



This is not the final word on church planting, but it is an exceptionally useful introductory one. It is simple without being simplistic. Accessible without being predictable. Useful without being boring. Informative without being prescriptive. Graham Beynon has done us all a huge favour in writing this, and I very much hope it helps provide an effective way into one of the most pressing and urgent needs of our day – the littering of our world with communities of light, a.k.a. churches!

Steve Timmis

Director of *Acts 29 Network* in Western Europe

This little book will introduce you to the many different ways that people go about planting churches. Given that the Church is God's chosen instrument to save the world, what could be more important than learning about how new churches can begin?

Adrian Warnock

blogger, adrianwarnock.com

Christians can easily ascribe to Graham Beynon's desire: 'to see God glorified by His gospel being spread and His church growing'. But we often do not see as He does – the consequence of such a desire: 'This will inevitably mean more churches and so church planting.' And even when we see that inevitability, we often do not see the complexities of the task. Graham has done a great service by teasing out some of the many issues involved in church planting. I warmly commend this book to all who would like to follow through on the inevitable outcome of their evangelistic desire.

Phillip Jensen

Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, Australia



An invaluable resource for laymen and professional clergy alike, Beynon's text is an essential guide for navigating the waters of church planting. Rife with resources essential to the development and cultivation of the church plant, *Planting for the Gospel* is a multi-faceted jewel that sparkles with ideas on church planting approaches, avenues, venues and systems.

J. Edward Norton

Minister of Evangelism and Global Church Planting,
Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis, Tennessee

The goal of planting for the gospel is that Jesus would use us to build His church for His glory. Graham Beynon provides a series of preliminary ideas to encourage us to think of church planting as a fruitful means for making disciples and spreading the gospel. This resource is very helpful for mother churches to think strategically about planting a daughter church and also for young pastors to explore their calling in following the will of God as bearer of God's mission to people of all nations.

Scott Thomas

President, Acts 29 Network
Pastor of Global Church, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington
Author and Creator of Gospel Coach



Planting for the Gospel

A hands-on guide to church planting



GRAHAM BEYNON

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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ISBN 978-1-84550-636-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published in 2011

by

Christian Focus Publications,
Geanies House, Fearn,
Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Scotland
www.christianfocus.com

Cover design

by

Moose77.com

Printed by

Nørhaven, Denmark

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SECTION 1





Introduction

One sunny April day, a group of people were standing nervously outside a school building. We were waiting for the caretaker to come and open up for us. He was late and I was getting anxious. It was the first meeting of our new church plant. About fifty adults and twenty children from a nearby church were meeting together for the first time on a Sunday morning. All our plans were laid but we weren't sure how it was going to go, and right now the caretaker wasn't helping! He soon arrived and it turned into one of the best mornings I remember.

Everyone was excited. Everyone arrived early (well, almost everyone). Everyone was pleased to be there. Everyone wanted to help. Everyone was conscious that with God's help we were forming something new – something that we trusted God would use for our good and His glory. Over lunch



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later that day someone smiled and said, ‘It was everything we’d hoped it would be’.

Of course that happy morning only came after many months of praying, discussing and planning. Along the way there were a couple of moments when it seemed like it wasn’t going to happen; the journey wasn’t always easy. And that morning was now over four years ago and some of the shine has been lost: no one arrives early anymore, it’s not always easy getting people to help, and some people have decided that the new church is not everything they hoped it would be. Living together as a church over the long term is always going to be harder than starting something new. And yet we trust God has worked in us and through us, that His church has grown and glory has come to Him as a result.

This short book is designed to explore the main issues involved in planting a new church. We’ll look at why we should consider planting and different models of church plants. We’ll think about the principles that should guide such a move and the practicalities involved. I write as someone passionate about church planting and having had some experience of it – but not as the ‘expert’!

My simple hope is that this will aid anyone and any church wanting to think about planting a new church. Some may decide to try to plant as a result and I pray they’ll see the joy of a new church growing. Others may decide not to, but



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I hope they'll see the ongoing growth of their current church. Some of course may try to plant but then see it fold – we need to say that that does happen. But even then I pray that valuable lessons will have been learnt and that the church will still grow.

It is, after all, about the growth of the church. The Lord Jesus said:

I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it. (Matt. 16:18)

Our desire and aim is that Jesus uses us in His plan of building His church.





1

Reasons for planting a church

I once sat in a church meeting discussion about whether or not we should try to plant a new church. Someone stood up and argued strongly that we should go ahead: 'It's Biblical', he said, 'God tells us to do it in His word, and we'd be disobeying if we don't.' No arguing with that then! Except people do. The speaker in that meeting wasn't quite right as there is no actual command to 'Go and plant churches'; rather the command in the Great Commission is to 'Go and make disciples' (Matt. 28:19-20). And so there is debate as to what exactly the Bible says about church planting and whether churches can plant if they happen to feel like it, or whether they should plant.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHURCH PLANTING

The missionary journeys of Paul and his companions (in Acts 13 onwards) clearly resulted



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in churches being formed. In Acts 14:21-23 Paul and Barnabas perform the return leg of the first missionary journey and go back to the believers in the towns they've visited, and we read this:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (Acts 14:23)

So here are new groups of believers being referred to as individual 'churches' and having leaders appointed. The task of evangelisation (spreading the message of the gospel) and seeing people converted doesn't result in individual believers but the gathering of those believers into new churches. The fulfilment of the great commission in whichever country we live, and around the world, should therefore be tied directly to the formation of new churches. Spreading the gospel message should result in churches being planted.

