

PRAAYER-BASED ORGANIC CHURCH PLANTING

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Prayerwalking to Birth an APARTMENT CHURCH

Around eighteen months ago, the Lord showed us prophetically that we were to start a church in one of the low-income housing projects, Springfield, about twenty minutes from our home. So we gathered together a team to pray for the area, and for several months, it was a prayer project. From time to time we would actually go and walk the area claiming it for the Kingdom, but most of our praying was done on an individual basis.

One day, Tony and I happened to be driving by, and on impulse, decided to stop and prayer walk again. Tony was specifically asking the Lord that we would meet our 'person of peace.' A torrential downpour surprised us and we ran to take shelter under a balcony with two Hispanic ladies who turned out to be sisters. Conversation started, and they inquired what we were doing there. (We obviously did not fit the local profile!) We explained to them that we were praying for their neighborhood, and as the conversation went on, asked if we could come by occasionally to pray about the needs in their family. They immediately agreed, and so for the next few weeks, once or twice a week we would drop in and pray for them, staying just fifteen minutes or so. It was not long before we were seeing very specific answers to prayer.

One of the sisters, Lily, turned out to be our person of peace. (She has a heart as big as Texas - everyone is welcomed and loved by her.) Our next step was to ask if she would bring some of her friends and family members together, and so a **weekly meeting time was set up at her home. She very quickly became a Christian, and this led to many of her family members also doing the same.** We have touched several other homes in the complex, too. Now a year later, her apartment is crowded out every week with 30 to 40 people jammed in, sitting on the stairs, on the floor, kids everywhere. Neighbors are telling us that the project has begun to change; there is less violence and some of the drug dealers are moving out. We have started a church in the home of another family member in a different housing project as well. (Excerpt from *Getting Started*, by Felicity Dale, House 2 House Ministries, page 100 and 102. Used by permission.)

Neal Hughes teaches laypersons to begin planting churches by Prayerwalking. Volunteers have started 52 such congregation in 5 years. Hughes suggests these simple guidelines:

1. Prayerwalk in the area seven times, or seven weeks.
2. Pray silently or aloud...but don't make a scene.
3. Talk to people...if they are interested ask, "Is there something I can pray about for you?"
4. Take them praying along with you.
5. About week 5, begin to ask, "What do you think about starting a church here?"
6. Keep prayerwalking until God leads you to a person of peace in that location.

Discovering and Developing a Person of Peace

Person of Peace (sometimes called “a person of good will”)...this individual is someone who is receptive, of reputation, and is a person of referral. By being receptive, he/she is eager to have a relationship with you. Regarding reputation, it could be either good or bad, but people know this person. He/she is also a person of referral in the sense that there is an influence over others, either good or bad. Every community will have people of peace. (Lydia - Acts 16:11-15; Philippian Jailer – Acts 16:29-34)

1. Finding a Person of Peace – Luke 10:2-11

A Person of Peace will:

- Welcome You
- Speak Kindly to You
- Be a Person of Hospitality (i.e. invite you into their surroundings/home)
- Have a heart of Compassion
- Share a Similar Vision
- Sense the Need for Change
- Note: you will find in this person an instant friend, who will open the door to others. Make this your base of operation, and your first indigenous leader.

2. Developing the Person of Peace

A. Become a Friend – You need to be seen as deeply concerned for the person of peace and his/her community. They need to trust you and you need to trust them. The only way for this to happen is through building a relationship of friendship and mentoring. Here are some ideas...

- **Accept Hospitality** – *A person of peace enjoys being a host. Be gracious and kind by accepting all invitations, and eat what is before you (Luke 10).*
- **Fellowship on a Regular Basis** – *Trust is your objective. They will only know your vision when they experience your heart. Model Christ before them.*

B. Form a Prayer Triad – *The person of peace, your prayerwalking partner and you should agree to pray for the lost in the community. Try to discover 9 people to pray for by name. Covenant to pray daily for these individuals and at least weekly as a team. Later on agree to visit them together and invite them to a time of fellowship around the Bible. This could become your first cell group in that community.*

C. Meet Regularly to Mentor – *Pour your heart and vision into this person of peace. Help them to see the community through the eyes of Christ. Tell them everything you know about church planting through small groups.*

D. Be the Coach – *You are not the doer, but the equipper. Let the person of peace be the person in charge. You coach and model for him and remain in the background. Remember, you are the missionary and this is their community! Your goal is to make it indigenous, not to be the person in charge.*

E. Have an Exit Strategy – *Be up front with any persons of peace. Let them know that there will be a day when you will be moving on (like Paul), and they will be leading others. Have a definite date in mind. The person of peace must get off the “training wheels” of your hands-on leadership, or church planting will not take place. Most indigenous church planting strategists suggest that the missionary needs to be off the scene and with another person of peace in less than six months.*

Excerpts from (*The Community of Hope*. 334.832.4673 (HOPE)
www.community-of-hope.org) Used by permission.

