

Summary of Key Cross-Cultural Church Planting Principles

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World Impact School for Urban Cross-Cultural Church Planting.

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1. **Jesus is Lord.**

The cardinal principle in church planting is that Jesus of Nazareth has been raised to the position of God's heir and Lord of the Church and the Harvest (Matt. 28.18-20; Heb. 1.1-4). Nothing that takes place in the Church, in mission, or in the spiritual realm has any lasting meaning or power without the sovereignty and overseership of Jesus Christ, who has been granted authority and a name which all creatures everywhere will one day acknowledge and worship (cf. Phil. 2.5-11). An understanding that Jesus is Lord, working through the Holy Spirit in this age to accomplish all that he has determined is the foundation and rock upon which all who minister must reckon and receive (i.e., Acts 1.8; John 14.16-17). No church plant team operates in an isolated manner, divorced from God's power, influence, leading, and resources. Because Jesus is Lord, we can now go and make disciples among all the people groups he has called us to minister to, and do so with the full assurance that he will remain with us at every phase of the plant, even until the very end of the age (Matt. 28.20).

2. **Evangelize, equip, and empower unreached people to reach people.**

God's intent is to draw out of the earth a people that will forever belong to him through the covenant promise made to Abraham and ratified through Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, we know that God has commanded his Church to go into the entire world, preaching the good news of his grace and Kingdom throughout the earth. This command is for everyone, and for those who repent and believe, becoming members of his family and Church, they are given the high privilege to represent him as well. Those whom we evangelize, follow up, and disciple in the city are also called to become his witnesses, and join us in winning their friends, families, and neighbors to the Lord Jesus. Our intent, therefore, in mission, is not merely to win others, but to see God so mature his Church among the urban poor that they become empowered to join us as colleagues in



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winning their surrounding cities and neighborhoods to Jesus Christ as well (cf. Col. 1.27-29; Eph. 4.9-16; 1 Pet. 3.15).

3. Be inclusive; whosoever will may come.

The command of Jesus is given to all, that is, his offer of forgiveness and redemption is universal in scope, bringing life and grace to all who believe (e.g., John 1.12-13; 3.16; 5.24; 10.27-29; 1 John 5.11-13, etc.). Therefore, God is now commanding all people everywhere to repent and believe in his Son (Acts 17.30-31), and bids them to come to him whatever their station in life, color, class, gender, race, or background. The grace of God that appears to all of us is a free, unmerited, and universal grace that is not bounded or limited in any way by a person's culture, clan, country, or circumstance. The universality of the Gospel is one of the most significant principles related to its dynamism and vitality. By failing to be inclusive, we can easily make our so-called "evangelistic outreach" just one more attempt to engage in a kind of spiritual social engineering where the deserving get to hear of Jesus' Good News, and the unlovely and undeserving others are ignored or spurned. Be zealous in every phase and activity of your church planting efforts, striving to get the Word of God to the people and families in the area where God has called you. Share the Good News with any and all who will listen, counting on the Holy Spirit both to illumine and to draw every true seeker to Christ (cf. Gal. 2.6-10).

4. Be culturally neutral: come just as you are.

In Jesus Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, male nor female, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, Black, White, or whatever. When we engage in church planting we acknowledge that the grace of God is universal in scope, that no one culture can claim any special status or place, that individuals are called to become disciples of Jesus in the midst of their own cultures, and that God welcomes them as they are, without regard to their cultural or racial history (Acts 10, 11). The concept of cultural neutrality simply means that the Gospel does not pick and choose among the peoples of the world as to which ones are deserving, more holy, more morally fit,

or better spiritually suited to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our intent is to share the Gospel with all of the clarity and love that Christ's call has constrained upon us, but never to be impartial or prejudiced in our offering or demonstration of the Gospel (cf. James 2.1-9). God commands us to speak the Good News of Christ's deliverance to all peoples, regardless of their cultures, who can come to him in the midst of their own culture, and among whom the Holy Spirit can plant a church which represents a branch of God's holy people in the very heart of the culture itself. No person of a particular culture needs to change their culture in order to be born from above and live as a disciple of Jesus Christ, for, in regard to the Kingdom of God, what Paul says is absolutely true; "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3.11).

