



# HOW EVERY CHURCH CAN PLANT CHURCHES AND SEND MISSIONARIES FOR THE GOSPEL AND THROUGH THE GOSPEL



1



SERIES

## SENT CHURCH SENDING CHURCHES



# SENT CHURCHES, **SENDING** CHURCHES

Session 1

How Every Church Can **Plant Churches and Send Missionaries** for the Gospel and through the Gospel

Ben Connelly

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# SESSION 1

## 1a. “BUT WE’RE NOT \_\_\_\_ ENOUGH!”

### The Example of Antioch vs. the Common Misperception Today

They arrived under cover of night. They were tired and dirty. They’d been chased. They’d hidden. More than once, they’d been sure they would be caught and killed. But after weeks of travel, trying to mask their worried expressions and blend in with other travelers, they’d finally crossed the border into safety. They were 300 miles, or over 480 kilometers from home. But they were alive.

The relief of their arrival was clouded by fear and grief. They would never see most of their friends again. At least one friend had been murdered before they left; they didn’t know the fate of the rest.

For a while, they could lie low, watching and waiting. After a few weeks, it seemed like their pursuers had given up the chase. They slowly began to venture out. Over time they began to breathe easy. Eventually they would settle into their new town and establish a new life. This was home now.

Somehow, through the terror, the death, the fleeing, they never lost their faith. Their message—and the life it birthed in each of them—was so new, they couldn’t possibly know much, but they wholeheartedly believed what little they understood. They believed that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah. They believed he was God. They believed that through him their sins were forgiven and their relationship with God was restored. They believed that everything they’d learned their whole lives had culminated in the recent crucifixion and the mind-blowing resurrection of this Jesus.

And they believed the resurrection. They believed that God’s kingdom had broken through, and that it changed every facet of their very lives. They believed this was news that the whole world needed to hear. Their fellow believer Stephen had just been pummeled to death for this message, and they had known there was a good chance they could be next.

So, along with many other followers of this new Way, they had fled. They had said their goodbyes, taken a few vital possessions on their backs and an even more vital message in their hearts, and headed north.

Though they didn't know it, some of their friends had boarded a ship and headed west, into the Mediterranean. Others had journeyed south, into the African land where their ancestors had been enslaved. Still others had begun the journey together, along the seacoast through Samaria, and some had decided to settle before they reached the Syrian border.

But this band traveling the farthest went all the way. They'd already left the faith of their childhood; they had now left their homes, their families, and their nation's promised land. They had made it across the border. Assured that they were safe, they eventually built homes and forged new relationships. They found jobs and began learning a new way of life. They adapted to their new culture, learning how to share their message in meaningful ways with those who were now their neighbors, friends, even enemies. And regularly, they gathered to thank God, to encourage one another in their still-young faith, to sing and grow together, and to remember Jesus' death and resurrection with matzah and Israeli wine.

This was their new life. This was their mission. This was their home. This was Antioch.

## **The Church at Antioch**

In the book of Acts, Luke records a version of the world's first "church plant." We frankly don't know much about the church at Antioch, but from the Bible and history, we know a little about when and how it was started, and about when and how it first sent others out.

Reimagined with some creative license above, here's Luke's actual description of Antioch's beginning:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to

the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19–21)

The church at Antioch didn't start because of some great planting strategy envisioned by Christians in Jerusalem. There was no fundraising campaign, and no prospectus or door flyers hung throughout the boroughs of this city. There were no seminary-trained pastors, with the right personality profile and entrepreneurial acumen. History's first church plant was started because of persecution, in part at the hands of a murderous Pharisee called Saul (Acts 8:1). And it was started by laypeople who were fairly young in their faith and discipleship. After all, Jesus' resurrection had only occurred about four years earlier. And yet, God had sent these people; God had started a church through them.

And this church's "sentness" did not stop with themselves. This sent church also became history's first intentional sending church. Only eight verses after describing the church's inception, Luke described Antioch's first "short-term mission trip":

[A prophet] named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). The disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:28–30)

And just over a couple of chapters—and within a few mere years of being planted—we see Antioch's first recorded "long-term send":

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1–3)

As the rest of Acts plays out, we see the fruit of Antioch's sending of Barnabas and Saul—the same Saul, of course, whose persecution had led to the Antioch church's existence in the first place! Over the coming decades, this "apostolic team" planted dozens of churches themselves. Many of those churches planted more churches as increasing numbers of

Christians and churches followed Antioch's example of sending. Indeed, the always authoritative Wikipedia goes as far as to list the church at Antioch as the root of the entire Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other Orthodox movements.<sup>1</sup>

Not too shabby for one local church!