Note: In some circumstances you might find that God is leading you to remain with the new church plant, or even to become its permanent leader. For example, a community with rapid population movement may need the on-going stability of a settled Christian leader from outside the group. Generally, this strategy slows or stops multiplication in church planting, so use it only if God clearly guides you to do so.

Read the following over-simplified possibility story, “PIZZA CHURCH,” and underline the five functions of a church as you see them lived-out in it.

1. Bible-based worship
2. Discipleship
3. Evangelism
4. Giving/Meeting Needs/Missions
5. True Friendship

PIZZA CHURCH

John prays silently (eyes open) as he walks toward the apartment where he is meeting about 20 friends. Some are not-yet Christians or not practicing Christians...others are sold-out to Christ! But each one is interested, to a point, in authentic spiritual truth. So, walking and praying, John asks the Lord to work in the heart of each one who comes to this late Tuesday night gathering: the sophomore college student, a “baby Christian who never grew,” his party-prone roommate, a couple of young nurses, most of his soccer league friends, and the young couple who live next door. How simply this group came together once he began to consistently pray for God to arrange encounters with persons He was making “spiritually” hungry for Christ and/or a church that fit their needs and schedules.

The pizza, and the intern who always orders it, arrive just before John. Within minutes the group begins comparing their weekly ups and downs while they eat. They casually call their meeting “Pizza Church” and pretty much sit all over the apartment...filling up chairs, the floor, and even the edge of the counter top! As all the guys grab a last slice, John steers the conversation toward a CD he brought...“Anybody have this? Listen to the third song, and let’s discuss what it’s saying about God’s purpose for life.”

After a couple of wisecracks by the guys, one of the girls opens up about some of her disappointments in life and how she connected with this in the song...but she still hasn’t made her mind up about God...“I believe there is a God, but I’m not sure what I believe about Him.” Others share about doubts and questions they have to get past before settling their faith in Christ and all agree...faith is a personal journey that you can’t rush or fake. They listen to the song again, and the intern leads a prayer at the end asking God to help each of them have wisdom and guidance in discovering their highest purpose in life.

John hands out copies of John 8, the passage to study tonight. At times he offers an insight, but mostly he presses the group to read a paragraph and then discuss what it is saying about (1) yourself, (2) others, (3) living, or (4) God. As they talk, the “woman caught in adultery” sparks several comments about true forgiveness, but Jesus as “the light of the world” leaves everyone thinking. John ends by encouraging everyone to read their favorite verse in the chapter each day during the coming week, to see if it helps them live differently.

Helping others is easy for this little group. Every gathering John concludes by having those present decide how they want to give their “offering” to make a difference in the world. They have given it to a homeless person, a neighbor with a family crisis who needed to fly home, a missionary, and an inner-city church children’s ministry. For a broader missions impact they recently decided to give 10% each week to a world-wide missions organization. They don’t even use a bank account. Everyone just gives cash and different ones take the money to the chosen recipient. Everyone likes to get in on the giving! The group ends with sentence prayers for each other, from one side of the room to the other. It is heart-felt, simple prayer support, and everyone gets included.

During the next seven days, John and the intern spend time praying for each person and planning the next gathering. They also hang out personally with individuals who came, or connect with them by phone or email. It is in these private times that they really get to know each person, listen to problems, or share their own faith journey.

New people are always showing up at Pizza Church, and they always come with someone who wants them to experience what they found...friends who stand by you and a faith that makes you face life differently. Evangelism is never calendared...it is just a natural by-product of these God-centered relationships.

By the end of the summer a lot had happened in their lives:

- One of the girls trusted her life to Christ and the “Pizza Church” baptized her at the apartment pool. She shared her faith journey just before the baptism, and two friends were there to hear it.
- The party guy recommitted his life to Christ and decided to begin a similar church in his apartment. He is spending 3 months as an intern with John, in order to prepare himself.
- Pizza Church got so big they sent 6 of their regulars to plant another church in a home a few miles away.

