

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a small, yellowish seed just above a mound of dark, rich soil. The background is a plain, light color, making the hand and soil the central focus.

PLANTING &
ESTABLISHING
LOCAL
CHURCHES
BY THE
BOOK

*I planted, Apollos watered,
but God gave the increase.*

1 Corinthians 3:6

DENNIS M. ROKSER

Planting & Establishing Local Churches by the Book

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos,
but ministers through whom you
believed, as the Lord gave to each one?
I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave
the increase. So then neither he who
plants is anything, nor he who waters,
but God who gives the increase.
(1 Corinthians 3:5-7)*

by Pastor-teacher Dennis M. Rokser

Dedicated to:
Peter Tranvik, Dave Knutsen,
Shawn Laughlin, and Tom Stegall—
church planters/establishers by the Book

INTRODUCTION

The objective of expounding these biblical truths is to encourage the planting and establishing of indigenous local churches that glorify Jesus Christ by preaching and responding to the Gospel of God's grace with all of its doctrinal and practical ramifications:

- justification by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone;
- eternal security by God's grace and power;
- the believer's identification with Christ;
- sanctification and spiritual growth by grace through a daily walk of faith;
- ultimate glorification in Heaven by God's grace;
- the blessed hope of Christ's imminent return; etc.

While many churches (which are too often ecclesiastical stone quarries and social country clubs) dot the religious countryside at both home and abroad, may God be pleased to raise up faithful servants who will be enabled to plant and establish local churches, His way—by the Book of Books.

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
(2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

Planting & Establishing Local Churches by the Book

As a pastor-teacher, I am devoting my life to serving the Lord via the local church; I can do no less.¹ This decision and God-given desire is not due to professional convenience (as some people think I only work on Sundays) but due to personal conviction—based on the Word of God.² I am absolutely convinced that as the saints are equipped through learning and applying God’s truth, they are to do the work of ministry resulting in the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). Furthermore, I believe we do well today to hear and heed the Apostle Paul’s instructions to Timothy:

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Corinthians 5:9-15

² 1 Timothy 3:1

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, **commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*** (2 Timothy 2:2)

Thus, it is my deep passion to see Gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching, grace-oriented local churches planted and built to the glory of Jesus Christ. Perhaps God will grant you the opportunity to be involved as an instrument in His hand to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). If so, may the scriptural principles expounded and explained in this little book help provide some guidance and encouragement to that glorious end.

WHERE DOES A CHURCH-PLANTER START?

By God’s grace, we have not only been privileged to observe the Spirit of God using the Word of God in our midst at Duluth Bible Church, but we have been honored to be involved in spreading the Gospel and planting local churches in other communities as well.³

With a desire to do this in a biblical fashion, I began reading various books on church planting. Most were very disappointing as they involved church growth techniques and worldly gimmicks laced with an occasional Scripture verse or proof text to appear credible.⁴

³ Duluth Bible Church has been privileged to not only send out a man to pastor a Bible Church in Clarissa, MN, but also to plant churches and provide pastors in Minneapolis, MN, Grand Rapids, MN, and Milwaukee/Waukesha, WI.

⁴ Their primary approaches were efforts to attract the unchurched to church by beginning the church plant with an Easter Service, or by pumping in rock music to make the unsaved feel comfortable, etc.

Personal conversations with seasoned missionaries were encouraging, but I still lacked sufficient concrete biblical principles to sink my spiritual teeth into.

I eventually proceeded to read an amazing piece of literature that I should have prayerfully consulted at the very beginning of this process—the Word of God, and in particular, Acts chapters 13–14! I finally arrived at the conclusion, “*Why not study the missionary journeys of Paul’s church-planting teams and seek to draw out some biblical principles to provide divine direction for this endeavor?*”

Dear readers, this booklet is the fruit of that exciting study.⁵

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. (Acts 13:1-5)

⁵ After I studied, taught, and sought to implement these principles from Acts 13–14, I came into contact with a book that intersects and confirms many of these convictions. It is titled, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, by David J. Hesselgrave—published by Baker Book House.

