in church planting and church leadership.
Here is the Support Plan tool. This is a simple, two-page document that can be filled out by hand or digitally.

**Support Plan**

*Go and make disciples of all the nations… I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Jesus (Matthew 28:20)*

For each line, fill in your support plan, with basic details. Only one column per line is necessary. Focus on a plan of support for each main category, and feel free to add in your own ideas as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power of God</th>
<th>Above (seeking experienced support)</th>
<th>Center (my responsibility)</th>
<th>Below (delegate to others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personally encounter God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deepening roots—prayer, word, spiritual disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calling and identity renewed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuing the mission of Jesus (not your own)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crisis: Desert (plan to respond)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision Refilled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal interaction with visionaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rest daily, weekly, monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part of something bigger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear expectations for success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crisis: Burnout</td>
<td>(plan to respond)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proactive Care</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual mentor or</td>
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<tr>
<td>director</td>
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<td>Community and friends</td>
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<td>Strong family life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy conflict</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis: Isolation</th>
<th>(plan to respond)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving and Prevention</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching or mentoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial support for the mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>A home base of resources</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Crisis: Overwhelmed</th>
<th>(plan to respond)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systematic Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership development</td>
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The Support Plan makes it clear who is responsible for providing which support. When the Sent (Supported) fill out their Support Plan, it is about how they will receive and seek out support. Support from Above means support that comes from those who are pouring into the Supported. This could be coaches, mentors, and experts. It can also be conferences, books, and systems (by a network, sending church, or denomination). Support from Below means support that the planter can delegate to others. This could be leaders in the church, administrative help, other staff members, or paid services (like bookkeeping or web design). Support from the Center means the responsibility is on the planter to seek out or provide their own support in this area. Some lines, such as personally encountering God, cannot be delegated to others. However, if a planter primarily experiences the Lord through worship, support from Above could come in the form of worship concerts or conferences. It would be his or her responsibility to seek out and calendar the concerts, but the concerts would help provide the divine encounter.
There are too many needs for any one planter to provide all of his or her own support. The five key needs, and the specific examples listed, are based on the research and survey work done in chapters two through four. Every line is important. For example, under the need of Vision Refilled, if a planter meets monthly with a visionary, seasoned church planter but does not have clear expectations for success, he or she will still be in danger of burnout (the crisis that accompanies this need not being met). Planters can also add in their own lines, under the five key needs, that are specific to their needs. Christian leaders need to realize that they cannot meet all their needs alone; God has provided support through others. The Support Plan helps identify key needs and create a plan to be surrounded by support. An entire list of practical ways to meet the five key needs will be given in a section below.

The more specific the plan, the more effective it is. In filling out this Support Plan, planters are encouraged to put down basic details, including what they will do (or will be done for them), who will do it, and when it will be done (daily, weekly, monthly). If a planter is to have a spiritual director, they should list how often they will meet. Under family life, it should be written down when they will spend time with family. Even if some planters are single, it is important that they connect with their family to remember that they are a person before they are a pastor. Financial support may come from the network for a year, and the planter needs to preach on the subject, and he or she can develop a financial team to give reports and updates. Once network support ends, the

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5 Bloye and Bloye, It’s Personal, 224.
planter will need to assess if the church needs coaching or a consultant to give expert support.

Each key need has a corresponding crisis that comes when the key need is not met in the life of a church planter. A lack of support in experiencing the Power of God leads to a desert, where God feels distant or even hostile. A lack of Vision Refilled leads to burnout, where there is nothing left in the tank and even legitimate needs in the church lead to resentment. Not being supported with Proactive Care leads to isolation, where planters feel misunderstood and used, leading to a sense of separation from their faith community, family, and self. Not enough support in Problem Solving and Prevention leads to a planter being overwhelmed with problems from all sides. This can be a feeling of sinking or fear. A lack of Systematic Support leads to the crisis of chaos where a planter is out of control and running on adrenaline, often overusing caffeine or using unhealthy habits to cope, while neglecting rest.

These crises are common occurrences in the life of church planters. Each one comes from a lack of support. The Senders must make sure that planters are supported in each of the five key needs, and the Sent (planters) must work to seek out and receive support. Church planting is spiritual warfare. A single crisis in the life of a church planter may be enough to end the mission of the church plant. The goal of the Support Plan is to ensure there is a steady stream of support in the life of a church planter. It also reveals the gaps in support. For each of the potential crisis lines, the planter should fill out their plan to respond to the crisis if they sense it approaching. If burnout is coming (sometimes called “brownout”), who can the planter call to ask for help with duties? How will rest
happen and vision get refilled? The best time to create an evacuation plan is before the fire is burning.

