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Building Self-Replicating Core Teams for Church Planting

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abstract

"Building Self-Replicating Core Teams for Church Planting" will assist church planters in building more effective teams that can reproduce themselves in the second-generation leadership of the church. The article begins with a summary of the problem in building self-replicating core teams and continues with a look at the example of the apostle Paul's church planting ministry. The article goes on to share the results from a survey of highly experienced church planters in the United States. It concludes by presenting a list of key components necessary for building core teams for church planting. The principles were shown through research to be reproducible and applicable to any church planting situation in the United States.

introduction

When it comes to numerical growth, the church in North America is stagnant. Barna writes,

> Life in America has changed greatly since 1994, with massive changes in
> technology, global politics, lifestyle choices and family dynamics. But one

constant has been the proportion of adults in the population who are unchurched. During that period there have been noteworthy shifts in religious behavior, but the percentage of adults who have steered clear of churches for at least the past six months has remained stable since 1994. . . .

When these statistics are projected across the aggregate adult population, the numbers are staggering. An estimated 73 million adults are presently unchurched. When teens and children are added, the total swells to roughly 100 million Americans.

To put that figure in context, if the unchurched population of the United States were a nation of its own, that group would be the twelfth most populated nation on earth (trailing only China, India, the churched portion of the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan and Mexico).[1]

To regain growth momentum, existing churches must plant more churches or perish.[2] Craig Van Gelder approaches this issue from a denominational perspective.

Studies show that if a denomination wishes to reach more people, the number of new churches it begins each year must equal 3% of the denominations' existing churches. Based on this formula, mainline denominations are failing to plant enough churches to offset their decline.[3]

Van Gelder demonstrates that without church planting, mainline denominational churches will diminish. The larger point he makes, however, is that without aggressive church planting that reaches the lost, the mainline church in North America will enter into a period of strong decline. The problem in creating a lasting church plant is directly connected to the problem of premature abandonment by the core leadership of the church.

Core leadership abandonment in the nascent stage of church planting creates two significant problems. The first problem is the increased risk to future church plants. A church plant that does not adequately address the premature exodus of its leadership leaves the church at higher risk of failure.[4] Consequently, when a

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1. George Barna, "Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S." The Barna Group http://www.barna.org/barna -update/article/12-faithspirituality/107-unchurched-population-nears-100-million-in-the-us (accessed 08/01/2009). The research points out that the percentage of those who have avoided church has stayed the same since 1984.

2. Joel Comiskey, *Planting Churches That Reproduce: Starting a Network of Simple Churches* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Pub., 2009), 28.

3. Craig Van Gelder, *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America,* The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 115.

4. Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 20. See also Lester J. Hirst, III, "Urban Church Planting Missionary Teams: A Study of Member Characteristics and Experiences Related to Teamwork Competencies" (Ed.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), 2–3.

church plant fails to take root, it leaves discouraged church planters, emotionally abandoned members, and mistrust in the community toward future church plants. A failure of a church plant can also create disillusioned partner churches, along with denominational leaders, who are left to justify the financial investment in a failed venture.[5]

The second problem created by early leadership abandonment of the church plant is the loss of future leaders. The typical church planting model utilized in North America puts the weight of success, or failure, on a solo church planter.[6] Research has shown that most church planters desire to plant in a team, yet solo planting remains the most dominant model in North America.[7] Equipping church planters to build strong teams who can draw in new members from the surrounding community[8] is crucial for the future of the church in North America.[9] In short, for the investment in church planting to continue, a successful approach to team planting must be developed.

Unfortunately, a surprising lack of authoritative resources is available to help church planters build stable reproducing teams.[10] Stan Buck observed how instability in the core leadership can be very problematic for a young church plant, yet few resources exist to help churches survive these transitions. He observed the following:

> During the first few years of a new church plant, a great amount of trouble often surfaces, and turnover can leave a young church struggling to move on to a healthy future. A good deal of material exists on the "birthing" process of new churches, but little is written about managing the "terrible twos." Many pastors leave during this period, as do many of the original core people of the church.[11]

While Buck is concerned primarily with the impact of the church planter leaving a young church, his study also shows the negative effect of core team instability on the sustainability of a new church.

Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird believe that the dearth of helpful resources exists, in part, because "the adoption of the conceptual strategy of planting 'reproducing

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5 Jeffrey Fulks, "Transformational Leadership and Its Relationship to Success in Developing New Churches" (Ph.D, University of Texas at Alrington, 1994), 1.

6 John S. Bohannon, "Church-Planting Teams: A Proposed New Hermeneutic for Church-Planting Strategy," *Faith and Mission* 22, no. 2 (2005): 35.

7 Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 8.

8 Sean Edward Franklin, "'Pre-Preparation': A Supplement to Team Church Planting in the Inner City" (D.Min., United Theological Seminary, 1999), 99.

9 Fulks, 2.

10 J. D. Payne, *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members,* 1 ed. (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2008), 6.

11 Stan R. Buck, "Staying Power: Pastoral Tenure in Church Planting" (D.Min. Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003), 3–4.

churches' is a recent phenomenon—primarily in churches founded within the last twenty years."[12] Without the right resources, the problem of a high rate of turnover in the core team is likely to continue.

My own experience in church planting illustrates a significant, and all too common, problem; a high rate of turnover in the core team creates instability that can severely retard growth, reduce momentum, and potentially shut down a young church. Within the first year of planting, many groups report that on average 80% of the core team will leave a young church. While some dispute the actual percentage of turnover, experience among church planters supports the premise that the untimely dissolution of the core team leaves church planters without qualified second-generation leaders to perform necessary functions.

I began building my first core team to help plant Reunion Church in Orting, Washington, during the fall of 2006. This early core team was an eclectic group with a diversity of church backgrounds and varying degrees of spiritual maturity. The team members were loosely connected to one another, but their primary connection was a relationship to me and my family. At the time, it was felt that these bonds of friendship would enable my core team to stand firm through the difficulties of planting and buck the trends of turnover so prevalent in other church plants. While the Reunion Church core team did last longer than some, within two years, I had lost 80% of the original core team. The core team members who left the church plant never passed on their leadership roles, and as a consequence, Reunion Church was left floundering, trying to incorporate a second-generation "core team" to help the church move forward. My story is similar to thousands of other church planters around the country, and the hard lessons I learned from failure inspired me to do a better job of building core teams that reproduce second-generation leaders for the church.

In the midst of planting my church, I pursued my doctoral studies. In the past few years, I surveyed dozens of leaders across the country. While my research has important implications to disciple-making and leadership trends, it speaks directly to church planters and what it takes to build second-generation leadership that will increase the membership and long term viability of a church plant. Ultimately, I found eleven key components to building a core team that can in turn develop second-generation leaders. Next, I will look at team development in the church planting ministry of Paul.

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[12] Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, "The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities " (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Research and Leadership Network, 2009), 33.

Although writers often speak of Paul's success in church planting as a solo accomplishment, his success was clearly a team effort.[13] Of the seventeen references to Paul's ministries in the book of Acts, thirteen contain references to the team members who served alongside Paul.[14] Paul also demonstrated a consistent respect for the existing leadership within each locality of the church.

Paul began his team ministry in the local church in Antioch at the invitation of Barnabas.[15] Eventually he was called by the Spirit away from Antioch to take the Gospel to the Gentile world. Paul's commission was then affirmed through the blessing of the church in Antioch, which soon became the center for sending church planting teams throughout the Gentile world.[16] When Paul encountered divisive teachers, he relied upon his unity with the church in Jerusalem to validate his Divine mission.[17] While most of the time Paul supported himself by making tents,[18] he, and the other apostles, also received financial support from established churches.[19] Paul recognized that this financial support was a tangible way the churches could participate in the team effort to take the Gospel of Jesus to the world.[20] Each of these unique instances recorded in the Scripture demonstrates the power of unity in fulfilling the mission of the church.