This simple small gathering IS a church! They are doing all the things a church is supposed to do: worship, discipleship, meeting needs, evangelism, and true friendship.

Some churches will be a little more complex/organized than this, but it is a good example of how everything can be meshed together.

Dialogue Bible Study or Sermon Time

Bible Passage: _____

This needs to be chosen ahead of time by the leader...usually 5 to 20 verses or no more than one chapter. A passage that is practical is more easily used for this type study than one that has a confusing context. Philipians, James, and Ephesians are good books to use at first.

Dialogue:

Introduce the passage to the gathering, and ask a volunteer to read one verse or paragraph. Lead the group to discuss it by answering the questions listed below. Move to the next verse or paragraph and repeat the process. (Vary this procedure and the questions to fit your church)

1. What does this verse say to me:
 - about myself?
 - about others?
 - about God?
 - about living?
2. How does it guide, correct, or encourage me?
3. What will I try to do this week because of its teaching?

The Dialogue Leader needs to pray and think through the passage in order to spur the group dialogue with truths or examples to consider as they progress through the verses. He does not need to have all the answers! Guide the dialogue by (1) drawing out the thoughts of each person, (2) valuing their insights, (3) gently correcting wrong interpretations, and (4) refocusing the discussion when a person or unrelated topics begin to sidetrack healthy sharing. (5) Wrap things up with a challenge or encouragement, and (6) offer to talk more with anyone who is still seeking to understand the truths discussed.

Prayer Life of a Church Planter

Build your prayer life on three tracks:

1. **Your Daily Time with God.** Don't think for a second this is just for grandmothers and boring christians. You can try to work for God without praying, and you can try to live for God without praying, but you can't walk with God unless you are TALKING WITH HIM!

Include at least these items in your daily time with God:

LISTENING...spend at least half of your time with God just listening to Him speak to you through His Word. Read a passage slowly. Look for His insights for the day. Underline any verse or phrase that "speaks" to you and put the date or a note by it. Pray the underlined words back to God.

P...PRAISE His strength, love, wisdom, power to change lives, etc.

T...THANK Him for things He has done, is doing, will do, for your present circumstances, His plans for your life, etc.

L...LORD...put Him in charge of everything, every person, every issue in your Life, include your needs, frustrations, and wants.

C...CONFESS any wrongs and trust Him for forgiveness...accept it.

A...ASK for His touch in people's hearts, for your daily needs, for His fruit in your life.

T...TRUST Him in each matter, and tell Him so!

2. **Pray for His Wisdom (guidance)** in your efforts to connect with the right persons and get them connected in a relevant church. James 1:5-6 encourages us to ask God for wisdom...without doubting. Do just that, and believe that He will give insight and direction as you need it (according to His plan and timing). Never "run ahead" of Him with your own ideas...wait on Him to lead you and provide the right people to join you.
3. **Pray for the Spiritual Needs of Persons** that God has given you a desire to reach and disciple for Him. Ask God to clearly show Himself and His life-plan to them in a way that gets their attention and to use you in an appropriate way in that journey. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 provides a few pointers that apply to praying for a person's spiritual needs.
 - the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful (our best weapon is God's power to work in people's lives)
 - for the destruction of fortresses (He can remove mental and lifestyle barriers to faith)

- destroying speculations (He can clear up wrong ideas a person might have about God and life)
- and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God (pride, ego, intellectualism...can all be overcome by His working in a life)
- taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (God has a way of captivating even a person's thought-life, i.e., "I couldn't think of anything else but eternity," or "I couldn't get God's love for me off my mind.")

Though God forces no one to follow Him, His influence is far stronger than our own outreach event ideas! There is no substitute for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit teamed with a praying Christian who has built a transparent relationship through which some not-yet-Christian friend can see and learn the difference Christ makes in a life! Pray, then care and share!

Never use these three tracks as an ironclad formula or long list to pray through legalistically. Just begin to talk with God along these lines then notice how differently you begin to follow God and depend on His influence to transform lives.

