Session Three

A look at the kind of churches that do multiply

Review

This is the third of five sessions on church planting strategy.

Session One: Initial Considerations in a Church Planting Strategy and some practical steps

Session Two: A look at what God is doing

Session Three: A look at the kind of churches that multiply

Session Four: The kind of people God uses in church planting and in moving from one church to multiple reproducing churches

Session Five: Training to be Church Planters

The kind of churches that multiply

There are two key issues – two characteristics that **must** be present:

- **Quantity** – the new believers are regularly added to the church and because discipling is being done well the **exodus** of believers is low.
- **Quality** – the new believers are growing into Christlikeness and are being set free from their old bondages. Also spiritual, visionary leaders are being developed.

It is important to ask what kind of churches sweep tens of thousands of new believers into the Kingdom of God within the space of five years or less **and** what kind of churches **at the same time** reinforce the orthodox evangelical teaching and that of the historic church since the New Testament times. These are the sorts of churches that bring glory to God.

A heretical movement is still a heretical movement even if it is growing very fast. But we should remember, most heresies are developed by theologians in seminaries and not by church planters. Most Church Planting Movements are in rural areas among farmers and day-labourers.

There are two ditches on either side of the road that are easy to fall into:

- Everything is right and orthodox and Biblical and people are being saved, but it is rare that ordinary MBBs reproduce themselves by planting out a new church. So you get a so called **'mule church'**. A mule church may get bigger and stronger, but it is incapable of reproducing itself. There are a number of reasons for this:
  - Poor models of church have been introduced to the church
  - The members are not moving in the power of the Holy Spirit
  - There is too much foreign money involved
- It is also easy to reproduce churches that are **contentless**. The MBBs don't have to change their worldview. Church is little more than a 'chat fellowship'. There is a group called Isawis in Nigeria. They are really a sect of Islam who have a relatively high view of Jesus, but do not see him as God. In essence, they are not followers of the Lord Jesus. We don't want churches to embrace a "do-nothing-different-from-before ism".

It is clear from the Book of Acts that being 'church' involved living out the teachings of Jesus and reproducing in their church fellowship the lifestyle of Jesus – including His miracles (see Acts 1:1-2). What Jesus began to do and to teach in the Gospels was continued in the church in Acts – the acts of Jesus worked out and through His people by the Holy Spirit. The Lord

Jesus is with us, but we must be doing what He did! So easy-believism – lots of fellowship but no discipline, no accountability and no tithing produces relatively small **mule churches**. But we are aiming at fruitful churches that glorify God.

The following are eight characteristics of healthy reproducing churches

1. **Many of these churches are different from the ones we come from**

   In Bangladesh, they call Jesus – Isa al-Masih and often use Muslim terminology such as:

   - A church is called a Jama'at (a group). The Bengali equivalent of 'church' is too "western". If they call their Jama'at anything, they would call it "a House of Prayer" or some such name.
   - They call their leaders "Imams". In Arabic this means 'the one who stands before'.
   - They are different in size. Perhaps the average is 30 to 40 people; anything much bigger can't fit into their houses! **They** believe the **optimal** size is 10. Why 10? They want to have 10 adult, baptized, mature believers in their Jama'at. If they get greater in number they start thinking about multiplying. Why 10? When Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gen. 18:22-33), God said that He would have mercy on the city for the sake of ten righteous people. The leaders want at least ten adult, baptised believers, so the church can have a preserving/blessing function in that village. Then they begin to think about other villages that need "blessing" and so begin to pray about planting out a daughter church. [Often in India the average size is about 80!]
   - They meet in different places – in houses and under trees. The number of people depends on how big the tree is and how much shade it provides. They almost never meet in a purpose-built building.

So they are using **new wineskins**. The wineskins are very flexible and need to be so because of persecution. The concept of rapid church reproduction needs to be implanted into their DNA at the very beginning.

2. **They are also like our familiar churches**

   2.1 **All five purposes of 'church' are present**. Every Biblical church has these **five purposes** and they must be present.

   - **Worship:** loving God with everything that you have
   - **Fellowship:** loving your fellow believers as your new family
   - **Ministry:** each member of the church using his/her spiritual gifts and natural abilities. If Jesus did an action it is okay. Encourage praying for the sick, releasing the demonised, helping the poor, teaching, obeying the Great Commission etc.
   - **Discipleship**
   - **Evangelism/mission:** This usually springs out of a deep concern that relatives and neighbours are lost.

