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Stetzer, Ed. *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003. 365 pp.

Reviewed by Joseph Mun. Joseph received a B.A. from Soong-Sil University in Seoul, South Korea. He received a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He is currently a Ph.D. student majoring in pastoral ministry at Southwestern.

*Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* is a contemporary church planting guide book by Ed Stetzer, an influential missiologist and President of LifeWay Research Division. In this book, Stetzer mainly focuses on the two following issues: encouraging today's churches to have a passion for church planting based on a correct biblical foundation and reaching today's unchurched people appropriately by having an understanding of postmodern culture.

This book includes both theoretical and practical aspects of contemporary church planting. Stetzer divides the contents into six parts. In parts 1 and 2, he explains the biblical foundation and basic elements of church planting. Then, in part 3, which is the most valuable part of this book, he analyzes cultural changes in North America and the expected responses of churches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Parts 4, 5, and 6 deal with the practical process and methods of beginning a new church, from its preparation and progression, to stabilization and reproduction of new churches.

Stetzer finds three reasons why we should do church planting—it is the command of Jesus, new churches are needed to evangelize North Americans, and our present methodologies are ineffective (11). He insists that churches should understand their biblical identity. Specially, he says that Christians should have identities as sent ones like Jesus Christ Himself (22). Church planting and mission form the biblical identity of the church. Then, he tries to break through the existing churches' attitude of protecting the establishment and seeing a church plant as competition (5). Stetzer argues that today's church must have a missional mindset rather than an anti-missional mentality. Stetzer defines the meaning of the "missional church" as "a church that is 'on mission' in its setting" (14). This missional mindset is extended to understanding the postmodern mindset. Stetzer argues that because the gospel is not fitted to a specific culture or people group (15), a church planter must understand the people group that he wants to reach. This thought is related to choosing a focus group in actual church planting.

He explains that as missionaries study the culture of their mission field, church planters must understand the culture of their society to reach its people. He states that our purpose "is to establish new churches that are culturally relevant" (31). For this, Stetzer stresses the balance between theology and contextualization. After he provides the biblical foundation and

evidences for church planting, he analyzes the cases of church planting and the types of church planters in early churches. He also briefly but correctly touches the issue of ecclesiology in a new church. He says, “Churches do need *biblical* ecclesiology that enables them to function with efficiency and integrity” (84). About church leadership, he advocates plural eldership as a biblical form of leadership in church (85). This position is connected to the team ministry of church planting.

Stetzer points out that today’s churches are not reaching people who live in postmodernity (115). Such lack of effort has led to fewer church growth successes in this age of postmodernism (109). Stetzer employs cultural exegesis to reach and win the lost of today. He states that we must identify underlying value systems rather than identify age groups (112).

Even though this book is written for church planting, it gives a quality summary and practical explanation about the culture by which our churches are surrounded, especially postmodernism. Although Stetzer explains that postmodernity denies ultimate truth and claims relativism, regarding the evangelism of postmoderns, he explains that they desire spirituality and want to see Christianity in action. In addition, they need to observe people who live out the gospel and are engaged in genuine loving relationships (139–155).

He then changes gears as he describes the practical process of church planting beginning with choosing a focus group. Stetzer states that focusing on a specific group “is not exclusivism” but building a base group to send the gospel “to many other groups” (185). In the beginning stage, he uses a large portion of his book to explain the importance and process of building a core group and team. Stetzer explains about the process and check points of church planting in detail covering meeting places, financial issues, worship, small groups, assimilation of new members, and even choosing the logo of the church. About worship, he claims that “true worship must be both *God-centered* and *seeker-sensitive*” (273). It is a balance between healthy theology and contextualization.

Stetzer closes the book with emphasis on spiritual integrity in church planting. It reminds readers his former emphasis on the leading of the Holy Spirit (94) as he asserts that “without the Holy Spirit’s work we are not planting churches” (77).

Stetzer attempts to make a paradigm shift in church planting to get through cultural barriers. In this sense, compared to other church planting books, the most noticeable distinction of this book is its contemporariness. It seems that Stetzer tries to cover everything about church planting in this book, and he does it well. Stetzer does not describe general, ambiguous principles of church planting; rather, he suggests practical methods and specific applications.