Finally, and this is very important, the Senders and the Sent need to be on the same page about support. They could fill out the Support Plan together, fill out their own version of the Plan, or sent it to each other once it is filled out. It can be devastating for the Sent to expect support from the Senders and not receive it. Some planters thought they would receive certain types of support, but it never had been promised by the Senders. Some Senders assumed that the Sent had a plan to cover areas of support, but they did not. The Support Plan helps communicate with clarity. Before a plant is born, and in the early days of the birth, there is a lot of support that is offered and even required. This is support from Above, the left column. Over time, support moves from the left column, to the center, and then to the right. Support changes as the plant gets older, and planters need to be prepared for this reality.

The Sent Become the Senders

Support shifts the older a church plant gets. An enormous amount of support goes into birthing a church: assessments, conversations, prayer, meetings, training, plans, profiles, fundraising, developing launch team, leadership pipelines, and more. As a church is born, there is also a tremendous amount of support that is offered, available,
and sometimes even required of church planters, including training, coaching, conferences, books, and resources. As a church gets a few years older, support is “weaned” away from the church plant (and moved to other plants in the process of birthing). The end goal is for a church plant, after maturing, to be able to self-support its vision and its leaders. The goal is also that a church plant can be strong enough to support others, becoming a Sender of support.

Church planters need to understand the five key needs for support. In the early years, they need to have a plan to receive this support. The largest challenge to support comes in the young church stage, when support from Above is not required or as available, and the church plant is not yet strong enough to provide the full level of support that a planter needs. It is in this stage that many planters feel under-supported; this leads to a decrease in growth or even the closing of the church. Planters should be prepared for support from the Senders to diminish over time. They need to have a plan to seek out additional support. For example, when required coaching ends, there needs to be a plan—from the coach and the planter—for a new coach to be in place. This could be a paid coach, but more likely he or she will not be paid. The last stage of official coaching is to help the planter find a new coach. This example needs to be followed for all five areas of support in order to navigate the young church stage well. The Senders do not need to continually provide paid support, but they can make resources, networking, connections, and online systems available to help planters as they seek support in years four to ten.

As spiritual parents, church planters should see it as their goal to raise a self-supporting, mature church that can contribute to the Kingdom of God. The Sent should
become the Senders. Church planters need to make sure they are supported and that they are supporting leaders and systems in their church. Church plants, as they mature, should be able to fully support their leaders in finances, ministry, vision, systems, and sending others. This is an ongoing, multi-year process, and it involves leadership on all levels of church planting being aware of the need to develop Supporting Leadership. Church planting network leaders, the ones who provide much support, themselves need to be supported. Church planters need to prioritize support, seek it out, and be able to easily find it. They also need to support leaders and systems in their church plants. Eventually, church plants need to mature to the point of supporting themselves, their leaders, and future church plants and planters. We will briefly discuss below the importance of supporting leaders at each level of church planting.

Support for the Senders

Church planting leaders, whether in a denomination, network, or sending church, need to be supported so that they can support church planters. When the Senders are not supported, they pull support away from the Sent. If Senders do not have strong administrative or executive support, they have to spend their support efforts in these areas, and less support is available for church planters. Also, church planters are pastors; if the Senders are not supported, planters will begin to offer pastoral care to them. Planters will also become more reluctant to ask for needed help from the Senders if they know the Senders are struggling to be supported. This hurts the overall support for church planting. The Support Tool given above can be used by church planting leaders to make sure they are supported in each of the five key areas, as well as having a plan for crisis.
When the leaders of church planting movements set an example in prioritizing support, they set a model for everyone else.⁷

The Sent Seeking Support

Church planters need to seek support and easily find it. It needs to be ongoing. While this paper has advocated for higher levels of support for church planters, the impetus for seeking support is still on the Sent.⁸ This is because different planters have different gaps in their Support Plans. Senders can help by training on the five key needs. They can also be clear about what support is offered and for how long. Planters need to seek out the support they need, understanding that support from the Senders will diminish over time. When this happens, it is imperative that planters replace this support with other support. Rather than celebrating the hour per week that comes back from the end of a coaching “contract,” planters need to seek a new mentor, coach, or peer gathering time with those who can help and support them through the next phase. Planters too often neglect their own support until they are close to crisis. The Support Tool should be updated by planters at least yearly, and it is ideal to update it quarterly. The more supported planters are, the more support they can overflow to others.

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⁷ Ferguson and Ferguson’s book is about starting and growing missional church movements. It starts with the leader, then invests in other leaders and artists, then moves out to structures and networks. Ferguson and Ferguson, Exponential, 17-20, 181-185.