Bard Pillette has done extensive research into teams in the New Testament. Pillette spent many years as a missionary in central Mexico. He is currently involved in an assembly in Medford, Oregon, in a ministry of evangelism and Bible teaching to Hispanics. He makes the following observation about Paul's approach to team development:

> It is rather surprising that no fellow worker spent more than fifty percent of his time physically present with Paul. Teamwork did not always mean being together in the same city. It is actually possible that the most trusted fellow workers were delegated difficult tasks in other cities and thus spent less time with Paul.[21]

Based on his study, Pillette makes several salient observations about the amount of time Paul spent with his different ministry partners. Table 1 below summarizes the time Paul spent with various key leaders over the total time of their association.

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[13] Acts 15:36–41; Acts 16:1–5; Acts 18:18–19; Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4.

[14] Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 222.

[15] Larry Richards, *Every Man in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1999), Acts 11:22.

[16] Acts 13.

[17] Acts 15; Galatians 2.

[18] 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

[19] 1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

[20] Philippians 4:14–19.

[21] Bard Pillette, "Paul and His Fellow Workers—Chapter 3" *Emmaus Journal* 6, no. 1 (1997; 2002): 120.

Table 1

Paul's Long Term Partnerships in Church Planting

Person	Years Associated	Years Together in Same Place	Percentage of Time Physically Present
Titus	25	13	50%
Timothy	19	9	50%
Luke	18	6.5	30%
Aristarchus	11–17	6.5	30%
Aquila and Priscilla	17	4	25%
Tychicus	14	4	25%
Trophimus	14	2	15%
Mark	20	2.5	10%
Erastus	16	2	10%

This table shows that Paul's associations were long held, yet he trusted each leader to work independently to fulfill their mission.

A second aspect of Paul's approach to team was how he spread his teams out to accomplish the work and allowed each the ability to develop his own teams and partnerships for effective planting. Pillette summarizes his research as follows.

> The average number of partners Paul had at any one time was two, but he often had only one co-worker present with him. The curious part in all this is that Paul's favorite co-workers, Timothy and Titus, were seldom together with Paul as a trio. The three can be put together only a few times for a total of a few months. As a consequence, there was no long-term necessity to meld together the various personalities.[22]

Pillette demonstrates his observation in Table 2 below, which shows how many team members Paul worked with and for how long. The importance of this research shows that teams can be fluid and changing when a strong trust in each member is evident to function when working on his own. Based on Pillette's study, several concrete applications can be made for church planters and their core team.

First, Paul's approach to team development placed little emphasis on titles that distinguished him from his co-laborers. Pillette provides an important observation regarding Paul's use of teams.

> [Paul] almost never reserved a title for himself alone. There was no attempt to distinguish himself from his co-workers as some might today when they use qualifying phrases such as "senior" and "assistant" to distinguish between pastors. Sometimes it is stated that a certain person is the pastor while other

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[22] Ibid., 121.

Table 2

Paul's Ministry Partnerships

Number of Persons with Paul	Length of Time with Paul	Names
2	3 months	Barnabas, Mark
1	1 year 2 months	Barnabas
1	7 months	Barnabas (Antioch)
1	1 month	Silas
2	2 months	Silas, Timothy
3	4 months	Silas, Timothy, Luke
2	5 months	Silas, Timothy
2	1 month	Aquila, Priscilla
4	1 year 6 months	Silas, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla
2	6 months	Timothy, Titus(?) (Antioch)
13 (off and on)	3 years 6 months	(Ephesus)
10 (off and on)	1 month	(Trip to Jerusalem)
1	2 years	(IMPRISONMENT IN ROME)
1	6 months	Timothy (Ephesus)
1	2 years (?)	Timothy (Ephesus)
1	2 years (?)	Titus (Spain?)
5 (off and on)	4 months	Timothy, Tychicus, Artemus, Apollos, Zenas, (Asia Minor of Greece)
5 (off and on)	1 year	Titus, Erastus (?), Trophimus (?) (Nicopolis)
5 (off and on)	6 months	(imprisonment in Rome)

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leaders in the same church are called elders or deacons. In contrast to our modern use of titles, Paul used designations that showed his partners were of equal value in the work (1 Thess. 2:6; 3:2). Even the designation *apostle* is shared with his workers in the sense that they were all messengers. He was uniquely commissioned but did not make that an issue by calling himself the senior apostle.[23]

Titles often get in the way of a team's ultimate purpose. Joe Westbury of the North American Missions board builds on this very point.

