

## The Calling of a Church Planter

A problem of calling often arises once one realizes the close connection between church planting in an itinerant fashion and church reproduction from pastoral perspective. Often team members will struggle with whether they are called to be itinerant church planters, or stationary elders. This chapter will focus on how one can distinguish between these callings. This is very important since a church planter must constantly work to avoid becoming fixed in pastoral ministry if he is called to the itinerant ministry of church planting. Likewise he must recognize if God changes the call from being a itinerant church planter to being an elder. The Apostle Peter is an example of this dynamic 1 Peter 5: 1. As a team leader you will need to make certain that your team members are clear in their call and likewise help them at times when they are confused as to whether God is changing their call. He will have to be careful to hold his team members with an open hand knowing that their calling is from God and not from the team leader!

At the outset I want to be clear that I believe calling is dynamic and not static. That is, I believe that a person's calling can change throughout his life. I was called to the ministry of church planting, but I was first called to be a pastor. Likewise some of the best pastors I know planted the church they have now pastored for years. They were called as pastors as they served in the ministry of church planting. Now that I am a church planter, is it possible that God could call me to return to ministering as a pastor? I believe He could. He is my Lord and Master, and I serve at His bidding. He knows where I need to be and what I need to be doing in order to accomplish His purposes far better than me. My desire needs to be like Paul's in Philippians 3: 12-14.

Since there is such a close connection between pastoring and church planting, I think it likely that a person's call could change several times in the course of his life. Tradition has it that Timothy finally did settle down to pastoral ministry in Ephesus. Peter was writing as a fellow elder in his first letter.

We encourage those serving with the team to re-examine their calling as the Lord leads. Often this re-examination comes at a time of family difficulty, personal upheaval, or other circumstances which may dictate a change is appropriate. Such examination is usually a time of carefully evaluating the deep, often hidden motives of the heart (Cf I. Corinthians 3:10-4:5). At this point we on the team can pray asking for more illumination and confirmation, but we cannot take the place of God in issuing the call.

### The Difference in Call

What is the difference in the call to plant churches as opposed to pastoring a reproducing church? The difference we have found could be placed largely under the category of what is often referred to as "**burden.**" A pastor is burdened to shepherd sheep. He wants to care for them from cradle to grave. Often a person who feels a burden to plant churches finds that burden evaporate after he has planted one. Once it is planted, he desires to see it brought to all the fullness of Christ, thus his burdens changes to a pastoral one. . Obviously he needs to carefully weigh his motives since, for some, this desire arises from carnal motives. But this burden, if pure, is reflective of one who, is called as a shepherd and he should likely remain in that church.

The church planter, on the other hand, also loves sheep and desires to see them come to fullness, but his real burden and joy is equipping others to serve as shepherds to the flock. Whereas shepherds should reproduce in the natural course of shepherding the church, for the church

planter, this is his reason for being. He is always on the lookout for prospective leaders and rejoices as they progress in answering the call of God. He must constantly look to decrease, while those he trains must increase. The church planter is first and foremost a trainer of leaders. (Yes, even before being an evangelist as the term is today understood. Because of this the call to church planting is usually evidenced by "*itchy feet*". There is always a sense that there are new places to go, new people to train. He will find himself wondering what surprises and challenges the next group of people will bring. Who will be the next leaders?

We need to reinforce the idea that the calling of church planter is itinerant by nature, even though he may work in a small geographical area. He will be moving on from group to group. He is a pioneer, not a pillar. He is always in transition. And difficult as that is, he recognizes how it suits him. If he is married he obviously needs a very special wife.

### **The calling of the wife**

We are often questioned about the call of the wife. As mentioned above we do not believe that a wife and husband need to be called together as church planters. It is quite possible that she is called to be a wife and not actively participate as a church planter. My wife was not called to join me actively in church planting for several years. She would be a member in whatever church I was laboring in and usually remained behind (to train women which was her gift) as I would move on to open a new work. We were in the same geographic region so it was not that I was gone for long periods of time from home. As a new church would come together, Cathy would join me with the children once the group was conducting regular Sunday meetings. Normally she would remain in the previous church for three to six months before joining me. This gave the stability to the family which was necessary for us. Each member of our teams work out how to include their families as the Lord would lead. For instance, Jim's wife Patsy, always traveled with him even in the earliest gathering stages of a new work.

### **Worksheet:**

1. How settled are you on your call? How has your call been confirmed? Have you ever had questions about it? On what basis? What people have you sought out to help you as you wrestled with your call?

2. How is your wife called? Have you worked through any tension in the differences in call?3. Evaluate each member of your team. How settled are they on their call? How has their call been confirmed? Have you confirmed their call?

4. In the event one is questioning their call. Why? Have those who confirmed the call originally, confirmed the change in call? How should the team be involved in confirming a change in calling?

5. Are the wives clear on their call? Are the family tensions worked through?