Session 3: “A New Flight Plan.”

The Pauline Principle: 1 Cor. 9:19-23

“. . . I have become all things to all men so that by some possible means I might save some. . . .”

Point of the passage: Paul adapted his approach to different people in order that the gospel could be heard and responded to.

Application: We need to think and act as the missionary Paul did and adapt our approach to people so that the gospel may be heard, understood, and responded to.

First, let’s dig a little deeper into the map:

- The changing fishing pond.

1) Per Gallup, in 1948 religious preference (and that may refer only to a cultural or family tradition) was: Protestant: 69%, RCC: 22%, and none/other: 9%. In 2015, the percentages were: Protestant or “Christian”: 47%, RCC: 23%; none/other: 30%.

2) Per David Olson in The American Church in Crisis, actual U.S. church attendance (as opposed to preference) in 1990 was 20.4% (including RCC), and will be 14.7% in 2020 (including RCC). At this rate, it will be down to 10% by 2050.

Biblical worldview according to other research by George Barna:

- 4% of adults
- 9% of “born again”
- 51% or Protestant pastors
- 71% of SBC pastors

What do we notice in 2015?

1. The percentage of lostness is increasing significantly.

2. But, let me suggest a more realistic 2015 pie:
Changing strategies and methodologies. Let me suggest a different look at the pie (not scientific, but highly probable):

- 1948:
  - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus: Church attenders minus lost church attenders plus saved but not in church = 50%
  - “Open” to the gospel (Cultural Christians, drop-outs, etc) = 41%
  - “Closed” = 9%

- 1990:
  - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus = 20%
  - “Open” = 50%
  - “Closed” = 30%

- 2020:
  - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus = 15%
  - “Open” = 45%
  - “Closed” = 40%

- 2050:
  - Born-again/saved/disciples = 10%
  - “Open” = 40%
  - “Closed” = 50%

What’s my point?

Consider some of the outreach methods/language stratégies we have used over the last few decades:
Changing expectations.

Cultural Exegesis and Engagement.

The difference between a synagogue approach and a Mars Hill approach.

1) Paul and the synagogue:

Acts 13:5: “When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.”


Acts 14:1: “At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.”

What are some observations we can make if we were to spend more time on these Acts passages?

1. Paul went to the synagogues because he had a love for his people and wanted them to be saved.

2. Paul could assume a lot when he entered the synagogue.

3. Paul was also aware of Gentile “God-fearers” who attended the synagogues.

4. There was eventually a breach with the synagogue to concentrate on reaching Gentiles with the gospel.

Missiological implications:

1. We don’t abandon the “synagogue” field!
2. However, sometimes “they” have heard the truth so many times, it just bounces right off.

3. Sometimes the synagogue group is composed of cultural believers, and that is as far as they are going to take it.

4. They are more and more the minority. So, where is the harvest field?

2) Paul at Mars Hill. Acts 17:16-34.

1. V. 17 – “he reasoned in the synagogue . . . as well as in the market place day by day . . .”
   - From the very beginning Paul engaged in meaningful conversation.
   - Paul sought people out.
   - Therefore, how are we going to third places, even hostile places, and engaging in conversation?

2. V. 18 – “A group . . . began to dispute with him . . . because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”
   - Paul presented the gospel in such a way that it invited discussion.
   - Therefore, in our gospel presentations, are we seeking to engage the person or are we shutting him/her down with a dogmatic, judgmental, or condemning attitude?

3. Vv. 22-23 – “I see . . . I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship . . . I even found an altar . . .”
   - Paul intentionally explored, observed, and investigated his mission field.
   - He sought information about his opponents before he began his evangelism.
- He also used a piece of their worldview as a connecting point or a jumping off point for the gospel.

- Therefore, as missionaries we need to exegete the culture and the community before we charge in.

4. V. 23ff – “I am going to proclaim to you . . .”

- Once Paul understood the context, he began to explain his gospel.

- Therefore, at some point the gospel has to be presented.

5. V. 28 – “As some of your own poets have said . . .”

- Paul demonstrated knowledge of and respect for aspects of his hearers’ culture.

- This continued to offer connection points to his gospel.

- Therefore, we should not attack or show disrespect to our hearers’ culture, beliefs, traditions, or practices, as distasteful as they may be.

6. Vv. 28-31 – “we should not think . . . raising him from the dead.”

- Paul did not shy away from the distinctions between the hearers’ worldview and the gospel.

- That is, a confrontation has to take place.

- Therefore, we make sure we know the differences, can point out the differences, and can do that boldly but with patience and love.

7. V. 32-34 – “. . . some sneered, but other said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” . . . A few men became followers of Paul and believed.”

- The response to Paul’s gospel presentation?

- Notice that Luke doesn’t say they “believed and became followers of Jesus or of the Way.”
Therefore, many will ridicule and reject the gospel (and us); some may be willing to talk or dispute a bit more.