The First Century church planting movement was carried on the shoulders of the laity. There was no such thing as the clergy; believers were called equally and gifted accordingly. That's the way it began, and that's the way it should continue to be.

It's time for laypeople to reclaim their rightful role in evangelism and

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[23] Ibid., 124.

church planting. It's time for them to become co-laborers in the field with their pastors and missionaries as healthy, reproducing churches are begun.[24]

Effective teams, asserts Westbury, eschew unnecessary distinctions that prevent each person from functioning as full co-workers in Christ. From Paul's example, church planting teams are built around the power of the so-called laity who are called and equipped for the work of the Gospel. The synergy of roles defined through the use of giftings produces strong momentum for the team.[25]

Second, Paul used the power of consensus leadership to develop teams. His consensus approach, summarized by Pillette, allowed the teams to grow stronger by recognizing that each person was responsible for the life and health of the church.

> [Paul] used the first person plural to show consensus (1 Thess. 2:18; 3:1–4). There was no distinction between his will (*"When I could endure it no longer, I also sent . . ."* 1 Thess. 3:5), and that of his fellow workers (*"When we could endure it no longer . . . we sent . . ."* 1 Thess. 3:1–2). He assigned to his partners the same feelings, the same logic, and the same productivity in the work. In fact, he sent Timothy, a convert of just two years and a worker of only a few months, to encourage the Thessalonians to withstand opposition. He also relied on Timothy's observations there to make a response to issues within the Thessalonian church. That is surely treating others as equals.[26]

Consensus leadership does not preclude the need for good decision making, but rather it puts an emphasis on each person as an equal. Based on a shared history of ministry, Paul trusted young workers to work with others and build the unity necessary for planting and growing strong churches. John MacArthur shares a similar thought in his book on leadership.

> It should be apparent, then, that the biblical concept of team leadership does not demand an artificial or absolute equality. There's nothing wrong, in other words, with a church's appointing a senior pastor, or a pastor-teacher. Those who claim otherwise have misunderstood the biblical approach to plural leadership.
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> Still, the undeniable biblical pattern is for multiple elders, team leadership, and shared responsibility—never one-man rule. And leadership by a plurality of godly men has several strong advantages. Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." The sharing of the leadership burden also increases accountability and

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[24] Joe Westbury, *Who Me? Help Start a Church? An Adult Strategy for Lay Church Planting: Participant's Handbook,* ed. Melissa Williams (Alpharetta, GA: North American Missions Board, 2001), 6.

[25] Hirst, 8.

[26] Pillette, 124.

helps ensure that the decisions of leadership are not self-willed or self-serving.[27]

MacArthur suggests that a right use of titles and authority within the context of team should be incorporated. Within the team of elders, certain people can make decisions, but always, the power of working in unity is emphasized. Consensus leadership in the practices of teaching and leading ultimately builds a stronger team and stronger church.[28]

Third, Paul developed teams that he could trust with difficult decisions. He did not have to override their decisions because he relied upon his training and the equipping of the Holy Spirit to ensure that the church would stay strong. Pillette says,

> Paul seldom had to override his fellow workers' decisions. In Acts 21:10–14, Paul's age, experience, and special commission were given preference. In the end, his partners allowed Paul's convictions to take priority. On the other hand, there are cases where Paul gave preference to a fellow worker's contrary opinion (1 Cor. 16:12). Paul and Apollos agreed on the need for a trip to Corinth but disagreed on the timing. Paul apparently was persuaded by Apollos's logic and feelings on the matter.[29]

Each of these passages listed above demonstrates a clear pattern in Paul's value and preference for team leadership in the church.

Fourth, Paul demonstrated flexibility within team roles. After Paul was converted on the road to Damascus,[30] Barnabas brought the newly converted Paul to the church in Antioch where they ministered together for more than a year.[31] While the church fasted and prayed together, the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Paul, the prophet and teacher,[32] to their first missionary journey. With the blessing of the church, the team, led by Barnabas, began their long church planting journey through the region of Galatia.[33] Partway through the journey, we see a shift in

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[27] John MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership: The Power of a Godly Influence* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 2004), 169.