EXAMINING SOME BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ON CHURCH PLANTING

While the following principles are not intended to be an exhaustive list for planting and establishing a local church, they have served to grant us scriptural direction and parameters for planting three churches thus far. You may find these truths very simple and extremely basic—they are! More importantly, they are *biblical*, though the Holy Spirit must personally direct in the application of them in each particular situation.

PRINCIPLE 1

When church planting, remember that God uses believers who are *already* growing and ministering for Him.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted... (Acts 13:1-2a)

From the prophetic-teaching ministry of the dynamic local church at Antioch, God would select two equipped believers to serve Him as missionaries—Barnabas and Saul. But it is important to note that this involved ministry with maturation. By this time, Barnabas and Paul had been saved for at least twelve years. By the standards of some mission boards today, they would have been rejected for being “fossilized” in age (they were in their mid-40s) and formally theologically uneducated; thus they would be deemed unqualified and unwanted. Neither were graduates of a Bible college or seminary, though both had been enrolled in God’s School of Spiritual Growth. Paul personally had taken unofficial upper graduate courses

at the Arabian Desert Academy of Grace-Orientation for past legalistic, pharisaical individuals with previous criminal records.⁶ We must not forget that church planting (like all ministry) is a grace operation from beginning to end!

Please carefully observe, “*as they ministered to the Lord...*” (13:2). When God has a special job to do, He does not look to someone who is waiting for a position in order to serve Jesus Christ. Instead, God uses someone who has a passion to serve as motivated by the love and grace of God and who humbly trembles at God’s Word.

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word. (Isaiah 66:2b)

Dear reader, no airplane trip ever prepared a believer to be a missionary, and no seminary ever gifted or matured a Christian to serve the Lord (only the Lord can do this). And while the local church is designed to “equip the saints” for their work of ministry, only God in His grace can ultimately gift, mature, and use a believer in whatever field of service He individually determines. This certainly debunks the force-fed, fast-food, assembly-line attempts at spiritual preparation for ministry that dominate our modern approach to missions and ministry.⁷

⁶ Compare Philippians 3:1-6; 1 Timothy 1:12-16; and 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

⁷ C.A. Coates wisely writes, “It is a sad thing when **service** interferes with **soul-prosperity**. It is possible to be so engrossed with service that one’s meditations are colored by it, one’s prayers are full of it, and the Word of God becomes simply a quarry out of which material for sermons can be

By the way, which member of the missionary team spiritually bombed and went home to mommy? The least matured and prepared, John Mark.⁸

*Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and **John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*** (Acts 13:13)

Whether you are interested in church planting or not, I encourage you to focus on your vertical walk of faith with the Lord in light of your position in Christ, and then be willing to serve Jesus Christ in whatever opportunities are right before you. As you concentrate on the depth of your spiritual growth, God will determine the breadth of your specific ministry.⁹

PRINCIPLE 2

The Holy Spirit must direct and enable you from the very beginning in order for church planting to be successful.

dug up. This is a serious loss to the soul and many are thereby hindered from making spiritual progress.

⁸ While there is a place for younger or more immature believers to function in support roles like Timothy would later do (Acts 16:1-3), the same cannot be said of frontline teachers.

⁹ “The greater the knowledge committed to a servant, the more necessary and important it is that he should be much alone with God about it, in order that he may realize the nature and effect of it on himself before he undertakes to make it known to others.

It rebukes the haste and readiness with which many now enter the ministry, attempting to impress others with a measure of the truth which they have not proved for themselves. Surely the servant should ever be able to say: ‘I believed, and therefore have I spoken’ (2 Cor. 4:13). It is better to lose time as to work in preparation for service than to lose time in repairing one’s mistakes in undertaking a work for which one is not yet qualified.” (J.B. Stoney)

*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the **Holy Spirit** said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* (Acts 13:2)

*So, **being sent out by the Holy Spirit**, they went down to Seleucia...* (Acts 13:4a)

This biblical principle is crucial—it must not be overlooked or underemphasized. God does not bless the activities of the flesh religiously rampant. We need the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit each step of the way. Since spiritual needs are great everywhere, a real sense of the Holy Spirit’s leading to open doors and hungry hearts is essential. Also, you must be very careful where you begin a church plant, as it is very difficult and discouraging to pull out and leave once you have begun.

PRINCIPLE 3

Church planting needs to be bathed in prayer.