## The Example of Antioch for the Church Today

To be clear, if this book were to extract a specific method or model from Antioch for today's churches to follow as we seek to train and send church planters and missionaries, it would involve a lot of assumption, reading between the lines, and eisegesis. Luke simply doesn't tell us enough about Antioch to follow any methodological example for planting churches and sending missionaries.

However, even in the Bible's brief words about this early church, Antioch does serve as an example for every single church today, no matter its location, size, budget, or age.

- The church at Antioch listened to the Lord and sent according to his leading: From its persecution-based inception, to heeding Agabus's prophesy, to prayer and fasting before sending Barnabas and Saul, the church clearly trusted God over human wisdom.
- The church at Antioch was generous with its resources: Its people were willing to sacrifice according to their need, for the good of the global church.
- The church at Antioch sent away strong leaders: I mean, they had the apostle Paul, and trusted God enough to let him go! (And while Barnabas is an unsung hero of the early church, he might have been an even greater loss.)
- The church at Antioch became a sending church while it was still small, young, and poor: At the most liberal estimates, Antioch sent out its church-planting team when the church was about eight years old, possibly even younger. When asked about the size of the Antioch church, renown historian Dr. Philip Jenkins explains that trying to determine numbers that far back is extremely difficult but notes that Antioch likely engaged "at the most, a few hundred, and possibly less" (in a city whose population is estimated at about

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_Antioch#Successive\\_branches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Antioch#Successive_branches). Accessed 7/03/2018.



300,000).<sup>2</sup> Again, these are liberal figures; in actuality, the church in Antioch likely comprised fewer people than this estimate.<sup>3</sup>

In these ways, Antioch serves as an example for churches to follow, across the world and for all of history. What Antioch shows us is that every single church—no matter its size, age, budget, or location—is both a sent church and a sending church. Every single church, following Antioch’s example, can plant churches and send missionaries, for the gospel and through the gospel.

Antioch’s example may fly in the face of today’s Western individualism, denominational territorialism, common measures of success, and even human planning and logic. But this series of ebooks aims to break down common misconceptions and presumptions; to help churches reprioritize (or prioritize for the first time) the training of leaders and teams, the sending of church planters and missionaries, and the self-sacrifice that both stems from and aims for the good news of Jesus’ own self-sacrifice. In other words, these books exist to help each church see how it can be intentionally and meaningfully involved in the God-given task of sending.

## Your Church’s Sending Journey

Perhaps your church has a vision for sending but is struggling to know the first step in that journey. Maybe your church is so young and new, or maybe you are so new to your role in your church, that you don’t know how to explain to other leaders your passion for sending. Maybe an event occurred that sparked the flame for the first time toward becoming a sending church. Perhaps it was as minor as someone taking a missions class and bringing questions to you. Perhaps it was more major like a global pandemic that caused a reevaluation of your ministry model. Or maybe you have sent dozens of people over the years and are merely brushing up.

Or maybe you’re just trying to hold your own church together and even the thought of planting churches or sending missionaries makes you sweat.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins, personal email correspondence, February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in a similar correspondence with N.T. Wright regarding the size of the church at Antioch, he admits honestly, “I don’t think anyone knows the size of the early Antioch church. We just don’t have that kind of information, alas.” (N.T. Wright, personal email correspondence, Nov 2020).

Bottom line, there are dozens of reasons that could have led you to a book on sending: whatever yours are, this book has a threefold goal:

1. To help you think biblically about sending
2. To invite you to rest in the good news of Jesus even for your ministry (after all, he builds and shepherds his church)
3. To exhort you to take even one step from where you are now, toward becoming a sending church.

More resources are available for planting churches today than ever before. (The Equipping Group even aims to add more gospel-infused, fruitful resources to the mix!) Many churches send, not as the result of persecution, but of prayer and planning. We have the ability today to learn from best practices, proven principles, general wisdom, and the experiences—and even the mistakes!—of others. Some of those things are captured in the coming pages: we try to give general shifts your church can make that have proven fruitful for church planting, and some examples of how specific churches have put those ideas into practice.