⁸ Brian and Amy Bloye are experienced church planters, and they list many of the struggles that church planters face: health, stress, lack of sleep, insecurity, fear of people thinking the planter is “lazy,” and temptations to pride, pleasure, and power. The planter’s spouse does not say anything because he or she is trying to “take one for the team.” The initiative is on planters to seek out close friendships, communication with their spouses, and additional support. Bloye and Bloye, It’s Personal, 21-30, 70-76, 162, 198.
Passing Support to Emerging Leaders

Church planters need to support leaders in their churches. As church planters are filled with God’s support, they can pour support into others. God’s support is not controlling; church planters need to guide not control their leaders. Good leaders are not given by the Lord to accomplish tasks but to unleash their gifts, passion, and vision. If church planters are not well supported themselves, they tend not to develop leaders, opting instead to do everything themselves or micro-managing potential leaders. If church planters are supported, they can go through the (often frustrating) process of developing leaders through the Power of God, Refilling Vision, Proactive Care, Problem Solving and Prevention, and Systematic Support. A planter can use the Support Tool with ministry leaders to communicate how he or she will support them; the planter can also teach them how to seek for support. For leaders in the church, this will bless their ministry and their personal lives. Most people do not have enough support in their lives, do not know what types of support they need, and do not know how to advocate for their own support without feeling selfish. Training on Supporting Leadership can change leaders’ lives and create a culture of support in the church. The sooner a planter begins this process with leaders, the more equipped the church will be for the young church phase. The key to thriving in the years four to ten of a church plant is having a growing group of godly, strong, and supported leaders. In the early part of this stage, the planter may be providing more support than he or she is receiving. If done well, however, by the end of the young church stage, the leader will be receiving more support from their church leaders and systems than they are giving. This support enables them to live into larger initiatives and Kingdom work, including sending others.
Self-Supporting and Sending

Church plants need to mature to the point of supporting themselves, their leaders, and future church plants and planters. When a church plant begins, it is primarily concerned with living out God’s mission, reaching new people, and surviving. As church plants age, though, it is easy to forget that one of the goals is to become a sending church. Planters may enjoy the financial support they receive from outside sources and not teach the biblical lessons on stewardship and generosity.\(^9\) Church plants may enjoy having a planter and few others who care for them and provide for all of their needs, rather than creating a culture of support where the church is mature, takes care of itself, has many leaders, and follows their pastor while supporting him or her. Although being self-supporting in all areas of support is years away from a baby church, the planter can begin early to teach the church plant about the five areas of support that are needed in the church. The planter and key leaders can use the Support Plan for the church plant itself, figuring out where support will come from in the church. At first, this will mainly be from the planter or even the network. As time goes on, support should move from the left to the right columns. This shows the maturing of a church plant. The planter can begin using the Support Plan with staff and boards, or key leaders, as they set up rhythms and systems for people learn that the first line of support is not the pastors but each other.\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) Christopherson encourages planters to understand their contexts in terms of growth capacity, based on the area and the giftedness of the planter. They need to assess their own leadership capacity, the contextual history of church plants in the area, contextual giving patterns, and planning a runway (which may need to be up to five years). Jeff Christopherson, *Kingdom First: Starting Churches that Shape Movements* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2105), 65-69.

\(^{10}\) Brian Sanders, *Underground Church: A Living Example of the Church in Its Most Potent Form* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 177-189.
This process will never be perfect, but if done well, the Supported will become Self-Supported and then the Supporters; the Sent will become the Senders.

**Practical Ways to Meet the Five Key Support Needs**

Sometimes the best support is a practical idea. In chapter four, we wrote about biblical examples of how the five needs were met. This section gave ideas that were more categorical, such as “calling and identity renewed.” This section will give ideas that are more tangible and practical, such as “have calling renewed by being publicly prayed for by sending church.” The lists below should not be considered exhaustive or definitive; they are practical suggestions of how to meet the five needs in the lives of church planters. The five needs apply to all Christian leaders, but planters have unique versions of these needs before launch, after birth, and in the young church years. This list is meant to spark ideas and practical action to support church planters.

**The Power of God**

Planters need to be connected to Christ. This can happen through prayer, obedience, rest, Bible study, and many other ways. It is a good idea to have a Rule of Life: a list of there plan to work, pray, and rest. The Rule of Life can be agreed upon by the planter, his or her spouse, and their coach or mentor. The planter should make a commitment to obedience and confession, and they should have a person who can ask them about their struggles and sins.

They should have time every day set aside for prayer, and they should plan on praying more than ever because they are entering a spiritual battle. Senders can commit
to praying for the Sent, even mobilizing groups of people to pray for the planter and everyone in the core group. One church had their seniors group do this for a church plant, praying for the church plant as missionaries. They renewed their commitment for three years. Planters should raise up a prayer team of at least five people, and they should ask every leader on their teams to do the same. Prayer retreats can be planned; prayer journals can be made. Many planters have places that are special spaces of prayer for them.