5. Avoid a fortress mentality.

In planting a church in the city among the poor, there will be a new, supernatural impulse to create through your outreach and the church and its programs, a haven of help and hope for the numerous issues, problems, and challenges that the believers in these communities face. This is the very nature of the substance of true spirituality: to demonstrate the love of God practically among those who have need (cf. 1 John 4.7-8). While we ought to strive to demonstrate practically the love and justice of the Kingdom of Christ through our ministries, we must also avoid the tendency to make our programs, outreaches, and activities at our preaching points or outreach neighborhoods a kind of end-in-themselves. A "fortress mentality" is that tendency of ministry in the city where we make our particular efforts in a specific target community the "all-in-all" of ministry itself, and our proverbial efforts become a kind of "little kingdom on the corner" where all our time, attention, and efforts are linked to the programs we host and sponsor there. The heart of the Kingdom message is advancing and taking the good news to those who have not heard of Jesus yet (Rom. 15.20-21). No church plant must be seen as an end in itself, but as another outpost of the Kingdom whereby the Good News can be sent to neighboring communities which need to hear of God's love.

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6. Continue to evangelize to avoid stagnation.

As we begin to harvest the fruit of the proclamation of the Word of God and start to give much of our time and attention to the nurture and equipping of the new believers, it is important that we do not lose our momentum in evangelism. Not only are new believers often times some of the best soul winners in the Church, it is important to emphasize sharing the Good News with the lost lest we fall prey to the common tendency of the “Jesus and us only” syndrome. Attending to the needs of our emerging flocks, (even the smallest ones!) can easily eclipse our responsibility to not only do critical “inreach” within the body (e.g., providing teaching, fellowship, worship, and tender loving care to the members) but also to continue to do “outreach” to the lost and hurting around us (e.g., evangelism, ministering, and serving the broken in our community, etc.). In order to avoid the kind of numbing stagnation that can come from being self-focused, we ought to emphasize within the emerging church from the very beginning its ongoing responsibility to be light and salt to their neighbors, sharing the Good News of Jesus with their family, friends, and associates.

7. Cross racial, class, gender, and language barriers.

The soul of cross-cultural church planting is being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and Jesus’ leading to cross barriers in order to win and disciple people into the Church. In other words, church planting in the city will involve developing timely and wise strategies to identify the barriers that urbanites are facing in hearing the Good News, and making specific plans to transcend these barriers in order that the members of a specific and targeted population can hear the Gospel communicated in their own native language, and be given the opportunity to grow and mature in Christ in sync with and in the midst of their own people and culture. Of course, it will require much prayer helping believers understand the difference between those elements in their culture which are immoral (contrary to the values of the Kingdom of God), moral (consistent with the values of the Kingdom of God), and amoral (practices which do not have

any moral significance, but are simply issues of preferences and taste). As Paul suggests, we are to become all things to all people in order to win some (i.e., 1 Cor. 9.22-27), meaning that we are to teach believers how to live free in Christ, but not to use their freedom as a covering or a license for sin but to express with honor and holiness their love for Jesus in the midst of their own people and cultural group (1 Pet. 2.16; Gal. 5.1,11). We cross the barriers to make the Gospel plain so people can respond to Christ intelligently and cogently; the Gospel is for the Jew and the Greek (Rom. 1.16-17).

