

Introduction (to *The Kingdom Quest* by Tom Johnston & Mike Perkinson)

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV).

It might startle some in the church multiplication world to know that Jesus never gave us a command to plant churches. For that matter, we are not convinced that Jesus came to start a new religion either. It would seem He came to establish two great relationships: loving God with everything we have, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Based on the two great relationships (Great Commandments as they have been called), we find the Great Commission: Jesus sent us to make disciples, instructing us to teach them, our disciples, what was commanded ("A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." John 13:34 ESV) and to show them how to observe, or to do what was commanded. This was the life and mission of those original followers of Christ - to go everywhere and do everything they could to make disciples of every kind of people on the face of the Earth. Not once did he mention "planting churches." In fact, the only time he talks about the church is when he defines it as "people" and says that He will build it (Matthew 16:18).

One might argue here that church planting is the greatest way to make disciples. We do not argue that it does help or could help in making disciples. In our experience it inevitably leads more to making church attendees than disciples of Christ. We suggest that making disciples is a great way of planting a church, developing leaders, and fostering a movement that might impact our cities, and dare we say, our world.

Jesus seems more concerned with the organic reality of the Church, its DNA or genetic code, than with the structural or procedural concerns that overwhelm us in the 21st century. We are not saying the structural or procedural issues are not important. They are, but that was not the primary focus of our Master and should not be ours either. In other words, Jesus was more focused on the building and development of people into disciples than the establishment of an institution. In the New Testament there is a noted lack of instruction on how to employ cool outreach methods (although miracles are a great marketing tool for attracting crowds) and absolutely nothing about launching a public worship service. The book of Acts does make it quite evident that the Church started at a point in time, and it could be construed as something like a launch. It might be better said that what is recorded in scripture is the birth of the Church, not its launch. Organizations and businesses are launched. Organic, living entities like the Church are birthed – you give birth to babies. That the infant Church was born at Pentecost is rather remarkable and the Pauline churches that were birthed had a point in time they started. We do not argue against a “launch” per se, but assert the New Testament does not place its emphasis on the planting of

churches. Rather it stresses the corporate reality of a “lived” faith where people seek to make disciples as a part of their lives taking the command to make disciples personally as well as a command from Jesus for the Church corporately. More accurately, the instruction to the Church corporate was a missional injunction founded on a way of life. With that said, we see there is strong instruction in the pages of the New Testament and in the life of the Messiah for following Him, so that the disciples could learn what He knew, do what He did, and eventually become like Him. He did not teach the methodologies, techniques and skills for the young and eager apprentices that often comprise the foundation of our training in the 21st century Church. Rather, He embodied and lived out the way, through how He conducted His life and ministry. He *showed* them the way, *showed* them the truth, and *showed* them the life. As we look at Jesus’ life and ministry, it appears He wasn’t as concerned about the things that so often concern us when it comes to church planting: money, marketing, hip services, cool people, etc. Such concerns just didn’t seem to register on Jesus’ radar as significant.

What Jesus really cared about was *people* not a system that could simply multiply His influence, or a slick slogan or edgy philosophy that could produce a quick surge in public awareness. For Jesus, ministry was not a profession but rather a calling that flowed from a relationship with the Father. It was a way of life which involved connecting people with their heavenly Father, not just getting them into the Temple. In many cases, the Temple was the last place people could connect with the Father. In Jesus’ day it was a place where if they did find

the Father they would quickly lose the joy of their relationship with Him, as the religious leaders weighed them down with their own interpretations and required activities in what it meant to be a true follower of God. The goal of Jesus for each person was rather simple, and it was to have people follow Him as "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), to be His disciple, and in doing so would come to know God the Father. Thereby, they would become a community of disciples engaged in transforming their culture and world. Jesus was not looking for attendees, or believers. He was, and is, looking for *disciples* – those who want to know what He knows, do what He does, and be like Him. That is precisely how He sent His original band of brothers from Mt. Olivet with a commission, a Great Commission: ***make more disciples.***

It should be noted that Jesus' ministry did attract people by the thousands, but we must be clear to state here that He was not focused on attracting people as much as He was on incarnating the truth (John 1:14; Romans 15:18) and showing the world the Father.