[28] Marshall Shelley, *Changing Lives through Preaching and Worship: 30 Strategies for Powerful Communication,* 1st ed., Library of Christian Leadership (Nashville, Tenn.: Moorings, 1995), 260.

[29] Pillette, 125.

[30] Acts 9.

[31] Acts 11:21–25.

[32] Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible,* Electronic ed., Baker Reference Library 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), Acts 13:4. This passage in Acts 13:8–13 has implications for how we build our teams. The full exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but Elwell's comment referenced above is worthy of further investigation. Elwell writes, "In his account of the inception of the mission (13:1–3), Luke lists the primary workers at the church in Antioch and classifies them as prophets and teachers (v. 1). In the original Greek, two grammatical particles usually translated 'both . . . and' appear, the 'both' prior to the names of Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius, and the 'and' in connection with the names of Manaen and Saul. Thus Luke divides the names into two groups which correspond with the two classifications, prophets and teachers. This means that Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius functioned as prophets, while Manaen and Saul functioned as teachers. The emphasis would be revelation and exhortation for the prophets and instruction and application for the teachers."

[33] Acts 13:1–3.

roles within the team. After standing firm against Elymas the magician, Paul becomes the team leader of the growing band of missionaries.[34] As Paul and his team planted churches, they ensured that the model of shared leadership would be carried out by appointing a team of elders[35] to lead each of the churches.[36] Once their mission was fulfilled, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and gave a report. Their actions demonstrate that even after great success and the passage of time, Paul and his team still valued the partnership of the church that first affirmed their call from the Holy Spirit.

Fifth, following the example of Jesus, Paul knew that successful leadership was defined by the ability to invest in other people, who could in turn invest in other people and establish a chain of generational leadership. Paul encouraged the older generation to teach the younger generation.[37] Paul's teaching created an expectation that those who were mature in faith would become like older siblings or parents who could guide the young in faith into maturity through both strong teaching and "informal, one-on-one encouragement."[38] Paul treated Timothy as his spiritual son, exemplifying the relationship of generational training necessary for church planting.[39] Douglas Milne in his *Focus on the Bible* commentary explores the depth of this relationship between Paul and Timothy.

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> Timothy was already a Christian disciple when Paul first met him (Acts 16:1) and took him to be his helper in the service of the gospel (Acts 19:22). The relationship so deepened that they became like a father and son, full of mutual affection and trust ("my true son," Phil. 2:22; 1 Tim. 1:18). In spite of Timothy's youth and his recurring ill–health (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:6f), Paul respected and recommended him before all his other helpers because of his selfless motives (Phil. 2:19ff.). As a result Paul sent him on some difficult assignments (l Thess. 3:2; 1 Cor. 16:10f). This close working relationship between the two men grew out of their shared faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of their age difference. This shows that there need be no generation gap in the Christian church, and that the one thing needful is a common commitment to the same Lord and his message of truth.[40]

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[34] John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures,* vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), 388.

[35] MacArthur, 167.

[36] Acts 14:23.

[37] William MacDonald and Arthur L. Farstad, *Believers Bible Commentary. New Testament,* Rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1990), Tit 2:4.

[38] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* 59 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 400.

[39] 1 Timothy 1:2.

[40] Douglas J.W. Milne, *Focus on the Bible: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus,* Logos Bible Software Electronic ed., vol. 5 of 25 (Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 2003), 1 Tim 1:1.

Paul grew to love Timothy as a son. Just as important, Paul built on this relationship and entrusted Timothy with key leadership roles, building churches and passing on the faith to the next generation.

Finally, it is impossible to leave this section without mentioning the centrality of Jesus Christ throughout the mission of the church. The momentum of the Great Commission was begun in Acts and fulfilled in Paul.[41] Craig Van Gelder in his book, *The Ministry of the Missional Church,* summarizes Paul's view as the "missio Dei."