This second book in this series—How Every Church Can Cast a Vision and Create a Sending Culture—introduces a biblical and theological example for sending, and the following ones include various tangible ways to help your church become a sending church. The book concludes with a closing invitation and a reminder, as well as some resources to help you take next steps.

But the goal of this first book, Session 1, is to ask, what if every local church on earth embraced the mentality of the church at Antioch? What if we all followed God's leading in sending and were willing to pray and give away our finances, and even our best leaders? What if we could do so, not in our church's 20th or 200th year of existence, but in its second year? And what if we could at least start down that path, not when we have 200 or 2,000 people engaged, but when we have 20 people?

That's the example of the church at Antioch, and that's the example I pray you'll consider following by the end of these four concise books.

## My Church's Sending Journey

Let me pause and introduce myself. Hi, I'm Ben. Nice to meet you. Along with a small team of family and friends, my wife, Jess, and I planted The City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2009.

We started with about twenty people in a friend's living room. The largest Sunday gathering we had in the eleven years we led The City Church was in the 300s (300 adults, that is. It seemed like we had 10,000 kids, which was great!). We never had more than three full-time staff positions, and never owned a Sunday gathering space. Our budget never crossed the \$500,000 mark, and trust me, we have had plenty of ups and downs in our years of ministry.

But in The City Church's first nine years, we were honored to send out four church planting teams across the US—each with various numbers of people, and each including elders, deacons, group leaders, generous givers, and/or great friends and leaders. During that time, we also trained and sent five families as long-term vocational missionaries to difficult places around the globe. And we gave tens of thousands of dollars and hundreds of staff hours to church planting and missionary support. In 2020, The City Church's eleventh year, my family and another elder couple were sent with others to gather a core team once again. We became The City Church's fifth church plant in just over a decade.

I don't share our church's experience to brag, or to invite comparison between our church and yours. We're smaller, poorer, and younger than some churches; we're larger, richer, and older than others. We've sent more churches than some, and less than others. Indeed, each "send" has been painful in its own right, and each has taught us, in some regard, how little we know and how much we still need to learn. And we've made lots of mistakes.

Instead, I simply share The City Church's story as one living example of a common, ordinary, everyday church in a typical beautiful setting and mission field, that has been committed to the concept of sending from Day One. We didn't wait until we were X years old, or had Y number of members, or had Z dollars in the bank before we turned our gaze outward. (As I'll share later, there's never a magic number in any of those categories that prepares a church leadership team to send.) We've never made a top, biggest, or fastest anything list.

Rather, I share our church's experience because, outside of the extraordinary Spirit of God, ours was not an extraordinary church; we didn't have any secret formula because there isn't one! As we told guests often on Sundays, The City Church was simply "a group of ordinary, messed up people God has redeemed, and through whom we believe he will work out his redemption in others." It still is.

That mindset captured who The City Church was for a decade, and at the time of writing is also taking root in Salt+Light Community, our new plant. That mindset led us to send our people well as God opens doors—even from our youngest, smallest, and poorest days. At the time of writing, Salt+Light is two-and-a-half years old (but we planted in the midst of Covid so we feel we've really just gotten going for a year and a half). We're a few dozen adults strong (but yes, still seemingly 10,000 kids), and have a budget of less than \$100,000. And we are actively, prayerfully considering sending out our first church plant.

## **The Common Misconception**

In addition to helping lead The City Church and Salt+Light Community, I lead two organizations that help train churches and people for sending: the Equipping Group trains planters and leaders globally, and Plant Fort Worth does so more locally. Before taking on these roles, I served as Director of Training for three different North American church networks. For over a decade in these roles, I've been honored to create and oversee training for discerning one's ministry fit and for equipping potential church planters to plant across North America and in multiple nations. I've also been honored to serve, coach, and train church planters in various cultures all around the globe. (I often learn more from them as they learn from me!)

Along the way, since each resident is embedded into a local church, I have helped dozens of churches cast vision for church planting, and to create church cultures to train, fund, plan for, and support sending. Some of these "sending churches" have membership in the thousands, others in the dozens. Some sending churches are more recently planted, and others have existed for decades. We've worked with churches across multiple denominations, who have budgets of various sizes.

In some ways, the work we do with sending churches is more important—and at times harder—than the work we do with the residents of the communities we’re in. From personal experience and even more from history and tradition, it’s my growing conviction that any church can be involved in planting churches and sending missionaries. To do so, many just need to overcome one, single misconception.