   Rick Warren: *"A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission makes a great church."*

   All five of these purposes grow out of the Word of God and not out of a church-planting textbook! From the Great Commandment comes:

   - ✧ **Worship** – loving God
   - ✧ If your neighbour is a believer have good **fellowship** with him/her
   - ✧ If your neighbour is lost, **minister** to him both spiritually and materially

From the **Great Commission** comes a call to **make disciples** and to **evangelism/mission**. If you see a growing, thriving church anywhere in the world, these five characteristics will all be present in that church. If you want a growing, thriving church, then start with the end in mind and work backwards component by component.

2.2 **There are a variety of leaders**

In Cambodia Pol Pot killed nearly all the pastors and other Christian leaders. Under communism each village would have a seven-man central committee. When the little house churches began to grow again after the collapse of communism, they began the leadership of the church with a seven-person central committee. This is common in China and all former Soviet lands i.e. Central Asia. Often there is:

- a worship leader (could be male or female)
- a preaching/Bible-teaching leader (usually a male)
- a men's discipleship leader (male)
- a women's discipleship leader (female)
- a youth/children's leader
- an outreach leader
- a hospitality leader

In addition, there is often a literacy leader as there is a great desire by those who are illiterate to read the Bible.

So leadership is built around the **five purposes of church.** Often nearly all the baptized believers of some maturity are given responsibility to lead something. The principle of faithfulness in little leading to a greater responsibility is practiced. Often they stay at seven leaders, as there were seven 'deacons' in Acts 6.

In one case in Cambodia, the outreach leader in a small church had a fruit and vegetable stall in the local market. She carefully watched all the people in the market and if she noticed someone who came from another village, she approached them and asked, *"Do you have a _____ in your village?"* [She didn't use the word 'church'. In Cambodia 'church' is only used for old French colonial Roman Catholic buildings – now largely empty.] Usually the answer she got was, *"No, what is that?"* She replied, *"Next Thursday we will come to your village and we will show you."* All seven or eight leaders would go to the village and show them what "church" was like (the five Ps – Praise – Prayer – Participative preaching – Partying and practical Problem-solving). Each leader would tell his/her story. The literacy teacher would speak about the need to read and give a small demonstration. Then they would ask, *"Would you like to have a _____ in your village?"* In this way this small village church planted over 40 new churches in 40 villages. Their view of things is that the communists nearly destroyed Cambodia and they are building a new Cambodia.

2.3 **Twin tracks of authority have to be maintained**

- **The track of the Word of God**
  There is a willingness to obey the Bible. Teachers/preachers don't tell them what to do or what to believe. They point them to the Bible, explain to them what the Bible says and by their lives they model that **they** are willing to obey whatever the Bible says.

- **The track of the Lordship of Jesus over every area in their lives**

  The leaders maintain and demonstrate that there is no authority in their lives except the Lord Jesus. They model that to be a follower of the Lord Jesus means accepting His authority over them. In particular they teach the Gospels.

Another characteristic of their teaching is to avoid excesses – i.e. drunkenness – for their health, for family life, how to be peaceful etc.

2.4 **They glorify God**
They seek to do all they can to live in a Christ-like way – together with boldness in witness.

3. How do we get from A (where we are) **…. to Z** (the tipping point and the beginning of a thriving Church Planting Movement)?

Often people say they really believe in CPMs and that they are wonderful, but they are at **A** and they don't know how to get to **B**, let alone to **Z**! So how should we start?

The answer is: **begin to live out the vision**. Start by thinking what the churches would be like and what they would be doing as they reached 'the tipping point'.

Jesus lived out "the end times" in His time on earth. He constantly spoke of the Kingdom. He demonstrated that the Kingdom had come. So begin with the end in mind. As a team, practice what you want to see one day. If, for example, you live in the Arab World, start an Arabic language house church. Carry out the 5 Ps and ensure that the 5 purposes of church are met. Keep it simple. Don't use instruments of worship that are not locally available. Work out how you would do communion in a culturally acceptable way – the same with baptism. Learn what you want to reproduce.

Most workers don't live out their vision. So, in evangelism and in discipleship, they continue to use methods that have little reproducibility and that were developed in a very different cultural context and are often irrelevant from the local believer's perspective. Also many workers have never been members of house churches and have never been involved in starting a house church. Keep asking the questions: Is this relevant in the local culture? Is the symbolism communicating? Is this easily reproducible in the local culture? Learn songs in the local language. Use instruments used locally. Begin to pray in the local language. Use culturally appropriate postures to pray – standing, kneeling etc. Work out how you are going to deal with financial matters – tithing and distributing the money.

So taste what you hope to see one day. **Don't introduce any MBBs into the group**. Keep it for team members only.