This means we can immediately agree on some situations in which church planting should take place – that is in an area which has no gospel witness. This is seen most clearly in a classic overseas mission situation where there is no church in a locality. We would want a mission team to speak the gospel, see people come to faith and create a new church. But the same can be seen in our countries that have significant churches already, such as the UK or the USA – there are villages, towns and significant parts of cities with



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no faithful gospel witness. Sending teams of people to reach these areas is something we should all want to see, and that will involve church planting.

There are some pragmatic questions over this, most specifically: how far away does a locality have to be from an existing church before we should try to plant there? In many cases of course this isn't simply a question of distance but social dynamics. We need to ask: would anyone from that area ever come to this church? Does anyone in this church have contact with people from that area? Despite the questions the point is clear: churches should consider whether they can give themselves to growth of the kingdom by church planting in 'new' parts of their town or city or into a nearby village.

But perhaps the biggest question over church planting is what churches should do about growing in their 'own patch'. Should churches simply get bigger, with bigger buildings or with multiple services – or should they look to plant? This leads us to the issue of church growth.

THE ISSUE OF CHURCH GROWTH

We've said there is no command for individual churches to plant new churches. Rather, as we read of churches forming in Acts and the letters written to such churches, we see that the hope and expectation is that churches will grow. For example Luke summarizes the spread of the gospel by saying:



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So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in number. (Acts 16:5)

As the gospel is spread and people are converted they join the existing church. But that existing church may grow best by planting more churches.

This is what seems to have happened in the first century. Christian meetings were limited to people's homes and so there was a physical limitation on how large a church could become. As the church grew new groups formed in new homes. The church in Jerusalem was something of an exception in that they could meet at the temple – but even then they also met in homes (see Acts 2:42-47). There is then a debate about how these different 'congregations' related to each other, but the point is that they didn't buy or build a bigger building to meet in.

Church planting in the first century was like this at least partly because there was little other option, and so should not be taken to mean that church buildings or large churches are wrong. However it does give us a model of church growth that we have tended to ignore.

LEARNING FROM OBSERVATION

Research into church growth has shown that smaller churches grow faster than larger churches.



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Those that are fewer than 100 people in size grow twice as fast proportionally than churches with 100-200 people. And the statistics get worse the bigger the church gets. This would suggest we would be better at reaching our nation if our strategy was planting lots of smaller churches rather than growing fewer larger ones. We need to be careful in reading such statistics as numerous factors can be at work here other than size; however we should not be blind to such observations.

NEW WAYS OF REACHING PEOPLE

Church plants also provide new opportunities in reaching people with the gospel. They usually have a blank sheet of paper in terms of what they do and how they organize themselves. They can be missionally focused from day one. They have great flexibility, fewer inhibitions, and can often take risks in a way that an established church normally wouldn't. All this means that planting a church may well be the best way to stimulate evangelism whether your church building is full or not.

THINKING ABOUT A HEALTHY CHURCH

There is also the question as to how size plays into the healthy functioning of church. Larger churches can easily have more people as 'passengers', have less ownership of the mission of the church, and less living out of gospel community. That is not to say large churches are necessarily bad at these things – they will simply



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have to work harder at them. However, it is to say that we mustn't believe the myth that 'bigger is better' in the world of churches – a myth that always stifles church planting.

WHEN IS A CHURCH A CHURCH?

Another issue to consider in church planting is: what makes a church a church? The reason to ask this question is that how we answer it profoundly influences what we think church planting involves. Are we trying to produce a 'clone' of the church we are currently in or can we plant something that looks quite different?

The churches of the first century are identifiable as a group of people who meet together. Hence Paul writes to the Christians who meet together in Philippi or Corinth (e.g. Phil. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:2). So a church plant is clearly more than an occasional or *ad hoc* gathering of Christians; rather it is a group which is committed to each other as a church. A church should also soon have an established leadership – see for example Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5.

But apart from these factors, a church is known much more for its *functions* than its *form*. Functions like teaching, encouraging, loving, caring, praying, praising and spreading the gospel. When Luke wants to describe what the church is about in Acts he says:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of



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bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Hence when thinking about church planting we must not necessarily think of replicating what we know of as a church—including a building, a full time minister, a music group, printed bulletins, youth groups and so on. Rather we can think very flexibly of any group committed to praying, learning, and growing together. This flexibility goes hand in hand with the size of a church: in the New Testament a small group meeting together in a house was a perfectly healthy church whereas today we easily think suspiciously of such a structure.

THE KEY QUESTION

The key question for any church to consider is simply this: how can we best grow both in quality of discipleship and spread of the gospel? The answer might mean staying as one church. It might mean planting another. It might mean planting many!



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SUMMARY

There are two questions for a church to consider:

1. Can we plant a church in a new area that we currently do not reach to see the spread of the gospel there?
2. How can we best see gospel growth in our current area – is it through growing a larger church, or planting new churches?