Extra Resources

- Acts 16 Bible Study on Prayer Based Church Planting ...for future church planters
- Obedience-Based Discipleship...for growth and accountability during the week.
- Interns...investing your life in future leaders
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Acts 16 Bible Study

on

PRAYER-BASED CHURCH PLANTING

Note the influence of four distinct factors in this church planting passage:

1. **The Holy Spirit** guiding leaders to unlikely groups and preparing the hearts in those groups
2. **Prayer** as a guide to connecting with not-yet-believers
3. **Relationship** ties quickly drawing family and friend-groups into new relevant church bodies
4. **The absence** of money and facilities

v. 1-3

- What simple Christian leadership traits did Paul see in Timothy?

v. 6-7

- What is the role of the Holy Spirit here?

v. 9-10

- Can God still guide us to the right people...even without events, activities, or advertising?
- Paul's response was immediate...what did he expect to find in Macedonia?

v. 11-13

- What do you imagine Paul was doing those first few days in the city?
- How many women were at the riverside? How much were women valued? Is this what Paul expected, based on the vision?
- How did Paul respond to the group he found?
- Did Paul find them by man's wisdom, or God's guidance, or both? Explain.

v. 14-15

- How long had God been working in Lydia's heart? Why does it seem like a God-directed encounter that brought Paul and Lydia together?
- Was Lydia's household (family/servants/friends) with her at the river, or did she take Paul to them in her home?
- Who baptized them? Where?
- This group became a church in v. 15...agree or disagree?

v. 22-25

- How successful did Paul and Silas feel at this point?
- How did they respond?

v. 26-34

- What factors were at work in the jailer's life to make him open to the gospel?
 - Would Paul have ever targeted the women's group or the jailer with his own wisdom?
 - How did Paul manage to speak to the jailer's household (family/servants/friends)... Were they at the jail, or did he take Paul home?
 - This became a church in v. 33...agree or disagree?
-
- Why was the jailer not at the riverbank with Lydia?
 - Would her house and his join together now, or remain separate little house churches?

Summary:

- The Holy Spirit led Paul to two groups he would never have picked out with his own wisdom: a woman and her household, and a jailer and his household.
- Prayer became the bridge between Paul's gospel and Lydia's spiritual hunger.
 - If God has been preparing a person to hear about Christ, they are already spiritually hungry and often open to prayer.
 - If you connect with someone who is open to prayer, that can usually become a bridge to all God wants to do in his or her life.
- Both Lydia and the jailer had an impact on their families and friends, their circle of influence. The new church plants crystallized around these relationships, not around events/activities/ programs. What God is doing in one life profoundly touches others who are close to that person.
- **All of this happened at a riverbank, a prison, and two homes that were adequate, relevant, and cost free.**

Obedience-Based Discipleship **...for everyday personal growth in an organic church**

Teams of 2 or 3 meeting weekly (in person/by phone/or email) to share their journey. Divide whenever a fourth friend is invited. Share 7 things:

1. What has the “world” been dumping on you this week?
2. What has God been doing/teaching/providing in your life this week?
3. Have you read the complete scripture passage for the week? What was the best thing God communicated to you through it? (pick a practical chapter from Philippians or James to read privately each week)
4. Who do you want to serve or share Christ with this next week?
_____, _____, _____
5. How Christlike have you been in the following areas: (Please be authentic as you respond to each item, but avoid sharing inappropriate details, being judgmental, or rationalizing wrong behavior. Speak the truth in love. Encourage one another.)
 - have your words, actions, and treatment of others honored Christ?
 - have you trusted God in a matter rather than worrying?
 - have you had struggles in any specific area this week?
6. Are you practicing being thankful in all things? I Thess. 5:16-18, Romans 8:28
7. Take time to pray for one another about the shared needs and names.

Copies available free from the BGCT...lindsay.cofield@bgct.org

(Concepts adapted from “Life Transformation Groups” by Neil Cole. Used by permission.)

Interns

You definitely need to be developing one or two people as future church planters. Ask God to lead you to the right person. Don't treat them like errand-boys, but like future faith giants! Pour your life into them. Give them responsibilities every week that fit their growing level of maturity. Entrust them with servanthood chores, and leadership roles. They will propel the church to multiply. Remember, your greatest impact is not building a church of a thousand people, but building 1000 churches of 20 people each!

Use 2 Timothy 2:2 as you go through these steps with your intern: MAPS.

- Model a task you want them to do (encourage them to observe you and be thinking how they would do the same thing)
- Allow them to try it. Give them time to get prepared rather than “surprising” them with an assignment.
- Pray for them as they carry out the ministry assignment. Avoid being critical, or finding fault, or assuming they need to do it exactly your way.
- Sharpen their ministry style with gracious feedback in an appropriate manner. Ask them what was most difficult...how they would adjust and grow. Make suggestions for them to consider. Speak the truth in love only if they have made a major error.