Here we are twenty centuries later, seeking to be obedient to Christ, seeking to make more disciples in a world that is increasingly more spiritually hungry, aware and open. *To that end disciple-making must be the focus of all our church planting efforts.* Not just as an *outcome* of church planting, but rather as the *means* of church planting.

A great deal of church planting methodology used in the Western world is a combination of accessing consumer-felt needs and marketing spiritual products for people to vend. This is then a huge roadblock to the disciple-making focus, as

the goal is attendance, not discipleship. It is hoped that discipleship is the final byproduct, but this is rarely the case. The Conversion growth rate of the church in America continues to hover around 5%, with 95% of the growth coming from transfer.

It has been said that the church, in a large part, has been reduced to being a vendor of spiritual goods and services. Whichever church has the best product and environment is the one who wins the loyal support of its constituency. The pressure on the church is then to satisfy its customer base and continue to be a vendor of spiritual goods and services, setting us up to be in competition with each other for the local Christian market share of our city. But is this really what the church is supposed to do? Nothing is wrong with trying to meet people where they are or ministering to felt needs. We are not challenging those activities, but we question the whole concept of **doing** church. In contrast, the New Testament seems to lay a foundation that tells us the Church is a community of believers who live out the message of the Cross. What we don't find in the New Testament is the early Christians trying to **do** church. Rather, what we do find is a community of disciples who are the church. It seems that we spend so much of our time and energy trying to **do** church that we forget to actually **be** the church. Perhaps that is largely why the church seems so impotent in its ability to reach our world, and why so many church plants either don't live or grow. Simply winning over another church's members as a customer base simply changes the brand names, rather than better meeting their spiritual needs. We market our message well to those who are already in the faith, but not to those who are out-

side the fold. How does this help us in making disciples?

Scripture makes it plain that Jesus came “to seek and save what was lost” (Luke 19:10 NIV). That is precisely what drives the heart of the Church. We are called to be a community of believers who not only embrace each other well, but also reach out to the world in a understandable language and style. In this we might live out for them the greatest message on the planet. It’s not as important how we do church as it is that we are the church. This generation is crying out for something real and tangible that can explain the greater mysteries of our existence. We believe people know there is something more, they just don’t know where to find it and all too often find themselves leaving church services hungry for something more.

In simple language, unless we provide a relational environment through which people can encounter God, as we are encountering Him, then we have done nothing more than creative marketing that has forgotten to provide a quality product. The Church is then analogous to a family that provides a wonderful meal for their neighborhood. They invite everyone to come for dinner. As people walk in they smell the delightful aroma of a home cooked meal, enjoy the ambiance provided by the followers, the music and the warm greeting by the members of the family. The embrace is so loving and the feeling of belonging and acceptance is near perfect. The anticipation grows for the meal, light snacks are provided to help curb the appetite and build towards the main course. To the surprise of the guests no meal is served. Rather it is described in great detail with Po-

PowerPoint presentations and even a movie clip that enriches the picture of the meal for the hearers. The guests leave the house with a great idea of what the meal is but still find themselves hungry. Although the service and hospitality at the house were great, near perfect, it did not meet the great need of hunger within; and so, the guests go elsewhere in search of food to satisfy their hunger. In our modern day churches we often have the relational dynamics down, the ambiance, mood altering worship, technology, the relevant sermons, etc., but we forget to provide the actual meal -- the stuff that actually makes us the Church. The atmosphere where a real life God-encounter can take place and people can feast on the Lord to satisfy the deeper spiritual hunger of their souls. People don't go to a sports bar to watch soap operas. Since we are the Church, maybe we should not hold back on what we do. So that people will encounter God as He is. It's one thing for people to come to our churches and leave hungry because we do not provide a meal. It is entirely another for people to come to our churches and experience the meal and find themselves with a choice to eat or not. At least if they leave hungry, they do so because they chose to reject the Lord." (Johnston & Perkinson, *New Testament Trilogy: Our God, Ourselves, Our Community*, p. 69, edited)

Jesus told His disciples as He tells us today: ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** (Acts 1:8) The assignment is simple and the power to accomplish it has been given.