*Then, having **fasted and prayed** ...* (Acts 13:3a)

While in Acts 13:2 this divine guidance may have come through prophetic utterance (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 nullifies that means for us today), God still leads in answer to believing prayer (James 1:5-6), providential circumstances (2 Corinthians 1:15-18), personal peace (Colossians 3:15), and always in accordance with God’s Word. Normally, fasting in biblical times was accompanied by a diligent seeking of the Lord in prayer. This is what Nehemiah did before attempting the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

*So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting **and praying before the God of heaven.*** (Nehemiah 1:4)

When involved in church planting, do not forget to bathe everything in prayer and believe this promise:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

PRINCIPLE 4

Church planters were confirmed by and sent out through the local church.

*Then, having fasted and prayed, and **laid hands on them, they sent them away.*** (Acts 13:3)

In this verse we see “ordination” in a true biblical sense. It is not the bestowal of some spiritual gift or powers, but simply the human recognition/appointment or confirmation by the spiritual leaders of a local church regarding *what God had already determined*.¹⁰ Please notice that all of Acts 13:1-3 transpired in and through a local church. Where better to gain ministry experience to evangelize the lost, teach the saved, and to plant churches than in serving in your local church? And who better to oversee and confirm your giftedness, growth and ministry than the spiritual leaders of your local church?

¹⁰ For further study concerning the ordination/appointment of elders or missionaries, write Duluth Bible Church for a recorded Bible study regarding this.

Although the local church is central to God's plan for evangelism and church planting, parachurch organizations have seemingly usurped this role (perhaps we have given it to them). Instead of missionaries being sent out by local churches, too often a mission board has become a spiritually-independent surrogate mother that steals the resources, man-power, and finances of the local church. Amazingly, parachurch organizations give little to no account doctrinally or practically to any local church, and too often fail to even have one pastor on its executive committee or board. Does it not cause you to stop and wonder whether many parachurch organizations have too often become a parasite instead of a partner to the local church? Yet the biblical paradigm was that church planters were confirmed by and sent out through the local church.¹¹

PRINCIPLE 5

There is great value in having a church-planting *team*.

*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when **they** arrived in Salamis, **they** preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. **They also had John as their assistant.** (Acts 13:4-5)*

Barnabas, Saul (Paul), and John Mark comprised this first church planting team. In later missionary journeys, Paul would be accompanied and assisted by Silas (Acts 15:40), Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), Luke (Acts 16:10), Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius of Derbe, Tychicus, Trophimus (Acts 20:4), etc.

¹¹ While I am not opposed to all parachurch organizations as some truly serve the local church (especially those who are true to God's Word), yet many conflict and compete with God's plan and program for the local church, thus, stirring up these comments.

Having a team effort allows more hands to do the work of ministry; thus more can be done. Furthermore, each believer's spiritual gifts can complement one another; they can mutually encourage and pray for one another; and what a great opportunity this provides for the younger (like Timothy) and more spiritually immature members (like John Mark) of the team. From our church-planting experience at Duluth Bible Church, we have observed first-hand the practical value of this team approach.¹²

PRINCIPLE 6

Church planters need to preach the Gospel publicly and privately.

*And when they arrived in Salamis, **they preached the word of God** in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. (Acts 13:5)*

*Then the proconsul **believed**, when he saw what had been done, **being astonished at the teaching of the Lord**. (Acts 13:12)*

The objective of a church plant is not to steal sheep from another church or to undermine the ministry of another Bible-teaching pastor. It is first of all to reach the unsaved with the Gospel of God's grace.¹³ In this day of doctrinal confusion, it is difficult to hear a clear presentation of the saving message of the Gospel

¹² We have involved several individuals in each church-plant who have shared the teaching responsibilities, witnessing opportunities, prayer needs, ministry contacts, etc. In each case, a man from the team has emerged to oversee and pastor God's growing flock in each location.

¹³ For an important booklet regarding this, you can order from Duluth Bible Church the booklet, *Let's Preach the Gospel*.

from the pulpits of our land.¹⁴ Unfortunately, in too many cases, a garbled Gospel has also been exported to foreign turf. Therefore, instead of seeking to build an exciting program in order to attract the lost to the church meeting, believers need to *go* and proclaim the Gospel of Christ to those who are perishing (Mark 16:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

PRINCIPLE 7

You need to expect opposition to the truths of God's Word, especially religious opposition.

*Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) **withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.** Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:6-10)*

*But **when the Jews** saw the multitudes, **they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.** (Acts 13:45)*

*But the **Jews stirred up** the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against*

¹⁴ For a needed clarification on the condition of salvation, you can order from Duluth Bible Church the booklet, *7 Reasons Not To Ask Jesus Into Your Heart.*

Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.
(Acts 13:50)

This opposition to the Gospel is often times a severe reaction to people's religious beliefs and traditions being threatened and individual hearts being convicted. Wherever the Apostle Paul went, there was either a revival or a riot—so do not be surprised if this happens to you!

Sometimes this opposition will even come from other genuine believers who may like the clarity of your Bible teaching, but do not appreciate your stand on it (as they fail to see that the two are connected).¹⁵ Perhaps they have been poorly or wrongly taught, or have embraced a sappy sentimentality with an ecumenical flavor that they semantically redefine as “love.” Satan will gladly use either the unsaved or the saved to hinder or thwart the building of Christ's church.¹⁶

PRINCIPLE 8

Church planting may include a flexible but defined strategy.

If you carefully trace the three missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul, a specific strategy is discovered. His team targeted only large, metropolitan cities. Furthermore, he usually went to the synagogue where its open forum provided an excellent opportunity to reach fellow Jews. Some responded to the Gospel; others did not and were hardened in their hearts. Paul then worked with the willing.

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things

¹⁵ Romans 16:17-18; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:15-21

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 4:10, 14-15

of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:8-10)

The apostle to the Gentiles also visited markets and other places where effective personal contact with the Gospel could be enjoyed. As people responded and a local church was formed, this local assembly would act as a hub to reach out to smaller cities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What joy when one evangelized town or village establishes a local church which has a Spirit-wrought vision to reach their neighboring communities with the Gospel!

Though your strategy needs to be written in pencil (as God has a big sovereign eraser) it does serve to provide vision and perspective regarding where you sense God is leading.

PRINCIPLE 9

The church planters utilized the chronological approach in their Bible teaching with a focus on the Gospel. (Acts 13:17-37)

If you read carefully Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, you will observe that he covers a brief history of the nation of Israel in order to preach Jesus Christ. If this was helpful to fellow Jews who were familiar with the Old Testament, would it not be even more imperative to do this with unsaved Gentiles—especially those whose loincloth consists of a brand-name business suit?

New Tribes Mission (NTM) has utilized this chronological approach very effectively now for several years by developing a curriculum written by Trevor McIlwain called, “*Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ*.”¹⁷



GoodSeed International missionary John Cross has also written an excellent, easy-to-read book implementing this same teaching approach titled, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*.¹⁸ Our church has utilized and distributed several thousand of these books in the last few years and has found them to be very effective with unbelievers and believers alike. The chronological approach not only provides a historical and logical sequence to learning Biblical truth, but it fills in the mental gaps and lays a solid doctrinal foundation both for evangelism to the lost and the edification of the saved. Furthermore, it helps resolve the huge problem of syncretism (mixing pagan beliefs with biblical truths).¹⁹

¹⁷ You can contact New Tribes Missions at www.ntmbooks.com.

¹⁸ You can contact GoodSeed at www.us.goodseed.com.

¹⁹ For further clarification regarding the serious problem of syncretism I recommend: *And Beginning With Moses...* by John Cross, which can be purchased through GoodSeed International (see note 18).

PRINCIPLE 10

The church-planters preached Jesus Christ, and told their audience specifically how to and how *not* to be justified before God.

*“But He whom God raised up saw no corruption. “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, **that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;** “and by Him **everyone who believes** is justified from all things **from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.** “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: “Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.” (Acts 13:37-41)*

While this approach of utilizing sharp contrast may be unpopular and offensive in our day, it is thoroughly biblical and very effective in underscoring the one and only response to the Gospel—faith alone in Christ alone! Since this salvation message was preached to religious Jews and God-fearing Gentiles at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (13:14, 26), Paul wanted no syncretism of his Gospel with the prevailing Jewish traditions of that day. Thus, he boldly proclaims...