FREE them to do the same ministry task again in their own God-gifted way. Mentor your intern through regular prayer and share times, continually nurturing them toward their next step with God.

Helping The Church With Baptisms And The Lord's Supper

BAPTISMS

The Meaning of Baptism

The significance of baptism is profound. Its meaning includes at least two aspects:

- It illustrates Christ's death, burial and resurrection. "Christ died for our sins...He was buried...and He rose again." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (also Colossians 2:12)
- It illustrates a believer's new life as a Christian. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Cor. 5:17 (cf. also Rom. 6:4)

Baptism doesn't make a person a believer – it shows that he or she already believes. Baptism does not "save," only one's faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring - it's an outward symbol of the commitment made in the heart.

Who Should Be Baptized

The Bible teaches that every person who has professed faith in Christ should be baptized—"*Those who believed and accepted His message were baptized...*" (Acts 8:12, 13).

How old should a person be before he or she is baptized? Just old enough to have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ! People sometimes argue that a child convert should not be baptized until he or she is older, just to make sure they understand the meaning. The answer to this objection is that if the child is old enough to make a real profession of faith, they are old enough to be baptized. If the child cannot understand what baptism means, it is unlikely they understand enough of the Gospel to be saved.

Where Baptisms Take Place

Baptisms can take place anywhere there is sufficient water. It may be commercially pre-fabricated or it may be homemade (some churches use a large metal container purchased at farm and ranch stores).

Churches may choose to have their baptisms outdoors. For example, many baptisms are still done at a lake, in a bay or a creek. Apartment churches frequently hold baptism services in the community swimming pool.

More important than the location of the water is the location of the congregation. Remember that baptism is a public profession of faith. Consequently, baptisms should

take place in a location and at a time accessible to the entire church gathering. Family and friends of the person being baptized should be given a special invitation. This is a great way to celebrate a changed life and share faith with not-yet Christian attendees.

Guiding Principles

While the church's leader is often the person who actually does the baptism, anyone acceptable to the church may do it. This can include teachers, parents, or the friend that led the person to Christ.

The person to be baptized should wear a comfortable set of pants or jeans, and a shirt or top. An extra change of clothes should be brought, along with a towel.

It is good for the person to make a short statement about his or her faith in Christ. However, if the person is shy, do not force them to say anything. Baptism should be a spiritually uplifting experience, so it is important that everyone feel comfortable with the ceremony.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus instructs us to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols as reminders of His death. These two symbols are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an object lesson that represents a great spiritual truth for believers.

Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper can be very helpful to glean an understanding of its meaning. (1 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Guiding Principles

For the individual worshipper, participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of devotion and consecration. The individual should examine and make right his motives in worship, his relationship to Christ, and his relationship to other people.

The New Testament gives no instruction as to the frequency of the observance of the Supper. Churches observe it variously—some weekly, others monthly, and others yearly.

Any group of responsible persons in the church may prepare for the Lord's Supper. They will arrange for trays and glasses in which to serve the bread and grape juice. Unleavened bread, or loaf bread, can be used.

At the appropriate time the leader should share about the meaning of the Lord's Supper and call for a time of private, personal prayer. He will then read an appropriate Scripture, help pass out the bread and juice, and lead in partaking of the broken bread and the grape juice.

World-Wide Vision

- Even the smallest Church can touch and change lives far beyond its community...
- Like all churches, it needs to have a vision for impacting lives locally, across the city, statewide, and around the world (Acts 1:8).
- Every church can do its part by giving a monthly voluntary offering.
- It is a common practice among churches to divide 10% of its total offerings between:
 1. The local **Baptist Association** of churches (3%)
 2. The **Baptist General Convention of Texas** (7%)

Through these two networks churches help support things like:

hunger relief	family crisis service	mission trips
medical clinics/poverty areas	missionaries	inner city ministry
church planting	disaster relief	prayer & evangelism

...some churches give more, others less...it's totally up to you!

To participate in this world-wide vision:

Pray about it as a church and decide how much you want to give as your part in touching the world for God. Then make your giving an act of worship!

1. Send a monthly gift to the local Baptist Association (contact the BGCT, 214.828.5389/lindsay.cofield@bgct.org for info if you are unsure about the address for your local Baptist Association...and,
2. Send a monthly gift to the statewide Baptist General Convention of Texas: BGCT Adopted Budget, 333 N. Washington, Dallas TX 75246-1798.