> The missional church reorients our thinking about the church in regard to God's activity in the world. The Triune God becomes the primary acting subject rather than the church. God has a mission in the world, what is usually referred to as the missio Dei (the mission of God). In understanding the missio Dei, we find that God as a creating God also creates the church through the Spirit, who calls, gathers, and sends the church into the world to participate in God's mission . . . The redemptive reign of God in Christ is inherently connected to the missio Dei, which means that God is seeking to bring back into right relationship all of creation. Or as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (5:19). The Spirit-led, missional church is responsible to participate in this reconciling work by bearing witness to the redemptive reign of God in Christ as good news, and through inviting everyone everywhere to become reconciled to the living and true God.[42]

Teams were a tool used by Paul to create vibrant communities of Spirit-empowered disciples who were equipped to fulfill the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of Divine reconciliation.

Douglas Moo summarizes Paul's view of Christ's leadership of the church in his commentary on the book of Colossians.

> Few texts in the New Testament make the case so clearly that Christian living must be rooted in Christ. He is the "head" who supplies power to the whole body (2:19). It is by our existence "in him," the "new self" or "new man," that renewal in the image of God takes place (3:10). He is the repository of all wisdom (2:3), the "reality" or "substance" of new covenant truth (2:17). Our very mind-set must be governed by "the things above," where Christ is and with whom we have been raised to new life (3:1–2).[43]

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The headship of the church was, and is, Christ alone who forms the thoughts and mission of the church. With Paul's church planting ministry as the backdrop, the next section provides a summary of my research and results.

research question and summary

My research project was designed to address the problem that core team abandonment, which exists in all church plants, can be effectively addressed by assuring that the founding core team is recruited and trained according to critical factors. The following research question was used in the development of this project: "Are there critical factors in developing a core team that can be emulated by other church planters?" To properly address this question, the project sought to enumerate the common elements inherent to church plants that have successfully developed core teams.

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The project took place in three phases. Phase one of the project was the identification of twelve key elements for building a core team, herein referenced as the Discipleship Path. These twelve key elements were identified based on the following three criteria: my own experience in church planting, a thorough study of the Scripture, and an analysis of the related literature. The twelve key elements of the Discipleship Path are listed below in the form of personal affirmations. These twelve core-team affirmations, or Discipleship Path, were used in the development of a questionnaire discussed in the following pages.

The second phase was the design of a survey tool used to identify which elements experienced church planters considered most essential in developing a core team. It was expected that a high correlation would be between the elements identified by experienced planters and the original elements identified in the first phase of this project.

Interviews were conducted with ten leading church planters around the United States. A twenty-one question survey was used as the primary measurement tool. The survey was conducted live using Skype®. The utilization of a live interview format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to help refine and better understand each church planter's approach to building a core team. The survey addressed three key concerns.

The first part of the survey collected biographical information about each church planter, his leadership experience, and overall background in church planting. The second part of the survey gathered information on how each interviewee became involved in church planting and his overall impression of success. The third part of the survey asked each participant to evaluate his specific

experiences in developing core teams. The survey asked respondents to summarize the lessons they learned in planting churches and asked what advice they would give to future church planters in developing strong core teams.

The interview subjects were recruited through a two-step process. Step one was a networking phase that was conducted between February and April 2009. In this stage, a basic set of questions was posted on the internet (see Appendix A). Church planters within the researcher's existing network were invited to participate. As church planters participated in the survey, a larger network of church planters was developed. As the network of church planters grew, more people were invited to participate in the networking survey. Ultimately, fifty-six church planters from around the United States participated in the internet survey.

Stage two of the selection process began in the late fall of 2009. Using the group of fifty-six respondents from stage one, ten church planters were invited to participate in the second, and more intensive, live-interview process. The criteria for selection of the ten live interviewees were as follows:

1. Each participant must have planted at least one church in the United States.
2. Each participant must be actively engaged in church planting as a trainer, planter, sending church, or some combination of the three.
3. Each person interviewed must be recommended by at least four other church planters.