This is not a power that we can utilize for our simple enjoyment. God help us not reduce the power of the Holy Spirit to some personal experience of goose bumps that makes us tingle all over or some moment of ecstasy in the Spirit. As wonderful as this might be, it is only a small part of what the power of the Holy Spirit is about. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the Church so that we might fulfill the assignment given. God saved us because He loves us and He empowers us because He wants to touch the world through us. The abundant life can only be had when we give away the life that Jesus so freely gave us. Let's move forward, with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and be the witnesses Jesus instructed us to be. The world needs to see Jesus in us. We are the Bible they are reading. ***“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us”*** (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Unfortunately, our entrepreneurial, business model-driven approach to church planting feeds on the consumerism in the society, and fuels a weakening of the Church in the West, as we get people "churched" (since they were "unchurched") as opposed to calling them to committed discipleship in Christ where they live the "way" of Christ. This book seeks to challenge and change that approach.

In this book, you will not find the latest tips, techniques and tricks to make your church really cool and attract some marginal Christian religionists or the disgruntled from the church down the street (95% of church growth in America is still transfer growth, with only 5% coming from conversion). What this book will focus on is people - the people involved in making disciples and those they seek

to reach for Christ.

Don't misunderstand. The authors are all about starting new Christian church communities. We want to see those become disciple-making communities, multiplying disciples and themselves, seeing more and better disciples emerging all over the place. Our desire is to see disciple making communities that have an impact on their neighborhoods, towns, cities, regions, and world.

So, what does reading this book do for you? We hope to give you some core biblical principles from the New Testament to organize your thinking about church and church planting, and give you some simple, practical steps from the ministry of Jesus as you seek to implement this new ministry endeavor. We want to see you become effective in making disciples of Jesus, and in doing so, give birth to a church that flows from your life and relationship with God.

If you detect a slight edge in our voice, it is because the status quo in our modern day church and in our church planting processes (not all mind you) is not only costing us the battle, but is also costing us the spiritual war in the West. George Barna's work, *The Revolution*, makes it quite clear that thousands if not millions are disgruntled with church, some for the wrong reasons, but many for the right reasons. In a Barna Update entitled "A Faith Revolution Is Redefining "Church," (October 10, 2005) written by the Barna Research Group we find some revealing prognostications.

One of the most eye-opening portions of the research contained in the book describes what the faith community may look like twenty years from now. Using survey data and other cultural indicators he has been measur-

ing for more than two decades, Barna estimates that the local church is presently the primary form of faith experience and expression for about two-thirds of the nation's adults. He projects that by 2025 the local church will lose roughly half of its current "market share" and that alternative forms of faith experience and expression will pick up the slack. Importantly, Barna's studies do not suggest that most people will drop out of a local church to simply ignore spirituality or be freed up from the demands of church life. Although there will be millions of people who abandon the entire faith community for the usual reasons – hurtful experiences in churches, lack of interest in spiritual matters, prioritizing other dimensions of their life – a growing percentage of church dropouts will be those who leave a local church in order to intentionally increase their focus on faith and to relate to God through different means.

That growth is fueling alternative forms of organized spirituality, as well as individualized faith experience and expression. Examples of these new approaches include involvement in a house church, participation in marketplace ministries, and use of the Internet to satisfy various faith-related needs or interests, and the development of unique and intense connections with other people who are deeply committed to their pursuit of God.

We cannot continue to *do* church, and by association, church planting that reproduces that sterile form of a consumer-driven church as we have done in the

past. We, along with countless others are passionate about the West experiencing what the global Christian community enjoys - revival and unprecedented growth and influence. Christianity continues to grow and prosper in all parts of the world EXCEPT North America and Western Europe. It's not too late. We must return to the business of making true, biblical disciples of Jesus Christ, and the best way to do that is starting new disciple making communities called "churches."

As you read on remember this: this adventure you are about to embark on is epic in proportion. It is no less than a quest to see the Kingdom of God extended into the lives of men, women and children. As you read, remember it is not about you. It is about Jesus and those He is calling to Himself. Keep your focus on Him, so that you can truly have eyes for the harvest.

May the Lord provoke you to love and good deeds as you read this book!

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