To go deeper, it is critical to have deep times in God’s word. This should be beyond preparation for sermons or other teaching. The goal is to pursue Christ personally. Planters can read books and discuss them with others. They can go take classes online or on campus. Spiritual disciplines are also helpful; this could be silence, fasting, lectio divina. These disciplines often involve the absence of some comfort (words, food, action), and they remind planters that not everything is a task to accomplish. Deep time in God’s word helps make sure that the mission of the church is continuing the mission of Jesus, not the planter’s personal preferences.

A church planter’s call can be affirmed by being publicly sent out by a sending church or network. Times of public calling are very affirming. They can be continually reminded by a coach, friends, or others of their calling to plant. It is also helpful to constantly share the story of how God called the church planter to plant the church. Planters can renew their identity in Christ by listing out their gifts and adding to the list the things they will delegate to others. They also renew their identity by getting time away from ministry to rest.

Planters need rest. A day off is critical, and the phone and computer should be turned off. Another leader in the church can be on call, and the day off can be
communicated with the larger church. Rest should happen weekly, monthly, and yearly. Many planters find getting outside in nature to be renewing for their souls. A monthly half-day retreat has helped many planters get away, reconnect with God, and renew vision. A yearly vacation is also a helpful time to reconnect with family, and deeper rest happens after three days away. Because they are so invested in their cities or communities, most planters find it is necessary to leave the area where they serve.

Planters also need to have good boundaries. They can trust God and leave their church plants while they get needed rest. They can rest assured that every job in the church does not need to be done by them. Boundaries are critical and need to be constantly discussed.

It is the Power of God that allows planters to have resilience and grit. Church plants are not born perfect. Planters need to constantly self-evaluate and have the self-discipline to make the needed changes. Rooted in Christ, planters can find their self-worth based on God’s love, not their own performance as planters. When the crisis of the desert comes, and planters feel far from or hostile to God, they need to run to the mountain of God as Elijah did (1 Kgs 19). This means time away from ministry to hear from God in deep ways. This could be at a cabin or retreat center, and it could include time with a spiritual director. In the desert, there needs to be safe space to cry out honestly and angrily to the Lord.

Vision Refilled

Planters constantly need to communicate vision, and they constantly need their vision refilled. It is great to be around catalytic, visionary people. Fellow church planters are very helpful, especially those who have just a little more experience than the planter.
It is also very vision refilling to find other planters who are planting in the same situation. Senders can help make these connections, or planters can find many of these connections online. It is also refilling to be surrounded by others in the local church who are fired up for the mission. Jesus invested more in the invested than the hurting; planters can do the same. Senders can make sure they have enough time set aside to meet with the Sent, and they can suggest other leaders for the planter as well. Planters also need to spend time with the church planting leaders above them; this could be a coach, church planting director, or the larger network. This time together can happen over food, at conferences, at retreats, or at other events.

Vision slowly drains over time if it is not refilled. Planters need to be aware of this and set aside time to fill up with God’s vision, escaping the tyranny of the urgent. Visiting churches, especially ones of the same size or church plants in the same situation, is helpful, especially if the planter can find time to talk to the pastor about what is working and not working. Conferences are a constant source of vision renewal. Books work well for many planters as well. Of course, it is critical for planters to spend visionary time in God’s word, reading Scripture not only as followers but also as leaders, and learning lessons for their church plants.

Vision is refilled when a planter knows they are part of something bigger. It energizes a planter to hear a network or denominational leader talk about the importance of planting. It also helps when a larger body of believers has a big goal for church planting. Coaches can remind planters of the larger movement, and planters should prioritize having time with the bigger body. Many planters return regularly to their sending churches, and many network plants have ongoing connection built in. In a best-
case scenario, the sending church is a place of welcome, empowering, and re-sending the planter back to their mission field, refilled with vision.

Planters need to preach on vision. Because they think about the vision of the church all day long, they often forget that the people in their church do not. Why the church plant exists should be preached about every service, and every action the church is taking should connect back to the vision. The planter cannot overcommunicate the vision. Clarity about vision helps define success for the church plant. A plant cannot do everything, nor can it compete with the number of ministries of other churches. Clear vision defines success. The planter also needs clear definitions of success from the Senders, including numbers, finances, attendance at events, and job description. Another great way for planters to communicate vision is to continue to talk about it with those outside the church. This could be with potential donors, new visitors, or non-churched people that can be invited into the church.

When vision depletes, burnout creeps in. Most leaders can feel burnout coming, but they ignore it until their engine has exploded; rather than a simple fix, it has now become a major repair. Many people take time away to connect with God, mentors, other churches, or other pastors who have overcome. Time away means trusting God to care for his church and trusting others to lead. Others only need time off of work to be with family, loved ones, friends, or even be alone.