The live interviews with these ten planters were conducted between April 8 and May 12 of 2010. The participating church planters were surveyed and recorded through a live interview on Skype®.

The interview subjects reflected a very diverse group of planters from across the United States of America. In total, ten experienced church planters were surveyed. The respondents were men who ranged from 36 years of age to 66 years of age. The men surveyed represented nine different states with two residing in California. Eight of the ten surveyed classified their primary role as a trainer of church planters. One man identified his primary role as sending church planters into the field from a large church. One described his primary role as a church planter. Six of the ten respondents are associated with the Baptist tradition. Three of the ten are multi-denominational. Three of the ten are planting within the charismatic or Pentecostal tradition, while two are non-denominational in their church planting efforts. A very diverse and experienced group of planters provided a solid foundation for analyzing the research question.

The measurement for the project was a comparison of the results of the

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twenty-one question survey with the twelve key components of the Discipleship Path. This section explains the purpose and the design of the measurement.

The twelve elements of the Discipleship Path are listed below in Table 3. The left-hand column states the key components of the Discipleship Path in the form

Table 3

Summary of the Discipleship Path

	Discipleship Path	*Key Component*
1	I have made a profession of faith in Christ demonstrated in water baptism.	Personal Faith in Jesus
2	I study the Bible on a consistent basis and demonstrate a growing knowledge of Scripture.	Bible Knowledge and Passion
3	I can verbalizes my desire for holiness and demonstrate real-life change by making consistently positive choices.	Demonstrates Maturing Faith
4	I desires to serve others and demonstrate an ability to draw others to Christ through specific acts of compassion.	Evangelistic Deeds
5	I have a growing passion for the lost and can make a clear and persuasive presentation of the Gospel.	Evangelistic Words
6	My love for the church is demonstrated in my family's priorities and by my commitment to a small group that inspires and encourages other Christians.	Small Group Participation
7	I am actively mentoring at least one other brother or sister in Christ.	Mentoring Others
8	I demonstrate a practical humility by serving the church and performing the daily tasks necessary to help grow the church.	Humble Service to Church
9	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to share the Gospel.	Teachable in Evangelism
10	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to understand the Scripture.	Teachable in Scripture
11	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to disciple other believers and move them through the Discipleship Path.	Teachable in Discipleship
12	I find and take advantage of opportunities to train others in the tasks necessary to grow and maintain a healthy church.	Training Others in Ministry Tasks

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of a personal affirmation. The right hand column refines each personal affirmation into a single key component of core team development.

The first step in the analysis of the data was to compare and contrast the original twelve components of the Discipleship Path with the answers to the survey questions. The survey questions strongly confirmed four of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the four factors received over 50% confirmation from the survey group. The four strongly confirmed factors were the following:

1. Personal Faith in Jesus-100%
2. Demonstrates Maturing Faith-80%
3. Evangelistic in Deeds-70%
4. Training Others in Ministry Teams-70%.

The survey questions moderately confirmed two of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the two factors received just 50% confirmation from the survey group. The two moderately confirmed factors included:

1. Evangelistic Words-50%
2. Teachable in Evangelism-50%

The survey questions did not confirm six of the original twelve components of the Discipleship Path. These six components received less than 50% confirmation and are therefore unverified as crucial to core team development.

1. Teachable in Discipleship-40%
2. Humble Service to Church-30%
3. Teachable in Scripture-30%
4. Bible Knowledge and Passion-20%
5. Mentoring Others-20%
6. Small Group Participation-10%.

The survey also revealed five additional components of core team development not contained in the original Discipleship Path. The survey questions strongly confirmed four of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the four factors received over 50% confirmation from the survey group. The four strongly confirmed factors were as follows:

1. Teachable in Methods-90%
2. Engagement with Non-Church Community-60%
3. Empowered to Lead-60%
4. Complimentary Gifts/Diversity within Team-60%.

The survey questions moderately confirmed one new component not in the original Discipleship Path. This new factor received just 50% confirmation from the survey group.