As I’ve gotten to share The City Church’s story and train church leaders across the US, I have also heard common pushback from those teams, against their own church’s ability to be involved in planting churches and sending missionaries. It would be common in a book like this to explain multiple misconceptions. But in truth, in all the conversations, I’ve actually only heard one—even if it’s stated in different forms:

“We’re not big enough.”

“We’re not old enough.”

“We’re not settled enough.”

“We’re not self-sustaining enough.”

“We’re not well-staffed enough.”

“We’re not rich enough.”

In summation, the one, single reason that comes up over and over again, that keeps churches from even starting toward sending is, “We’re not enough.”

On one hand, this pushback seems logical: “Look out for number one,” goes the common saying. We’re even told on airplanes that if oxygen masks drop, you “place your own mask on first, and only then assist others.” Human logic would say that your church must be “something enough” before you can think of helping another church. Sending people out before your church is “whatever enough” would be foolish, right? But doesn’t God usually turn human logic on its head? Writing to one of the churches he planted, the apostle Paul reminds us:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:27-29)

Could it be that our desire to be “enough” is actually “to be strong in the eyes of the world”? Could it be that we want to meticulously plan our ministry, grasp for control of God’s church, and rely on ourselves and our own logic, more than on God? If so, are we not boasting in ourselves and our ability and our plans, and defining “strength,” “wisdom,” and “the things that are” by human standards? That would be logical—just maybe not godly.

On the other hand, we must ask how much this drive to be “enough” is shaped by the culture in which our churches exist. We’re surrounded by, and sent into, a world that celebrates things that are bigger and faster; things that are flashy and famous. Is our desire for Jesus’ kingdom to expand, or for our own kingdoms to expand? Could “being enough” be just a more acceptable way of saying that we want our church—or our own name—to be big, fast, flashy, or famous?

Doug Logan, president of Grimké Seminary, once admonished a group of church leaders, “Your church plant is just one moment on a history-long journey to the end days. The moment we turn that moment into a monument, we fail. [Israel’s] King Saul turned his momentary reign into a monument. So did King David and King Solomon. And this led to each king’s downfall. Do you do the same with your church?”<sup>4</sup> If we’re more about our monuments than the reality that each church is a mere moment, we’ll surely never feel the freedom to look beyond our own church for the sake of another!

One passage we keep in front of the church planters we train is from Paul, speaking of his own credibility for ministry. Some of the Corinthian church wanted letters of recommendation, common at the time to prove one’s authority, at least in the eyes of man.

Paul answers:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:4-6)

Here’s the humbling but freeing reality of these verses, in the midst of striving to “be enough”: The Bible promises that we are not “enough”! No human commendation can give

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<sup>4</sup> Doug said this at a training event for church planters, 2019 in Philadelphia, PA.

authority or life; only God is sufficient. No person, and no church, should ever get to where we have enough people, money, experience, or leaders, to feel settled and sufficient in our own strength. (In fact, churches that do, find themselves under rebuke in Revelation 2–3!) By human standards, no minister or church will ever be enough. And that’s the exact truth that frees each minister and each church to plant churches and send missionaries.

This is where the gospel of Jesus, the primary sent one of God the Father, becomes good news: while we are weak—as many of us preach often, but sometimes have difficulty believing—he is strong. He will build his church as he promised, and he’ll do so in the exact way he wants it. He cares for his bride perfectly, even in ways we wouldn’t, or can’t. God frees our grip on his church and his people by holding us in his far-more-capable hands. Jesus frees us from relying on human standards or metrics of success. Jesus sacrificed more greatly than any human, for the glory of his Father. By his example, and by his Spirit living in us, he invites us to echo his own sacrifice, for the furtherance of his gospel message across the world today, and to join him in glorifying God.<sup>5</sup>

### Side Note:

*For the record, there are seasons in churches where sending is unwise. The truth of our universal human inadequacy—the same “not enough-ness” that frees us to send also frees us not to send at times. It also frees us from boasting in the number of missionaries or churches we send out. Allow me to share two mistakes The City Church made to guard us against swinging a pendulum too far into “sending.”*

*First, we learned the hard way to say no if someone isn’t ready. Our excitement for sending doesn’t always equal a potential planter’s or missionary’s readiness to go, whether based on character, capacity, gifting, and so on.*

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<sup>5</sup> The sentences in this paragraph are summarized from Luke 10:16, 2 Cor. 12:10, Matt. 16:18, and Eph. 5:25–27, respectively.