So learn how to organise a house church, so that it is:

- **Self-governing** - appoint the leaders for the 5 functions of church - work out their job descriptions and review until you have a workable model
- **Self-supporting** – keep the budget low in terms of hospitality – collect money and decide what percentage should go on the budget and how the rest should be distributed – the poor – crisis fund for members etc.
- **Self-propagating** – what are the culturally appropriate ways of doing evangelism?
- **Self-correcting** – think how you are going to build mutual accountability into the house church in a culturally appropriate way.

When you think it is the best you can make it, invite a mature MBB from the locality to join you and watch what you do for the whole time and then make suggestions for improvements. He/she should help you identify areas of misunderstanding that have occurred. If you don't have any local mature MBBs available, choose an MBB from a culture as close as possible to the local one. Then morph/tweak your house church as much as possible.

Eventually you will have a model you can talk through with your MBB disciples. If it is okay for security reasons, let your local disciples **visit** your house church as a one-off occasion.

What you are seeking to demonstrate is a house church that is indigenous, that is reproducible and that local MBBs would feel comfortable to have in their own homes. Give it a simple name such as a "family worship group". In one fairly high security country workers studied the terminology that Sufis use for their semi-secret house meetings.

In terms of bench-marking 'your house church', look for someone from somewhere close culturally (include urban, rural and other sociological factors as well as language and ethnicity) either in our company or in other companies that have planted an indigenous house church. Ask this person to visit 'your house church' and, if appropriate, visit theirs and learn.

Then start! Give it two or three years to see if it is working. Keep doing your research on bench-marking and feed ideas to the leaders of the first "local" house church of MBBs. Develop clear markers to measure progress. Carry out ruthless evaluation. Develop the art of "shadow pastoring". AS a general rule, none of your team members should attend a local MBB fellowship – except extremely rarely – i.e. perhaps an annual picnic. **Shadow pastoring** involves each of your 5 or so leaders coaching **at different times** their local leaders:

Your worship leader with theirs

Your teaching leader with theirs

Your men's discipleship leader with theirs

Your women's discipleship leader with theirs

Your youth/children's discipleship leader with theirs

Your hospitality leader with theirs

Your outreach leader with theirs

This is one-on-one coaching/discipleship. Having done it, they should be able to help others. They will probably learn a lot about problems. This is a good opportunity to direct the local leaders to the Word of God as our authority.

4. A guide to healthy house churches – POUCH again

P-O-U-C-H stands for:

Participative: Every member participates in the 5 Ps (praise – prayer - participative preaching – partying and problem solving). There is no observation. All are involved. So the meetings are all audience-based. Lively and thoughtful involvement in God's Word usually helps in identifying potential leaders.

Obedience to the Bible: Authority lies in the Bible and not in the leaders and not in the preacher. The members perceive the mark of success of the house church not as growth in numbers, but in their obedience to the Word of God. For this to happen, structures of accountability need to be in place.

Unpaid multiple leaders: There are two models given in the New Testament for how leaders are to be supported (1 Cor. 9):

- Peter's model of full support from churches
- Paul's model of self-support

In 1 Cor. 9 Paul argues that for his form of apostolic Church planting, **unpaid** leaders are better. There are economic incentives and disincentives for a church to reproduce itself.

The **incentives** for unpaid multiple leaders is that the bigger the house-church grows, the harder it is to fit into the house. [There is greater wear and tear on the fabric etc.] Also the

bigger the house church, the more work there is for the leaders who also have jobs, so they reproduce and form two house churches.

The **disincentives** for a church with just one paid pastor mean that there is low motivation to reproduce. If 33% of the members of his church leave to form another church, not only does his church get smaller, but his salary drops by 33%! So the aim of paid single leaders is often "the bigger the better". If you have one paid pastor, he had better be good! In practice, if you have more than 40 adults in your house church you tend to professionalize the leadership and move out of the house into a rented facility (or build a "church") and both of these strategies dramatically slow down reproduction.

Why multiple leaders? If they have to earn their living, they will have time constraints so multiple leaders share the load of ministry. Collective leadership can better prepare new leaders and so fuel multiplication. Collective leadership usually leads to better, healthier discipleship for different views are expressed. One-man leadership very quickly leads to authority being transferred **from** the Bible **to** the one-man leader. Church history demonstrates what a mistake this is.

Cells: usually of three to four members in an accountability group. Accountability is crucial in discipleship, in praying for each other and in problem-solving together. Don't be afraid of encouraging small groups. ***"Iron sharpens iron"*** (Prov. 27:17). So in a larger house church several cells should exist. Every church member ought to be in a cell.