*And by Him everyone who **believes** is justified from all things **from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.** (Acts 13:39)*

No speaking invitations from the “Hour of Power” for this courageous apostle! Yet Paul practiced what he preached.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him

*be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. **For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*** (Galatians 1:8-10)

*For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. **But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.** For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.* (1 Thessalonians 2:3-6)

Granted, while forthright preaching will please God, some men will be offended by such a bold approach (perhaps even fellow-believers). Yet, God will honor His Word as you do God's will, God's way, to God's glory.

PRINCIPLE 11

When church planting, work with the willing and do not worry about numbers.

*So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, **the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.** Now when the congregation had broken up, **many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas,** who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:42-43)*

In the various ministries of our church we have utilized this motto: “*We are not here to have fun with the phonies or to cater to the carnal. We are here to work with the willing.*” With the firm conviction that Jesus Christ promised to build His Church (Matthew 16:18), and believing that God will use the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God), a church planter must preach the Scriptures in a clear, accurate, practical, and simple fashion—leaving the results with God. With the passing of time, the Lord will surface those individuals who are responding (and it may surprise you who they are). The willing, in turn, will be used by God to provide numerous other personal contacts and open doors for the Gospel.

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:44)

But do not be surprised when religious opposition also comes—our Lord Jesus Christ promised it would happen (John 15:18-16:4).

*But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, **we turn to the Gentiles.**” “For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Now **when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.** (Acts 13:45-49)*

Do not be discouraged when the lost initially and completely miss what you are seeking to communicate, for blind people do not see well (read Acts 14:6-18). Remember, God does the saving; we are to do the preaching, leaving the results in His hands.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.
(2 Corinthians 4:3-7)

PRINCIPLE 12

Since church planting is a divine undertaking, believers need to be filled by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task.

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:8-10)

But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against

*Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. **And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*** (Acts 13:50-52)

It is interesting to note that both of these incidents involved opposition to the truth. When better (and more needed) to be filled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians 3:16-17) than when facing persecution. Since we are totally inadequate to do God's will (including church planting) it is imperative that we walk in dependence on the Lord and the resources of His grace. Otherwise, we will attempt to do God's will in our own wisdom and strength—a sure recipe for failure. We will be busy, but barren of true fruitfulness (John 15:1-5).

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (Colossians 1:28-29)

The importance of a daily walk of grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the enablement of the Holy Spirit cannot be stressed enough. All ministry (including church planting) must not consist of believers striving in their own strength to work for God. Instead, our service needs to be the outflow of a daily dependence on Christ, living His life in and through us.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live

in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Thus, as Paul reviews his past missionary endeavors to the church at Rome, notice the crucial truths that he communicates.

Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:15-19)

If we examine this passage closely we see several key aspects to the apostle's missionary activities.

- Its *basis* was the GRACE OF GOD. (15:15)
- Its *nature* was likened to PRIESTLY SERVICE. (15:16)
- Its *focus* was JESUS CHRIST. (15:16)
- Its *target* was the GENTILES. (15:16)
- Its *message* was the GOSPEL OF GOD. (15:16)

- Its *purpose* was “*that the OFFERING UP OF THE GENTILES MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE to God.*” (15:16)
- Its *Sanctifier* was the HOLY SPIRIT. (15:16)
- Its *glory* was in JESUS CHRIST and the things that pertain to GOD, not in human achievement. (15:17)
- Its *secret of success* was to have CHRIST as the source and man as the INSTRUMENT. (15:18)

If you are to be involved in planting and establishing local churches by the Book, you must learn this secret of success as well. And to grasp this, God may allow you to fail miserably in order to personally teach you the “not I, but Christ” life of faith and service (Galatians 2:20). This was Paul’s experience in Romans 7.

Miles Stanford in his classic book “*The Green Letters*”, *Principles of Spiritual Growth*, makes it clear that,

“It is one thing to know what God’s purpose is for our lives, and it is another to know something of the ‘how’ as to entering into it all right here and now. One of God’s most effective means in the process is failure. So many believers are simply frantic over the fact of failure in their lives, and they will go to all lengths to try to hide it, ignore it, or rationalize about it. And all the time they are resisting the main instrument in the Father’s hand for conforming us to the likeness of His Son!”