Stetzer does not lose sight of evangelism, which is the core of church planting and the main purpose of the church. He also does not lose sight of

the truth that the church is not just a community, but it is called to be holy and pure as the Body of Christ. For this reason, he emphasizes meaningful church membership in the new church (268–270).

One of the most striking points in this book is Stetzer's two-fold conversion theory. Even though the chart he gives us to explain the two-fold conversion is relatively complicated, his points are simple. He explains that there are two conversions—the conversion to community and the conversion to Christ. Through the conversion to community, unbelievers come to church, and through conversion to Christ, they can be part of the church (193). This theory gives good insights on assimilation of new members.

The most useful contribution of the book is Stetzer's explanation about the postmodern age. He provides practical examples about how unchurched people respond to Christianity and how Christians should respond to them (122–129). In this vein, this book is a good resource to understand young adult groups both inside and outside the church.

There are, however, a few problematic areas of the work. Regarding the need for church planting, even though he claims that both revitalizing established churches and planting new churches should be performed together (5), he repeatedly emphasizes that most established churches are unable to become indigenous, which is the pivotal element in reaching unchurched people in today's postmodern society (26). However, the number of established churches cannot be ignored. The issue we face is not just about planting biblical churches but sustaining them. I think established churches can be changed to indigenous churches if they restore their integrity to become a genuine church in accordance with God's Word. Furthermore, restoring the biblical nature of today's churches is not an option but is an essential and desperate task.

In addition, I am concerned with Stetzer's recommendation for busy church planters to take the sermon resources of others such as someone else's outline; his rationale is that it is acceptable given the busy reality of ministry (91). Even though sometimes God may speak to a congregation with a sermon that does not originate from the pastor, the practice should not be intentionally recommended.

Lastly, to be strengthened, Stetzer could integrate his thoughts on postmodernism, which is covered in part 3, and the practical process of church planting, which is covered by the latter half of the book. He could explain how postmodernism makes a difference in today's church planting in more detail.

As Stetzer puts it, our ongoing struggle is about “presenting the unchanging gospel in an ever-changing cultural setting” (24). *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* supports church planters who struggle to reach unchurched people by giving them a guide on how to plant biblical churches in today's postmodern society. Even though this book was writ-

ten a decade ago when smart phones and social networking like Twitter or Facebook were yet to be developed, Stetzer's book on church planting is still the most recommendable book on church planting to date.

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DeVine, Mark, and Darrin Patrick. *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014. 176 pp.

Reviewed by Garrett R. Eaglin. Eaglin is an undergraduate student at Biola University. He has served as a student leader in various student ministries. He is currently working on a B.A. in Biblical and Theological Studies and a minor in Great Books from the Torrey Honors Institute.

Recent trends of urbanization have caused a substantial need for church planting in urban areas. It is no longer sufficient for the church to exist in the cultural stasis of a suburb; we are in continual need of church plants in our nation's urban cultural centers. However, this can be difficult for church planters or replanters as they enter into new territories that are often in need of strong leaders committed to the biblical foundations of a church.

In *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again*, Mark DeVine and Darrin Patrick recount the enticing true tale of Journey, a church replant of First Calvary Baptist Church—a dying church in need of strong pastoral leadership. The text traces the efforts of DeVine and Patrick while providing several invaluable tips and principles concerning church planting and growth. Both DeVine and Patrick are part of the recent resurgence movement—a movement committed to establishing and enabling missional churches. This commitment is evident in the authors' stories of leadership through trial and opposition.

The majority of the book consists of DeVine's experiences as an interim pastor at First Calvary, while Patrick includes invaluable principles and ideas for application in boxes set apart from the rest of the text. This is quite helpful, as it reminds the readers of the core principles for strong pastoral leadership and church growth.

The authors also include a map with recent statistics illustrating church growth from 2000–2007 by percent in each state across the United States. These statistics display shockingly low percentages, which illuminate the need for strong pastoral leadership and church replants in urban settings.

DeVine and Patrick primarily advance the value of these principles by demonstrating their effects in their story. This demonstrative method is unique among books in this field; much like a novel or collection of short stories written to advance an idea, this work advances the value of these principles with plot and character development. This is an exceptionally effective way of emphasizing the practical importance of these principles, since DeVine and Patrick locate these principles in the true story of First