Proactive Care

Planters are caring for so many people, usually without the structures of established churches. Especially early on, it is important for the Senders to support the
Sent with proactive care. This means taking initiative in communication, being proactive not reactive. If reports are used, they need to be read and responded to in a timely manner. If benchmarks in finances or attendance are not reached, the planter will need more care and support, not more pressure or stress. Planters have found it helpful to have a spiritual director or mentor who asks them nothing about the church plant, focusing only on their personal and spiritual care. This almost always needs to be a different person than the planting coach, who tends to focus more on strategic action. Care needs to be proactive; the initiative needs to be taken by the Senders. It is also important to be visible. Video calls are preferred over audio, and calls are more helpful than email or text. Being present and making visits is also helpful; there is no insight without being onsite.

Planters need a good faith community around them, and they need good friends. Pastors overall struggle with making genuine friends. Many planters have made friends with other pastors in town; this prevents them from trying to invite them to church, and it helps them to view each other equally. Female planters have to work extra to find ministry peers who can support them as friends, and many have found connecting online to be very helpful. Some planters have connected regionally with other planters, having a monthly video call and a yearly retreat.

A strong family life is so important for church planting. It is great to have a limited number of nights out per week, a time to talk with each member of the family each day, and a date night with a spouse, if married. Planters spouses are often overlooked in the support systems of networks or denominations; Senders can provide ways for spouses to connect and support each other, and spouses can take advantage of these opportunities (or create them). If the church planter is female, male spouses feel
especially isolated and may need to look nationally to connect with others in the same situation. If the planter has kids, it is very helpful for their kids to be able to participate in the kids or youth ministry of the sending church (or a local church).

Planters need to embrace healthy conflict. They have to speak into people’s lives, make ministry quality better, and handle feedback from others. Planters can preach on biblical conflict and how Jesus taught believers to handle it. They can read books, and the Senders can offer resources for help, including consultants. As the church gets older, a healthy church board can protect the planter from much conflict and absorb conflict when it happens. Planters need to be willing to dig deeper into the sources of conflict; having books, experience, and wise people in a planter’s life helps with this.

Crisis of care happens in a planter’s life comes when they feel that they are all alone and no one understands them. Their marriage could be struggling, their kids could be in crisis, or the planter could be experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental struggles. The best plan is to have a professional counselor and to build a relationship with that counselor ahead of time. The Senders can help provide financial assistance for the counseling.

Problem Solving and Prevention

Of the five key needs, perhaps no other gets as much attention as this one. Coaches are assigned or sought out to help planters think ahead, prevent problems, and see problems before they come. Coaching is critical. The closer a coach is to the planter, the more effective the coaching is. Some planters get additional coaching support from their ministry mentors; these are people who have poured years of insights and love into
the planters. No matter who is providing the support, it is crucial that phone calls, emails, and text be returned. Problems arise quickly in planting and need to be dealt with quickly. If reports are filled out, they need to be read and responded to, as church planters will often write in the problems they are facing. Planters also get a lot of help with problems by asking fellow planters.

Training helps solve and prevent many problems; as a leader grows stronger, so does the church. Training can happen from consultants, conferences, or be network supported. A network, denomination, or sending church can help by providing training as well as pointing to key books, events, websites, and manuals for their planters. If these resources are listed online, it helps provide consistency across the network. Planters often have to identify and seek out the training that they need, especially if they are in a unique ministry setting. Possible topics include evangelism, conflict, community service, leadership development, self-care, organizational structure, volunteer recruitment, financial accountability, preaching, ministry systems, and the weekly worship service. Once weekly services begin, planters need training on how to live into the weekly rhythms of a church plant and being a lead pastor. Young churches need specialized training in leadership transitions and development. This help is best from similarly sized, slightly older church plants.

Financial support prevents a lot of problems. If a church plant is supported financially, it is important that their financial support arrives on time. Planters need to be ready to share vision and ask for additional support from outside donors. They also need to regularly preach on the biblical themes of giving and stewardship, raising up Christ-centered generosity in the church plant. There are many consultants and generosity
resources available. Some planters have permanent or temporary side jobs to help with family finances. Sending churches can provide financial blessings by allowing planters to have office space or use their workroom without charge. They can allow the church plant to meet in their spaces, when available, for no charge.

One of the most supportive things a church planter can experience is a home base of support. A network or denomination is helpful, but the best home base is a church that acts as a sending church. Ideally, this church is close enough to drive to regularly. They can provide resources, systematic support, and emotional care. In addition to the coach, this home base becomes the first line of defense against problems and the first place to go to solve problems. Networks and denominations can provide support in looking for rentals and buying property, as well as pointing to problem solving resources on a larger scale. They can also help with legal support.