8. Respect the dominance of the receiving culture.

In all phases of our activities and outreaches, we are to respect the dominance of the culture in which God has placed us, for the purpose of making disciples. In other words, we ought to avoid having the members of another people group conform to our norms of culture as they define and express their own sense of life in Christ. We ought to expect that the culture will express and respond to God and his leading in unique and different ways, very much unlike our own, or even from the ways of “traditional” Christian practice. This orientation is simply an acknowledgment of the freedom that the receiving culture has in following Christ as the Holy Spirit leads them, and not necessarily in the same way and manner in which you personally or your team is either familiar or comfortable with. Recall the shock and horror of Peter and his team to the falling of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and the rest of his Gentile clan (Acts 10-11)! The apostles refused to place upon the Gentiles any extra burden regarding their discipleship except “to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.” (Acts 15.20, ESV). In all our evangelism, disciple making, and church planting, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit will work in and through the receiving culture in ways different and even beyond our own.

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9. Avoid dependence.

In a real sense, fledgling urban churches, once they begin, are like children. They need the kind of constant, creative, and concerned care that any infant needs, and, in the same way, need this input around the clock. It is only natural for us to want to provide for the needs of the burgeoning church, and help it to avoid all the mistakes, problems, and challenges they will necessarily face. Sometimes, in an effort to stand with and support the growing church, church planters make the mistake of being paternalistic and patronizing to them, that is, the error of interfering with the new church's need to trust and depend on God for its resources and direction. God's intent for the church is not that we do the work for them, but that we equip the members to do the work of the ministry in order that the church might grow to become mature to the measure of Jesus' very own stature, growing both in numbers (as God leads) and in maturity (through the Holy Spirit) (Eph. 4.15-16). As spiritual parents, we are called by God to save up and make provision for our spiritual children (c.f. 2 Cor. 12.14). Nevertheless, we must be careful neither to interfere with their freedom nor cause unnecessary dependence on us or our resources as they mature in Christ. In other words, while we seek to strengthen them in all things, we must strive to avoid dependence, encouraging them to grow up in Christ, seeking the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance as they grow. This demands discernment; too much supply and we can take the place of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, by taking this principle to the extreme on the other end we may become stingy and mean spirited to the little community, all the while saying it is for their sakes that we provide them with so little support or aid. We must understand that a church plant process for a community is a series of stages helping the new community move from its natural early dependence upon us, toward independence as a strong church, to interdependence as a partner with us in Kingdom mission. Helping a new community matriculate through this threefold process is the heart of the urban church planter's enterprise.

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10. Think reproducibility.

As mentioned above, the Great Commission is a global mandate, involving the challenge of making disciples among all the unreached peoples of the world (Matt. 28.18-20). While simply adding a new Christian community here and there throughout our urban centers is a wonderful task, we are called to multiplication, to seeing the Good News spread throughout the entire earth, starting from our own “Jeruselems,” and continuing on to our neighboring “Samarias” and to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). Our intent must be to see the churches that we plant become reproducing churches, and we must work and pray that this vision and burden be inculcated within the very DNA of the plant. In order to accomplish this goal, we must “think reproducibility,” that is, we must ponder how we can practically equip those Christians in the receiving culture to share the Good News of Christ with others as soon as they possibly can. We must seek creative and innovative ways to help these believers to be freed up to embrace the Great Commission as their own, and challenge them to become vessels of Gospel advance as quickly as possible. We ought to avoid burdening them with processes and suggestions that will tie them to huge, unmanageable structures, and resist all temptations to link them to practices and activities which cannot be transferred or translated easily. In all our training and equipping we ought to emphasize simple, biblical, and reproducible models of evangelism and discipleship, and suggest workable structures and processes that will allow them to join us in ministering to the city as quickly as possible. In all our teaching and prayer, our motto and mantra must be to enable them to become our ministry partners as soon as possible, so the very momentum of the Kingdom advance can be felt from the first day of our evangelism and outreach. Let us put nothing in the path of the growing Christians and new churches which will prevent the Holy Spirit from allowing our church plants to become the start of unique movements of reproducing, vital congregations, all of which are committed to using their talents, time, and treasure to advance the Kingdom’s cause throughout their neighborhoods, their city, and from them in their neighborhoods, even to “the ends of the earth.”

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