*Second, we learned to let our church rest and heal between “sends”: in one year we sent out nearly fifty people as a core group. (And those were the intentional “sends”; we of course had a few people leave for other reasons too, as do most churches in a given year.) You can imagine the toll on a small church family of sending 20 percent away, even if they were sent for good motives!*

*One woman in our church wisely reflected that it felt like going through two birthing experiences without giving a mother’s body a chance to heal between them. Lest we trade one idol (church size) for another (number of people sent), learn from our church’s mistakes: consistent, healthy sending is more sustainable than constant, weary sending.*

## **Build a Legacy That Outlasts Your Church**

By all accounts, the church at Antioch was a good church, in a hard but rich mission field. The capital of Syria and a major Roman military and trade city by the AD mid-30s, Antioch was a melting pot of “native Syrians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans.” There existed a mix of deities, and Antioch had seen its share of hostility between religious factions. The first wave of Jewish Christians (Acts 11:19) arrived at Antioch and, as Christianity was initially a Jewish faction, logically “confined their preaching of the Christ to Jews in the synagogues, probably with quite limited response.” A second wave came next (11:20), and “took the bold step of preaching Christ to the ‘Greeks,’ that is, to Gentiles.” This was the multicultural context in which the first Christian church was planted. Indeed, Luke’s carefully crafted list of leaders in Acts 13:1 shows a church led by a team of both Jews and Gentiles, and multiple races.<sup>6</sup>

As we saw above, the church at Antioch was a sent church. And the church at Antioch became a sending church, who prayerfully, generously, and sacrificially gave rise to a history-long lineage of global disciple-making. But . . . the church at Antioch doesn’t exist

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<sup>6</sup> Quotes and much of this paragraph are summarized from Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 263–67.



anymore today. The city itself was sacked in the AD 1200s, and “the majority of the Roman city lies buried beneath deep sediments from the Orontes River or has been obscured by recent construction.”<sup>7</sup> Centuries before that, the planting team who risked their lives to flee persecution eventually lost those lives, even if by natural causes. Similarly, the multicultural group of leaders who prayed over and sent Barnabas and Paul have now been dead for two thousand years. Paul and Barnabas themselves are also long gone.

Fast-forwarding to today, in just a few decades, The City Church and Salt+Light Community, two of the churches our team planted, may not exist. Even if they do, their current leaders will be dead (or at least senile!). Even the “best” churches of our generation won’t likely be around—or at least, they won’t be exactly like their leaders currently envision them—in a few short generations. But if current churches keep raising up and sending out planters and missionaries, and if the churches that we plant, plant churches and send missionaries, then generation by generation we get to participate in something that outlasts our names, our churches, and our brief moments on earth.

None of us are “everything enough.” No one but Jesus was ever intended to be enough. No church is “everything enough” to accomplish the beautiful, weighty, spiritual task of sending, because no church without God’s Spirit can accomplish what only God can accomplish. But in the coming pages, we’ll consider six needed shifts that, by God’s grace, can help your church follow the example of Antioch, and—whether it’s one year old or 100; whether it’s 20 people strong or 20,000—be involved in the multigenerational, globally scoped, kingdom-expanding work of planting churches and sending missionaries.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antioch#Fall\\_of\\_Antioch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antioch#Fall_of_Antioch). Accessed July 13, 2018.

## REFLECTION 1a:

The next part of this session lays a theological foundation for being a sent and sending church, through the good news of the gospel. But to make sure this process is tangible and personal, take a few moments either alone or with a ministry partner or team and honestly answer the following questions.

1. What resonates from this reading? What's one thing that was new/especially helpful?
2. Which of the following aspects of Antioch sound most like your church, and which sound least? Why?

*The church at Antioch listened to the Lord and sent according to his leading.*

*The church at Antioch was generous with its resources.*

*The church at Antioch sent away strong leaders.*

*The church at Antioch became a sending church while it was still small, young, and poor.*

3. From the list above, what aspects of Antioch would you hope to be true of your church? What's holding your church back from realizing these traits?
4. Which "not enough" concerns have kept you from taking steps toward becoming a sending church? Whose voices say those things? Which are true/which aren't?