When problems reach a crisis point, planters become so overwhelmed that they lose sleep, live in stress, and consider quitting. Church plants are full of problems. Planters need to have a plan ahead of time for how to deal with the crisis of being overwhelmed. This can include on-call preachers, interim leadership, board support, and consultants. Planters are called to their church plants, but they need to accept that they may need outside help to overcome the level of problems that are happening in their church plants. Senders can be ready to get involved on the ground to help the planter deal with practical problems, or they can send professional help.
Systematic Support

Systematic support is often the most under-supported area of the five key needs of church planters. A new generation of church planters is looking for easily adaptable systematic support. Most denominations have incredible systems of support before a plant is born but few turnkey systems after. Sending churches help more with systems, but the planters have to ask for help. Networks have risen up to fill in the need for systematic support; network churches typically launch with systems already in place, allowing the church planter to run after the mission with greater pace.

By far, the greatest system that planters need help with is leadership development. Planters need help in assessing what is theirs to accomplish and what can be delegated to others. They need simple structures for the early days of a church plant, as well as resources that fit a church plant setting. There are no resources on leadership development for the unique setting of a young church, so they will need to talk with each other. Some planters have joined a leadership cohort to talk out their challenges every month. Planters need support in other leaders, and they also need help behind the scenes with developing and delegating to administrators and others. If renting from a school, is good to get advice on how to strengthen relationships with the principal, janitor, teachers, and the school district. It is good to get everyone serving, but some do not like to give out leadership titles early on. Others have people commit to a one-year cycle of serving. Senders can make sure they have coaching contracts in place, as well as coaching reports that are read. Senders can also set up a system, such as an online national database, that can be accessed by planters to connect with others in similar planting situations, whether by size of church, geography, or model of planting.
Planters need to have systems in place, and they need to improve their systems every year. Senders can help by providing systems before the church is born, or by pointing to resources for systems. These could include leadership expectations, documents for volunteers, a policy manual, background checks for working with minors, and more. These documents should be able to be modified by the church plant. Some church plants do demographic studies in their area to help with evangelism. Church plants also are greatly helped when given support through the process of incorporation and registering as a non-profit. Help with logo design, branding, and marketing is also a great boost.

Senders cannot create ministry systems for the church plant, but they can help with resources such as where to buy lights, a sound system, signage, and kids ministry equipment. It is best when these resources are listed online with recommended configurations. A list of possible events, ways to serve communities, and even sermon topics can be posted online on an “idea page.” Churches also need help with a database for their members. Senders can make recommendations or even pay for the first year of service. Planters need to be aware of the systems that their church plant will need. Nelson Searcy lists eight systems of a healthy church: weekend service, evangelism, assimilation, small groups, volunteer, stewardship, leadership, strategic. Alex Rahill, a national church planting director, has a different eight systems: outreach, Sunday morning, connection, formation, ministry structure, leadership development, stewardship, and care. Christian Schwarz lists eight essential qualities of healthy churches: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service,
holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.\textsuperscript{11} The Covenant Church has ten healthy, missional markers: the centrality of the word of God, life transforming walk with Jesus, intentional evangelism, transforming communities through active compassion, mercy, and justice ministries, global perspective and engagement, compelling Christian community, heartfelt worship, sacrificial and generous living and giving, culture of godly leadership, and fruitful organizational structures.\textsuperscript{12} No matter which systems a planter decides to implement in their church, it is vital for the health of the body to have functioning systems that can bring life.

Ministry systems are typically visible and seen by many; support systems are often behind the scenes and seen by few. Yet they are crucial in providing structure and strength for growth. Many Senders provide early systems for church plants, either in house or paying for services. Websites need to be set up, including online giving. Bank accounts need to be opened. Financial systems need to be put into place including budgeting guidelines, financial accountability, counting, paying bills, generating reports, and bookkeeping. Many church plants opt to pay for bookkeeping services (or at least payroll), and some networks pay for the first few months.

The crisis that comes without systematic support is chaos. Many planters thrive with a level of chaos, but church plants collapse under the weight of need that is placed on few people rather than strong systems led by faithful leaders. Crisis comes when people leave, or do not stay, because the systems are too weak to disciple are care for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} The Evangelical Covenant Church, “10 Healthy Missional Markers,” accessed August 22, 2019, \url{https://covchurch.org/vitality/healthy-missional-markers/}.
\end{itemize}
them, and the planter is unable to develop the systems adequately. Planters can have a plan that includes a list of experts in the different systems listed above. They must be prepared to slow down other areas of ministry to strengthen the systems, so that the entire church can grow and live out the mission of God. This may also include paying for ongoing services in areas that need help.