Failure where self is concerned in our Christian life and service, is allowed and often engineered by God in order to turn us completely from ourselves to His Source for our life—Christ Jesus, Who never fails. Rejoice, dear friend, in your need and hunger of heart, for God says, ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled’ (Matthew 5:6). As we, in our abject need, consistently and lovingly look on our Lord Jesus revealed to us in the Word, the Holy Spirit will quietly and effortlessly change the center and source of our lives from self to Christ—hence for each of us it will be, ‘Not I, but Christ.’”²⁰

If you are discouraged in your church planting ministry, consider the following:

“We might consider some familiar names of believers whom God obviously brought to maturity and used for His glory names such as Pierson, Chapman, Tauler, Moody, Goforth, Mueller, Taylor, Watt, Trumbull, Meyer, Murray, Havergal, Guyon, Mabie, Gordon, Hyde, Mantle, McCheyne, McConkey, Deck, Paxson, Stoney, Saphir, Carmichael, and Hopkins. The average for these was fifteen years after they entered their life work before they began to know the Lord Jesus as their Life, and ceased trying to work for Him and began allowing Him to be their All in all and do His work through them. This is not to discourage us in any way, but to help us to settle down with our sights on eternity, by faith ‘apprehend[ing] that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus... press[ing] toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 3:12b, 14).”²¹

²⁰ Stanford, Miles J., *The Complete Green Letters*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977, pg. 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 8

PRINCIPLE 13

In believing the biblical promises, you need to expect God to use His Word.

*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; **It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*** (Isaiah 55:11)

*Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, **and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.*** (Acts 14:1)

Being privileged to teach the Word of God, I view myself as a table-waiter or servant (1 Corinthians 3:5). In keeping with this metaphor, I am seeking to bring the food from the kitchen to the table without spilling it. And though I am both humbled and thrilled when God uses the two-edged sword of His Word in human hearts, it should not surprise me. He promised that this is exactly what would happen. Thus, over the years I have heard after church services remarks such as...

- “It is so good to be taught the Word of God here.”
- “Pastor, did my wife call you?”
- “It was like you were in my back pocket this last week.”
- “Would you start preaching at someone else for a change?”

- “Pastor, what you taught is exactly what I needed to hear today.”

Confidence in the transforming power of God’s Word will also help deliver you from the temptation to utilize legalistic arm-bar pressure or Madison-avenue gimmicks to accomplish results.

*Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. **These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.** (Acts 17:10-12)*

An important ingredient in this church-planting process is patience, as we want to hurry God’s work along. This process requires you to wait patiently on the Lord to use His transforming truth in people’s lives. Also, it will be necessary to show patience towards people and endurance under testing.

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all **longsuffering** and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)*

*Therefore I **endure** all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. (2 Tim. 2:10-11)*

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with **endur-***

*ance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with **longsuffering**, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **longsuffering**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

PRINCIPLE 14

When utilizing a church-planting team, wisdom dictates that someone needs to head it up.

As you follow this missionary journey closely, you will observe a subtle shift from Luke mentioning “*Barnabas and Saul*” (Acts 13:2, 7) to “*Saul and Barnabas*” (Acts 13:43, 50). Also, the superstitious crowd at Lystra intended to worship Paul “*because he was the **chief speaker***” (Acts 14:12). It is like the old adages; “*Too many cooks spoil the broth*” and “*Too many chiefs and not enough Indians.*” While every member of the church planting team has been uniquely gifted and prepared by the Lord to contribute to the cause, the buck needs to stop somewhere.

This counsel becomes necessary and valuable when practical decisions will need to be made. Who makes them? What if there is a disagreement? Who decides? In addition to this, sub-

mission to spiritual leadership can be modeled in the process which will prove to be helpful later when the local church becomes established organizationally.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

Obedience to the Word of God and submission to spiritual leaders should be learned first in the local church before it is attempted on the mission field. This reminds me of the time I met a husband–wife team, graduates of a Bible institute, who were eagerly planning to soon travel to Russia as missionaries. As the conversation developed I inquired, “What are you specifically planning to do in Russia?” The husband replied, “We hope to plant a church and train church leaders.” Though the intent was admirable, I then replied, “So have you ever been integrally involved in the ministry of a local church?” To which they replied, “not really.” I then asked, “Have you ever served as a church leader?” And again they said “no.” So I gently challenged them about the obvious inconsistency of their endeavor due to a total lack of needed experience. Nevertheless, they pursued their dream only to return from the field within 3 years never to return.