<i>"We're not big enough."</i>	<i>"We're not old enough."</i>
<i>"We're not settled enough."</i>	<i>"We're not self-sustaining enough."</i>
<i>"We're not well-staffed enough."</i>	<i>"We're not rich enough."</i>

5. How does the gospel answer each of those "not enough" concerns, and how does the good news of Jesus free you to admit that you, and your church, are not enough?

6. What do you feel like God might be inviting you and your church into at this point? What will you do with that invitation?

## SESSION 1

# 1b. EVERY CHURCH: A SENT AND SENDING CHURCH

## Discovering Your “First Step” in God’s History-Long Mission

God’s church is an organism more than it is an organization. Yes, there are denominations and networks. And yes, as Australian leaders Colin Marshall and Tony Payne write, “All Christian churches, fellowships, or ministries have some kind of trellis that gives shape and support to the work. As the ministry grows, the trellis also needs attention . . . these all become more important and more complex as the vine grows.”<sup>8</sup>

But at its core, God’s universal church, as well as each local expression of it and each person within it, is a branch of a vine. That’s the image Jesus gives: he is the “true vine”; his people are dependent “branches” (John 15). So each church may be simply seen as “branches, together.” A local church is the breathing, moving, growing, feeling “body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12). A church is not an event or building. God doesn’t need a house; rather, his people are “the household of God” (Eph. 2).

God’s church is a living organism. And if healthy, living organisms reproduce. Flowers bud and are pollinated, and new flowers grow. Bird eggs are fertilized, and the next generation of birds is born. Paul’s charge to his own disciple Timothy was to make more disciples, who in turn would make more disciples. If Spurgeon was right, that “Every Christian . . . is either missionary or an impostor,”<sup>9</sup> then healthy Christians make new Christians. And, healthy churches make new churches.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2021), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Spurgeon: *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, vol. 54* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 476. If you’ve never read the rest of the quote, which I had not, it deserves a glance. Warning, conviction ahead: “Every Christian here is either a missionary or an impostor. Recollect that you are either trying to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus, and a totally silent tongue about him. Of course I do not mean, by that, that those who use the pen for Christ are silent; they are not. And those who help others to use the tongue, or spread that which others have written, are doing their part well; but I mean this,—that man who says, ‘I believe in Jesus,’ but does not think enough of Jesus ever to tell another about him, by mouth, or pen, or tract, is an impostor.”

<sup>10</sup> Sure, theologically God is the one who makes new Christians, and we’ve already recalled that Jesus is the one who builds his church — but God is also the one who cares for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

## Change the Target

The coming books in the series will introduce some tangible shifts that are necessary for churches to make in order to become sending churches. While we'll get to those later, there is one shift for church leaders to consider now that informs all the rest we'll discuss: To develop a vision and culture of sending (Session 2), then to equip, send, and support missionaries and church planters (Sessions 3–4), very often a church has to consider—and perhaps change—its values, goals, and desires.

For example, the desire to be a large church may work directly against the desire to be a sending church. Getting more people in the door has, in some scenarios, led to a bolstering of people's being comfortable—in Sunday venues and programs, for example, or in a level of teaching conviction and obedience. This can happen in other areas, any of which can directly work against the culture of discomfort a church needs in order to involve many people in mission and ministry, and to send people out over time.

Other examples exist, in nearly every area of your church's ministry, but the bottom line is that, as one friend of mine has said, “you may have to say no to good things, for the sake of the best thing.”

Author Jared C. Wilson explains the dilemma further. He writes specially about “the attractional model,” but in truth, his words can apply to leaders pursuing any ministry philosophy: “Many . . . are very fearful of the organization dissolving. There are personal visions and aspirations at stake; there is money at stake; there are buildings involved; there are lots of programs that are considered successful. The enterprise is predicated upon the longevity, the bigness, the success of the enterprise.”<sup>11</sup>

This principle is true in general for vision, culture, and ministry philosophy, but also applies to sending: we can't have conflicting targets. We must know what our “targets” are, and even be willing to change them if we realize they work against God's vision for his church. This may mean losing people, or slowly shifting a culture, or even offending some individuals with long-standing membership. But we must become more laser-focused than

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<sup>11</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 132.

function as scattered shotguns. Every church can become a sending church, but we will rarely just happen to drift into that goal. It takes prayer, intentionality, unity, definition, and an all-in pursuit of God's vision. You may need to change the target.