A Call for Support, Especially for Young Churches

This research is a call for greater support for all planters after the birth of the plant. There is life after birth, and life can only thrive with high levels of support. The greater the support, the greater the chances that churches will grow, mature, and live out the mission of God. So much needed support goes into the birth of a church, but that is just the beginning. When a church plant is born, there is so much more support that is needed. Planters are the spiritual parents of their church plants. They do not usually need to be told what to do, but they do need a lot of support. Planters need to prioritize seeking out support, and others need to make sure support is available. As the church ages a couple of years, support will go down, but the plant and planters still need a lot of support. The young are not mature enough to take care of themselves, and parents of adolescents still need a lot of support. Church planters, if they emphasize their levels of support, will find that they have much more energy and passion to pursue the mission.

This is a call for those who lead church planting movements to invest in ongoing support for church planters after the birth of the plant. This support does not necessarily need to be paid, but it needs to be organized, systematic, easy to use, and communicated to planters. If church planting movements ask sending churches to support church plants,
they need to provide a suite of support tools to those sending churches, including a framework and timeline for support that can last for years. It would go a long way to have additional metrics tracked and reported by church planting movements. We need to know more than the survival rate of our children. My hope is that metrics can be tracked for church plants until their tenth year. These metrics can include healthy missional markers, median size, growth rate year over year, giving back to the movement, and participation in further church planting. When new metrics are tracked, new trends can be identified, and greater support can be given to reverse the negative trends.

There will be at least three benefits to greater levels of support. First, church plants will be much stronger after they are born and in their young years. Stronger church plants have less problems and raise the level of momentum for the entire movement. Supported church planters are less likely to need crisis care or leave church planting, both of which are very costly to church planting movements and the Kingdom of God. A second benefit is that there will be more support for new church plants. No one is more enthusiastic about church planting than church planters. Yet most cannot participate in church planting because they do not have enough support in their lives to overflow to others. As they experience greater support, they can give greater support to others, especially new church plants. A third benefit is that greater levels of support can be marketed to potential church planters. Part of the success of networks is their ability to promise ongoing support for years to new church planters. The next generation of

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13 Christopherson suggests four Kingdom metrics for plants: new believers, new disciple makers, new communities of faith, and transforming communities. Christopherson, *Kingdom First*, 27-30. Multiple church planters that I interviewed also requested that serving their communities be turned into a measurable metric.
planters is looking for additional support in systems, connection, and resources; they are drawn to movements that can deliver on creating a culture of support.

This paper serves as a call to encourage a culture of support in the world of church planting. There are five needs for all Christian leaders: they need to experience the power of God, have vision refilled, be cared for proactively, have help to solve and prevent problems, and get systematic support. These five needs can be communicated out to leaders on all levels of church planting for leaders to create a Support Plan for themselves and for those they are overseeing. Movement leaders need more support. Church planters need more support and must be encouraged to prioritize and seek out the support they need. Planters need to communicate about the five needs of support in their church plants, navigating their baby and young churches from receiving support to becoming self-supporting and able to support their leaders, members, and other missional movements. The Support Plan tool is helpful to identify needs, gaps, and responsibilities. A culture of support does not promise unlimited support but strong support with healthy limits. These limits are communicated clearly. Additional tools are needed to raise up the level of support and strengthen the culture of support.

This is especially a call for additional support for young churches. After birthing a new church and endlessly caring for people for three years, church planters and their families are typically exhausted and on the verge of burnout.\textsuperscript{14} This is also the time that much of their official and non-official support is diminishing because people see them as

\textsuperscript{14} “We lead from the overflow of what’s happening inside of us, and in our lives the needle was sitting on empty.” Their strategy in their family was to put family first, have boundaries, discuss spiritual warfare with their kids, and to have a strategy to help their kids love God and the church. Bloye and Bloye, \textit{It’s Personal}, 105-107, 192.
a “real” church now. Yet most young churches are not ready to fully support themselves with strong leaders, systems, and stewardship. Planters acutely feel the loss of support. Church planters in this stage report needing deeper family and soul care, including establishing boundaries that were often neglected in the early days of the plant. They need leadership growth to develop leaders and be stronger leaders who can develop support in their own churches.