With a sense of great responsibility of shepherding God’s flock, no wonder the writer of the book of Hebrews quickly attaches to this instruction an admonition,

Pray for us... (Hebrews 13:18a)

PRINCIPLE 15

Doing follow-up work is essential for spiritual stability and growth, especially doctrinal establishment and personal encouragement.

*And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, **they returned to** Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the **disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith**, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21-22)*

The “P and B” missionary team retraced their steps in doing some crucial follow-up/discipleship work. This is amazing since Lystra was the very place where Paul had earlier been stoned and left for dead (14:19). The word “*strengthening*” (vs. 22) means “to establish, to confirm.” This strengthening comes primarily through feeding God’s sheep the Word of God (Acts 15:32). Establishing believers became a standard practice of Paul (Acts 15:41; 18:23) and is the only means to get believers spiritually stabilized and able to stand on their own (1 Peter 2:2).

Romans 1-8 provides us a solid blueprint of doctrinal building blocks that every believer needs to be grounded in. There we are taught such truths as:

- The importance of the Gospel of grace (Rom. 1:14-17)
- The attributes of God (1:18-20)
- The sinfulness of men (1:21-3:18)
- The place of the Law (3:19-20)

- Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (3:21-4:25)
- The blessings of justification (5:1-8)
- The eternal security of the believer (5:9-11)
- In Adam vs. in Christ (5:12-21)
- Positional truth—the believer’s co-crucifixion, co-burial, and co-resurrection with Christ (6:1-5)
- The cross and victory over the sin nature (6:6-13)
- Living by grace instead of Law (6:14-7:14)
- The conflict of the 2 natures and spiritual defeat through self-effort (7:15-25)
- The ministry and enablement of the Holy Spirit (8:1-13)
- Future guaranteed glorification by grace (8:17-25)
- Praying by grace (8:26-27)
- God’s eternal purpose for the believer (8:28-30)
- How God is “for us” (8:31-34)
- How nothing can separate us from the love of God (8:35-39)²²

²² In being involved in leadership training in El Salvador and Myanmar (Burma) for many years, we have been teaching the message of grace to pastors and church leaders from legalistic churches. In doing so, we have found that teaching them “Creation to Christ” using *The Stranger on the*

In addition to this, though Paul was with the Thessalonian church for a very short time (3 weeks to 6 months), he did not fail to teach them prophetic, eschatological truth regarding Christ's return *for* His saints (at the Rapture) as well as *with* His saints (at the 2nd coming), etc.

*Do you not remember that when I was still with you I **told you these things?*** (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

These prophetic truths can have a very practical and motivating effect on our lives.

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. **Therefore comfort one another with these words.*** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. **Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*** (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when

Road to Emmaus, followed by a verse-by-verse exposition of Romans 1-8, along with series on key Biblical Distinctions, followed by Galatians has been used of the Holy Spirit to transform their thinking and ministries towards understanding and teaching God's grace.

*He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*** (1 John 3:1-3)

Furthermore, in Acts 14 the apostle Paul “*exhorted*” or encouraged these new believers. Babies in Christ need sound doctrine *and* personal encouragement by caring fellow-believers to help facilitate spiritual growth in their lives. Apart from this, they may be easily misled, or get discouraged and choose to hang up the towel spiritually. Do not under-estimate this principle!

*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, **so that you may be established**—that is, **that I may be encouraged together with you** by the mutual faith both of you and me.* (Romans 1:9-12)

PRINCIPLE 16

Organize only as the need requires, appointing spiritual leaders (when qualified) in due time.