## Every Church Can Do Something

I introduced myself earlier. Before you open book #2, let's consider who you are, because your posture matters as you engage in the rest of this content. Maybe you are a church planter and have been wondering how to instill a vision for sending in your church-to-be from the day you "hit the ground." Maybe you're a pastor or leader of an existing smaller church and have felt the desire to plant but haven't known the right steps to take. Maybe you're in leadership at an older, or larger, church and have wanted to dip your toe in the water of church planting, but don't know where to start.

No matter who or where you are, and no matter the size or age of your church, every single church can take a step toward planting.

Maybe it's as simple as starting to put 1 percent of your budget toward a future plant. Maybe it's sharing some form of leadership for the first time, such as with a potential apprentice or leader in training. Maybe it's reshaping a small group or class structure to involve some form of "looking out" and meeting the needs of your city. Maybe it simply starts with you, praying over morning coffee, that God would give you a passion for an unreached people group somewhere in the world.

Just crafting a vision and culture for sending may take months or years. Actually starting a leader development process and finding the right people to go through it may take more time, even years, after that. But it starts with one step. And then another. And sometimes the steps you take will leave you with a smelly shoe—and you simply wipe it off and know not to do the same thing the next time. Every potential planter and missionary is different, and every round of every training process will teach you something.

I recently met with a leader of one of the most respected church planting organizations on earth, and he told me that after decades of the stellar process they've developed, which has produced multiple planters each year with a stunning success rate, they have gone back to

the drawing board to revamp much of their whole procedure. The meaning is that you don't have to have something perfectly formatted, produced, and executed to be involved in sending, because nothing will ever be truly perfect! Trust God more than your ability or process; pray that he will guide you; put in the planning, time, and effort you can, and take a step. Every church can do something!

## The Extra-Ordinary Church

The goals of this first session are simply: laying a biblical and theological foundation for churches to plant churches and send missionaries. In future sessions, readings and reflections will guide the leadership of each local church—no matter its size, age, budget, or location—to see how you can be involved in planting churches and sending missionaries, and then take a step in that direction. The pages you'll read are filled with shifts that can help your church become a sending church based in Scripture and theology. And you'll see some examples of the many ways each can be carried out. But every church is unique, and each leadership team is distinctive. So there are dozens of creative, godly ways to put these concepts into practice.

The simple fact is that “the median church in the U.S. has 75 regular participants in worship on Sunday mornings.”<sup>12</sup> Most have small leadership teams and budgets; none are perfect or have “made it.” The strength of any local church is not its own resources or abilities; the strength of every local church is its God. The only extra-ordinary thing about God's people is that they are his: he created us, draws us to himself, matures and grows us, indwells us, empowers us, helps us, comforts us, and sends us exactly where he wants us for the sake of his glory, kingdom, name, and mission.

In this light, Tom Stellar, dean of the Bethlehem Institute in Minnesota, writes of all Christians, “there are only two ways to respond to the truth [of] the supremacy of God in missions. We must either go out for the sake of his name or we must send and support such people who do, and do so in a manner worthy of God.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> National Congregations Study (NCS), <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>, cited at “Fast Facts about American Religion, [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html).

<sup>13</sup> Tom Stellar: “Afterword,” in *Let the Nations Be Glad*: 235. Tom Stellar in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 235.

Every church is a sent church, planted by God no matter the human reason for its inception. Every church has a spiritual lineage; each has parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent churches, all the way back to a group of slack-jawed Israelites standing on a hillside one day.

A small group of Israelites were still trying to wrap their minds around the charge their risen Savior had just given them: to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8b), when “a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (vv. 9–11). God has not yet fulfilled that promise yet, to send Jesus back to earth and usher in a new, eternal reality, “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

## Your Church’s Place in the Story

But until God does fulfill that second promise in Acts 1, his people for all history can rest in the many promises he has already fulfilled, including Acts’ first promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a). This Spirit alone would motivate and empower God’s to pursue Jesus’ final charge, starting with those few simple followers who then saw their Savior disappear in the clouds.

Through every age and over all the earth, God’s people are still his witnesses. Whether we travel across an ocean or live in one house our whole lives, we are each his Spirit-filled missionaries. For those of us paid by a church, we are ministers and missionaries: both/and, not either/or.<sup>14</sup> Our charge is to do what church leaders did in the book of Acts: make disciples, who gather and grow together, and then to send some out or be sent, to make new disciples and repeat the process.