Unfortunately, there are almost no resources designed for young churches. Church planters have many books and tools for them, and established churches have a plethora. Most young church planters do not fit in either group. Like teenagers, they are not children or adults. They will need to find ways to support each other by connecting, writing, and sharing resources. Their best support will be each other. There is a huge need here; almost every church that is planted will someday be a young church. The opportunity is open for planters to create tools for churches in this stage. This paper seeks to address the need for support for all church plants, especially young churches, and provides tools to raise up additional support so that young churches can thrive.
CONCLUSION: LIFE AFTER BIRTH

The birth of a church is just the beginning; life after birth can thrive when given high levels of support. This paper includes research done on church planting, based on over seventy open-ended interviews. The most important factor in church planting is finding the right planters who have a history of fruitfulness in ministry and who have been personally and systematically assessed. New models of church planting are being used, but metrics and funding are slow to adjust to the new needs that the new models require. Five key needs for church planters were identified: experience the power of God, have vision refilled, receive proactive care, be helped with solving and preventing problems, and get systematic support. Planters reported often experiencing gaps in these areas; when they did not have support in a key area, their lives suffered, and their plants slowed down. Church planters want more support from their sending network, but network leaders themselves reported feeling their own lack of support.

Young churches especially need additional support. Planters of young churches, years four to ten, reported feeling a special sense of struggle as support decreased. They need deeper soul care, deeper family care and boundaries, and a lot of leadership growth. Pastors of young church report feeling isolated, burned out, and overwhelmed with the problems and demands of a church that is no longer a newborn but not yet mature enough to support all its needs. It is in these years that many church plants close, or church planters move to new churches or out of ministry completely. My hope is that new metrics can be added into the world of church planting, specifically focused on young churches. These metrics can lead to a new awareness of the unique challenges that
planters of young churches face, and the metrics can raise greater support to meet those challenges. Providing ongoing support is what new planters are looking for from church planting movements, and those who can communicate that they do this well will be able to bring in more potential planters.

It is increasingly difficult to be successful at church planting in Western cultures. Success in church planting is planting a healthy, missional church that is sustainable. A successful church would continually reach new people, be involved and serve in their community, and participate in future church planting. Church planters are facing struggles from the outside, as culture grows increasingly hostile to the Christian faith.

Innovation is important in church planting, but evangelism must come first, or church planting will fail. Church planting must take a missionary posture, even within the United States, embracing their identity as the people of God rather than trying to fit in to an unravelling culture. Church planters are also facing struggles from within. They are wrestling with their calling from God, family stress, finances, conflict, lack of friendships, lack of boundaries, lack of rest, leadership development, and theological training. Planters need help with growing systems and adapting to the structural and leadership changes that happen as their organizations mature and grow. Coaches and mentors are needed and are available, but planters need to seek them out and prioritize their own need for support, even as they support their church plants and grow them to the maturity where it is able to support God’s mission, its leaders, and other Kingdom work, including future church planting endeavors.

The Sent need support so that the Sent can become the Senders. The model for support comes from God, who has supported (not controlled) his people throughout the
Bible and history. He is present, speaks clearly, provides systems, and raises up others to support his people. Church planters need to receive his support, pass it on to those they are supporting, and point others to his support. The best support is personal, organizational, and systematic; it is also ongoing over time, though it often diminishes as those who are supported grow stronger. Church planters need to be ready to seek out and find additional support in the five key support needs. Planting movements can help make connections and resources available, though most support does not need to be paid. This paper includes an original Support Plan tool to help plan for support, identify gaps, and communicate well around responsibilities. The leadership goal for the planter is to see their church plant mature to the point of being self-supporting for all five needs, as well as supporting their leaders and further planting work. This goal will take many years to accomplish, the plant will have to survive and mature through the young church phase, and planters will need to consistently prioritize raising the level support in their own lives and in their plants.

This research is a call to support movement leaders and church planters, especially the planters of young churches. When I planted Covenant Grove Church ten years ago, I was given ongoing and incredible support from many sources; I also sought out support when I sensed gaps. Strong support allowed me to lead with confidence and a strong footing. I was able to raise—year after year—the level of support inside of Covenant Grove. Our church was financially self-supporting by year two but not able to fully support leaders, missions, and continual needs until year seven. It was at this time I was asked to do the research on church planting. I had my own ideas of how to improve church planting, but I was not supposed to share my thoughts; I was to listen deeply and
report on what others said. The results were clear but not what I would have thought: church planters need greater levels of support. Planters are looking for support and struggling when support diminishes because they were not prepared. Those who sought out and found strong support were able to thrive as their plants grew older.

For years I contemplated planting another church. After completing this research, God has made it clear that my role is to advocate for greater support among church planters. I am more involved in church planting in my denomination now; I have been involved in training events and I am coaching two church planters. I have lead seminars on leadership development. I believe that greater support will help planters overcome the obstacles and increased challenges that are facing them. I especially have a heart for planters of young churches, who are almost always under supported. If they can receive more support, they will be the leaders of new movements to reach new people. If they can mature their churches from Sent to Senders, they will have an overflowing supply of support behind them and new Kingdom ventures. I believe this can be the greatest era of church planting ever. Increased support is a crucial piece for it to happen. My hope for all church plants is that they will experience overflowing life after birth.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