Homes/houses as meeting places: This is Biblical (see Col. 4:15). Develop **house-churches** and avoid renting special places or erecting purpose-built buildings. There are significant advantages to this:

- It is cheap – not free – for there is damage caused by having a crowd of people often in the home. The house owner needs to be helped with repairs and maintenance costs.
- It is easier to bring new MBBs into the home of someone living in their neighbourhood.
- It is usually a lot friendlier and more informal.
- It is great for the family in whose home the church meets. It is good for the children to see that their parents are under the authority of the Bible. Also the homeowner, often the leader, is held accountable by his family for his own spirituality.
- The homeowner or hospitality leader needs help with the provision of food. Hospitality is very important and often quite costly. You must avoid the situation where poor people can't have a church in their home.

The key to developing **POUCH** churches is to develop **leaders**. The house-church can only develop and reproduce at the rate it trains good leaders. This is why "shadow pastoring" in the early days of the first church plant is **crucial**.

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Develop leaders around the five purposes of the church**

  So, you need:

  - **a worship leader** who could be male or female
  - **a fellowship leader –** as this involves hospitality among other things, often a woman is better at this as in most cultures food and fellowship go together
  - **a ministry/teaching leader** – usually a man
  - **a discipleship leader** – this leader may co-ordinate a small team of those discipling the children, the youth, men and women separately (MBBs usually prefer small group/one-on-one discipleship to be by a person of the same sex)
  - **an evangelism/mission leader**

Call these leaders **shepherds** or **deacons**. It is best to avoid 'leader' because in most of our neighbours' cultures leadership is viewed in a very authoritarian way. Note that in the New Testament both men and women were deacons [Phoebe was a deaconess Rom. 6:1].

Most leaders have **one** spiritual gift – say evangelism. If there is **one** leader, the church will focus on evangelism. So you need at least **five** leaders with the relevant spiritual and natural gifts and abilities for the five purposes of the church.

- **Elders** will eventually emerge. These are people who oversee many house-churches. They will be recognised as advisers and consultants by the house-churches.
- If you get too many people in a house-church it becomes harder and harder to get volunteers for leadership because it involves too much time. For example: feeding 20 people is okay, but feeding 40 people puts impossible constraints on hospitality. All the leaders will find it difficult to deal with this overload. Looking after 5 to 10 children is okay. But looking after 30 kids in a small space is not! As a house-church becomes bigger, leading worship becomes more and more scary. There is a tendency to professionalize to trained musicians – worship suffers. So to remain vibrant and reproducing divide and grow. Keep things small and simple.
- Don't just reach singles or men or women. Aim at whole families.
- Perhaps once a month have a large **agapé meal** – "break bread" and celebrate everyone's birthday who was born in that month.
- Don't let **one** leader determine what sort of church it should be. It should be a collective decision after prayer and discussion of the options in the light of what the Bible teaches. Eph. 4:11 says the Holy Spirit has given to His church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Try and make sure your leadership team demonstrates each of these five gifts. If you let one dominate, then the house-church will be built around the leader and his gift. Aim for a well-rounded house-church.

5. Four marks of maturity in the house-church

- It is **self-governing** – i.e. governed by its own members and not by outsiders and especially <u>not</u> expatriates.
- It is **self-supporting**. There is no regular giving from outside the church. No believers are so poor that they cannot give anything. Tithing is taught in some form. There are no paid leaders. This gets over the danger of creating dependency.
- It is **self-propagating**. It reproduces itself regularly. New believers regularly join and are baptised and new house-churches are regularly birthed out.
- It is **self-correcting**. This was missed by the 19th century missiologists! Paul gave the secret of self-correction to us late in his ministry. The early apostles were scattered and many leaders were being killed. Paul explains to Timothy how a church can be self-correcting – 2 Tim. 3:16-17, ***"All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, <u>correcting</u> and training in righteousness, that the man of God*** (or a house church), ***may be fully equipped for every good work."***

  The Word of God does four things:

  - **It teaches us.** What does it teach us? Right thinking about God (doctrine) and right living in order to please God.
  - **It rebukes us.** It does this by teaching us what **not** to think and do!
  - **It corrects us.** It teaches us what we have to do to change our lives.
  - **It trains us in righteousness.** So we ask ourselves how do we apply these truths in our lives?

We are "The People of the Book". Individually and collectively we need to ask ourselves lots of questions about ourselves and about our house-church. Key questions are:

- What is right?
- What is not right?
- How do we get right?
- How do we stay right (training in righteousness).