1. Unity Around Vision-50%

These five components offer a significant addition to the elements necessary to answering the research question of this project. The next section summarizes the eleven key elements to building healthy self-replicating core teams for church planting.

conclusions

Based on my research, the following conclusions were derived. The researchable question for this project was, "Are there critical factors in developing a core team that can be emulated by other church planters?" The answer is yes, there are critical factors in developing core teams for church planting. A summary of all the factors confirmed through the research project are listed in Table 4 from highest to lowest. These eleven components listed above reflect the key components receiving confirmation with 50% or more from the church planters as necessary to building a core team. The research demonstrated a viable relationship between the use of these eleven key components in the Discipleship Path and the successful development of core teams for church planting. Any church planter who implements a training process incorporating the key components of the Discipleship Path will significantly increase the odds of successfully planting a church.

Successful use of the Discipleship Path to build core teams is by no means an easy task. To fully engage the process, the following recommendations are given to church planters. First, church planters must utilize a "train as you go" approach. The Discipleship Path is not transferable in a "classroom-only" approach. The key components of the Discipleship Path must be demonstrated and taught through the daily process of planting a church.

Second, proper implementation of this research requires preparation coupled with reproducible action. The church planter must prepare the right materials and tools for training and then combine those with an intentional set of actions that reinforce the Discipleship Path.

Third, the key components of the Discipleship Path are established best in an environment where there is both an empowered and decentralized leadership. This means that church planters must learn to train people who in turn are given the freedom to train other people. A restrictive centralized power structure will hinder the proper development of a core team.

Finally, the corollary to the previous conclusions is the right use of "Divine-Neglect." That is, the church planter must build a core team and allow the Holy Spirit to be the teacher, sustainer, and builder of the church. At times, establishing the key components of the Discipleship Path can only be accomplished when a

Table 4

Summary of Components Critical to Core Team Development

	Suggested Component in The Original Discipleship Path	Church Planter Confirmation	
		#	%
1	Personal Faith in Jesus: The initial core- team needs to have an existing relationship with God.	10	100%
2	Teachable in Methods: Every church plant is unique, so members of the team must have an openness to learning new and different methods to achieve ministry goals.	9	90%
3	Demonstrates Maturing Faith: Not every member has to be a life-long follower of God, but they do need to show a history of maturity and a desire to grow stronger.	8	80%
4	Evangelistic Deeds: Team members must have a track record of taking action to reach the lost with the love of Jesus.	7	70%
5	Training Others in Ministry Teams: Team members must have Aa willingness to work hard in the basic task of min-istry and to train others in those tasks.	7	70%
6	Engagement with Non-Church Community: Each member of the core teams needs to have preexisting involvement/relationships outside the church.	6	60%
7	Empowered to Lead: Only core-team members who are empowered to lead will reproduce a second-generation leadership for the church.	6	60%
8	Complimentary Gifts/Diversity within Team: Every team member must know and be empowered to use their his unique strengths.	6	60%
9	Evangelistic Words: Members of the team must demon-strate a history of inviting others to participate in the church.	5	50%
10	Teachable in Evangelism: Members must Sshow an open-ness to learning new methods and approaches for reach-ing out to the lost.	5	50%
11	Unity Around Vision: Members of the team must have a personal investment and passion for the vision of the church plant.	5	50%

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planter pulls back and allows the team to succeed and fail without his or her direct intervention in the process.

recommendations for further study

The following areas are in need of further research. My theological study does not demonstrate a strong support for the five new components of Engagement of the

Non-Church Community, Unity Around Vision, Teachable in Methods, and Empowered to Lead. Although each of these is confirmed through the survey and implicit throughout the research, these four new factors in building core teams deserve future study with a broader examination of the Scripture.

It is clear from the research that the following six elements are not necessary for building a core team for church planting.

1. Teachable in Discipleship-40%
2. Humble Service to Church-30%
3. Teachable in Scripture-30%
4. Bible Knowledge and Passion-20%
5. Mentoring Others-20%
6. Small Group Participation-10%

The existing research does indicate these factors are still important for making disciples of Jesus. Therefore, it would be of great value to church planters for future researchers to define how and when a church planter can properly transition members of the core team into a fuller program of discipleship that incorporates these six factors.

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