*So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting....* (Acts 14:23a)

Paul and Barnabas “*appointed*” (ordained) “*elders in every church.*” These spiritually growing men (relatively speaking) would serve their local church by overseeing, shepherding, and feeding God’s flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). A major feature of New Testament church function was simplicity, not complexity. Furthermore, Acts 6 bears out that it is wise to organize

further *only* as needs and ministries arise that require organization. Remember that the church is both an organization and an organism with dynamic-life. It is far more important to have believers established and equipped (walking by faith vertically with the Lord) than to have some kind of organized program in place. And resist the pressure to appoint unqualified men as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7) to meet some kind of quorum or model. Let God surface those whom He desires and determined to feed and lead His Church when they are ready and need requires.

PRINCIPLE 17

Trust the Lord to ultimately undertake for the planting and growth of the church.

...they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23b)

“*They* (Paul and Barnabas) *commended* (entrusted) *them* (these new spiritual leaders) *to the Lord, in whom they had believed.*” It is very important that church-planters be reminded that this is not “their baby”—it is the Lords! While the eleventh attribute of God seems to be “God is slow,” He has a sovereign timetable and is never behind schedule regarding the establishment of His church. Regarding all of this, you must “walk by faith and not by sight.”

Furthermore, this “Paul and Barnabas” church planting team eventually left the area geographically as these churches became established and indigenous. Like releasing your grown child from your home, this may be painful but is needed when they are ready to do so.

PRINCIPLE 18

The missionary team gave an honest report back to the sending local church, which magnified God’s grace and brought glory to God.

*From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, **they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*** (Acts 14:26-27)

Sensing an accountability to their sending local church, Paul and Barnabas reported back home. Notice how the Holy Spirit directs Luke to underscore the divine source (“*the grace of God*”), the specific mission (“*for the work*”), the human instruments (“*which they*”), and the spiritual success (“*had completed*”). But these humble servants of Christ, recognizing the ultimate source of any spiritual endeavor, “*reported all that **God** had done with them, and that **He** had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*” Dear friends, the issue is not, “Did it work?” The bottom-line is, “was God glorified?” True success in serving Christ is defined by one word: faithfulness!

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2)

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new

covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (Colossians 1:28-29)

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16)

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

LET'S REVIEW

- 1. When church planting, remember that God uses believers who are *already* growing and ministering for Him.**
- 2. The Holy Spirit must direct and enable you from the very beginning in order for church planting to be successful.**
- 3. Church planting needs to be bathed in prayer.**
- 4. Church planters were confirmed by and sent out through the local church.**
- 5. There is great value in having a church-planting *team*.**

6. Church planters need to preach the Gospel publicly and privately.
7. You need to expect opposition to the truths of God's Word, especially religious opposition.
8. Church planting may include a flexible but defined strategy.
9. The church planters utilized the chronological approach in their Bible teaching with a focus on the Gospel. (Acts 13:17-37)
10. The church-planters preached Jesus Christ, and told their audience specifically how to and how *not* to be justified before God.
11. When church planting, work with the willing and do not worry about numbers.
12. Since church planting is a divine undertaking, believers need to be filled by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task.
13. In believing the biblical promises, you need to expect God to use His Word.
14. When utilizing a church-planting team, wisdom dictates that someone needs to head it up.
15. Doing follow-up work is essential for spiritual stability and growth, especially doctrinal establishment and personal encouragement.
16. Organize only as the need requires, appointing spiritual leaders (when qualified) in due time.

17. Trust the Lord to ultimately undertake for the planting and growth of the church.

18. The missionary team gave an honest report back to the sending local church, which magnified God's grace and brought glory to God.

The target of the Great Commission of our Lord to His Church (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21) is not merely the salvation of sinners who trust in Jesus Christ alone as Savior, who are then taught the Word of God and encouraged to grow toward spiritual maturation, but it is also the planting and establishing of grace-oriented, Bible-believing, Christ-centered local churches. In doing so, new and indigenous local churches are to then responsibly carry out the Great Commission mandate in dependence upon the Lord in their area of influence and beyond. May God be pleased to use the scriptural principles of this book to that blessed end.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dennis Rokser (M.Div., D.Min., Grace Biblical Seminary) pastored Duluth Bible Church from 1985-2022. The focus of his teaching has been the Gospel of God's grace as it relates to salvation, eternal security, the believer's identification/position in Christ, and living by grace through faith-resting in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)