If all four marks are present the Holy Spirit **will** transform both individuals and the whole house-church so that ***"they are fully equipped for every good work"***. It is very important to start the **four marks of maturity** right at the beginning of the life of the house-church. It is very difficult to impose it on the church later. So these four marks need to be in the DNA of the church. Then the Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to bring them into the Truth and, just as important, **keep** them in Truth. It will be a great help (the self-correcting one in particular) in discipleship by the leaders in the house-church with newer MBBs.

So emphasise that we are "People of the Book". Present this "ideal" right at the beginning. It is not a foreign element being introduced into their culture. It is all about **your** people coming to Jesus and being transformed by Him.

6. There are three levels of leadership to be both Biblical and relevant to the culture

- **Elders/overseers**
  They are responsible for a network of semi-autonomous house-churches. Their main function is encouragement to the other leaders and helping the network of house churches to remain orthodox. Heresy can be defined as allowing non-Biblical choices. Maintaining orthodoxy is teaching leaders to make the right choices that are Biblical.

- **Deacons/Deaconesses/Imams/Shepherds**
  They are responsible for individual house-churches. They will be responsible for **one** of "the five purposes of the church". These leaders don't miss meetings of the church. Being responsible means you are there.

- **A Treasurer**
  If you don't have a treasurer, then you will have no money for any ministry. Teach tithing. In general church members should be **discouraged** from giving as an individual to individuals. They should give as a group, putting their resources and their minds together to make a real difference in the life of an individual or in their community. Note the Biblical reference that Jesus named someone to ***"look after the purse"***. Warn against corruption and theft. The Treasurer should not come from the families of any of the leaders.

  Where should the money go? Well, to **"the five purposes of the church"** – worship, discipleship, fellowship and in particular to holistic mission. [One house-church collected their money and were able to purchase 150 blankets to give during a cold weather snap to families who lived on the street.] Decisions need to be made openly and collectively by the whole church – especially when one member faces a large bill like a hospital bill. Collective decision-making helps build accountability.

The Role of women in a house church

A deacon/deaconess comes from the Greek word "servant". 'Doulos' is a slave. A *'diakanoi'* is a more respectable free servant in a family.

Among MBBs it is important that women are given an opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts. In nearly all MBB house-churches the teaching role is in the hands of men. It is hard to move from the Friday mosque-style of preaching to **participatory teaching** – that is often a **facilitating role** – facilitating both men and women to **think**. This is hard at first because all

their lives they have been taught by rote memory by "experts" who were also taught by rote memory!

Other roles – worship leaders, fellowship leader, and evangelism leader are often held by either a man or a woman. If the church has a male discipleship/female discipleship split, then there is an obvious role for women – similarly for children and youth leaders.

This is a controversy in the church worldwide. Generally MBB churches are more conservative than western churches. Decide what "hill you are prepared to die on" as a team – i.e. what are **vital principles** and what are **preferences**. Don't die on unimportant hills!

7. Learn to produce 'antibodies' to 'disease' in a house-church

Churches can catch a heresy and succumb to a disease or they can implode due to disunity. There are a number of 'diseases' a house-church can develop. How can we place 'antibodies' into a house-church to protect the church from 'disease'?

Here are some 'antibodies':

- A good accountability structure is in place:
  - ✧ Having multiple leadership
  - ✧ Having cells
  - ✧ Having an atmosphere of openness
  - ✧ Ensuring people are not publicly shamed
- There is an emphasis on self-correcting.
- Obedience to the Word of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ is evident.
- There are no paid leaders.
- The five purposes of church are emphasised.

It is like an ecosystem – each supporting the others. People will bring their cultural/theological baggage with them as new MBBs. As these five purposes are emphasised, together with obedience and accountability, they will **separate** themselves from their old baggage and increasingly integrate themselves into a Biblical lifestyle.

Don't allow an MBB to say, *"I'm not a 'fellowship' sort of person."* Explain that we all need each other. We need accountability.

So the health of the church is in its DNA (including the ability to produce 'antibodies' that will fight off 'diseases'). Healthy churches will reproduce healthy churches and a **network** of autonomous churches helps.

8. The Focus of the house-church is on One Unique Purpose – to bring glory to God

"By this My Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples." Jn. 15:8

"….. and we have seen His glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jn. 1:14

"Christ in you, the hope of glory." Col. 1:27

In the next session we will see what sort of person God uses in moving from a single church plant to a Church Planting Movement. Often the key is **not**, "Come and join our church", but "Let us help you to start a church in your own home"!