As former Acts29 CEO Steve Timmis writes, “Every church should be a church-planting church; every church without exception. Church planting is not just for those who have a

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<sup>14</sup> If you need help navigating the balance of mission and vocational ministry, and living out both callings, see my *A Pastor’s Guide for Everyday Mission* (GCD Books, 2015).

special interest or capacity. Just as every believer is called to be a missionary, so every church is a church-planting church. That is because, as the Holy Spirit gathers people who are all missionaries, you have a missionary church. And a missionary church plants churches. The Spirit is a church-planting Spirit. Church planting is the preferred divine method of evangelism, of kingdom expansion, of fruit-bearing, of discipleship-making, of men and women being rescued from darkness to light.”<sup>15</sup>

Similar to God’s call on the church at Antioch, he will, at some point, call your church to raise up a team like “Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” I encourage you to follow that church’s lead and enter a season of “fasting and praying” (Acts 13:1-3) to ask what you can do—no matter how small or insignificant it might feel—God the Spirit might have you take today toward a vision, culture, and training to send and support. Because your specific sent church, no matter its specific size, age, or budget, has a role to play in sending from your specific place in God’s world and at this exact moment in God’s history.

## “Mission and the Final Goal”

In case you’re closing this first session feeling lost among the trees, let us zoom back out and see the whole forest. We’ll close by quoting theologians Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, who beautifully remind us of the past, present, and future motive, purpose, and power behind anything I’ve written in this book<sup>16</sup>:

The Lord of the Scriptures is a missionary God who not only reaches out and gathers the lost but also sends his servants, and particularly his beloved Son, to achieve his gracious saving purposes. As many have rightly observed, the most important mission in the Scriptures is the mission Dei. Jesus Christ is the “missionary” par excellence: the basic and foundational mission is his. He has been sent by the Father to effect forgiveness and salvation, especially through his death and resurrection (cf. Luke 4:18-19; 24:46-47), and then to announce it to Jews and Gentiles alike.

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Timmis, ed., *Multiplying Churches: Exploring God’s Mission Strategy* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 71.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 269.



In fulfillment of the Servant's role his task is to bring (or perhaps, be) God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

The mission of the exalted Jesus is accomplished through the witness of the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit. The one who is himself sent by God sends his representatives to bear testimony to his salvation, to announce the forgiveness of sins, and to make disciples of all nations. In other words, his witnesses continue the mission for Jesus by declaring to men and women everywhere the glorious gospel of the grace of God. As the Father sent him, so Jesus sends them. Moreover, this testimony to Jesus and his saving work involves a wide-ranging series of activities that result in believers being built up in Christ and formed into Christian congregations. It is not limited simply to primary evangelism and immediate results. Conversion to Christ necessarily involved incorporation into a Christian community.

Contemporary disciples who follow in the footsteps of the apostles and first witnesses are caught up in God's majestic saving plan, and because of their identity with Jesus they continue his mission. Its focus is the apostolic gospel which is proclaimed under the sovereignty of God, in full acknowledgement of the supremacy of the Lord Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. This mission of God's people within the world is to be understood with an eschatological perspective, that is, it is grounded in the saving elements of the gospel and keeps any eye on the final goal—the gathering of men and women from every nation, tribe, and people, and language before the throne of the Lamb.

That is our vision for sending. That is why we create cultures and pursue the training of missionaries and church planters. Followers of Jesus send because we are sent. The rest of these ebooks will help you take tangible steps in that direction. But churches send because we were sent. As these authors remind us, that is both who God is, and who we are: we are sent, and we send—for his glory within your church and among all nations, forever. Amen.

## REFLECTION 1b:

1. What resonates from this reading? What's one thing that was new/especially helpful?
2. What are your church's stated values, goals, and desires? Do you think an average participant in your ministry would agree that those are your values, goals, and desires?
3. What things among your values, goals, and desires—whether stated or experienced—promote your church's ability to send well, and what things detract from it?
4. What do you agree with, and disagree with, regarding the statement, “No matter who or where you are, and no matter the size or age of your church, every single church can take a step toward planting”?
5. How does it impact your view of sending to realize (or remember) that your church was at one point a sent church, that you are a sent person, and that for all history, God is a sending God?
6. What do you feel like God might be inviting you and your church into at this point? What will you do with that invitation?

# WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

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