- **Some practical applications about cultural exegesis:**
  
  o Don’t assume anything about your focus group, your community, your church members, and even your own knowledge!
  
  o Work hard at gathering information.
  
  o Get out.
  
  o Listen to people.
  
  o Learn all you can about contextualization.

- **Now, some practical resources**
  
  a. Bible and Worldview surveys
  
  b. Guide for developing a Biblical worldview
  
  c. Cultural issues guideline
  
  d. Acts 1:8 strategy templates
  
  e. What will your church look like and how will you get there?
  
  f. Re-thinking church planting
## Worldview Survey
(These questions are not all-inclusive and could be asked in different ways)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is one transcendent, sovereign, all-powerful God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created all things from nothing and his creation is good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created human beings in his image, male and female.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human beings are born with a sinful nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin explains what is wrong with the world: brokenness with God, among humans, and in creation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, Son of God, fully God and fully man.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus led a sinless life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, a person and not a force.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The solution for sin is found only in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the only way to God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation and the hope of eternal life cannot be earned by good works</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although other world religions may have some elements of truth, none are absolutely true and none offer a way of salvation from sin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satan is a real fallen angel in rebellion against God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven and hell are literal places where believers and non-believers respectively spend eternity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracles can only be explained by a supernatural intervention in creation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible is God’s word to us, divinely inspired and fully authoritative for life and faith.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moral code for human life was given to us by God in the Bible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life is highly valued by God. It begins in the womb at conception and ends at natural death.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God intended for marriage to be between one man and one woman, united for life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activity outside of God’s plan for marriage is sinful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible informs us in all aspects of life and faith, including government, economics, politics, culture, social life, and so on.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible teaches us about absolute truth, morals, and ethics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Survey on the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bible is God’s revealed Word to us.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible is divinely inspired, authoritative, and without error.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible judges all aspects of a person’s life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible judges all aspects of every human culture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible is the authority for how to operate our individual lives, our families, and our church.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible’s moral and ethical code never changes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible applies to all times in history and to all cultures.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When common practices and the Bible conflict, common practice should change.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the Bible teaches on marriage as being between one man and one woman still applies today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the Bible teaches on sexuality and sexual behavior still applies today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the Bible teaches on homosexuality still applies today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible teaches that any sexual behavior outside of marriage between one man and one woman is sin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guide for Developing a Biblical Worldview

As you begin to formulate a Biblical worldview, you will need to work hard at examining your own worldview to make sure it lines up with Scripture. Even as you address specific moral and ethical issues your people are struggling with, let me suggest that there are some foundational questions to use that can drive and orient your study, teaching, and response.

1) What was the Biblical ideal before the fall? This is what Russell Moore refers to in *Onward* as the “alpha point.” That is, what can we learn about God’s original purposes for:
   a. The created order and dominion/stewardship of the earth
   b. God’s relationship with and purpose for humans
   c. Humankind, including human nature, human government, work, and the purpose of life
   d. Marriage, sex, and family
   e. Good, evil, and sin

Obviously, we gain most of our information from the first three chapters of Genesis, but we also learn from what is affirmed and confirmed throughout Scripture, especially from the New Testament. It is important to start with God’s ideal for humanity. Too often we simply throw the “thou shalt not” verses at people (true and authoritative though they may be), but without any context. This only supports to caricature of Christianity as being about a list of do’s and don’ts.

2) What is the Biblical eschatological vision? Or, as Moore also notes, what is the “omega point?” That is, what can we learn about God’s ultimate purposes for:
   a. Redemption of the creation
   b. His relationship with humans and our ultimate purpose and destiny
   c. Human relationships
   d. Knowledge, good, and evil

Knowing where we are headed will inform us as to how we are to live now. Understanding and teaching the redemption of creation and the restoration of all things will keep us from falling into an escapist Christianity. That is, what we do now in this life and on this earth does matter for eternity.
3) We need to know God’s creational purposes and eschatological goal, but what are the Biblical principles for between the times? That is, what can we learn about God’s purposes for us fallen human beings as we work and wait? Asking this question is not without some confusion, conflict, and debate. On the one hand, we need to be careful not to underestimate and overlook God’s original creational purposes (for example, the distinction and implications of male and female or dominion over the earth as stewardship). On the other hand, we need to be careful not to overestimate or over-realize the “not yet” eschatological goals (for example, expect perfect sanctification this side of heaven or withdraw into a utopian “heaven on earth” or overemphasize the effectiveness of social change).

   a. What was for covenant Israel? (Confusion and debate at times. Moral law still applies, but not the punishment! Example is homosexual behavior)

   b. What is for members of the Kingdom, already but not yet? (Sermon on the Mount – describes Kingdom citizens, impossible to live apart from Christ, cannot be lived out perfectly until the consummation of the Kingdom).

   c. What is the church called to be and do? (Paul’s letters)

   d. However, what may have been addressing a specific cultural issue then (women’s hair length, for example), but which still has a timeless principle (being aware of modesty and what one’s appearance may communicate in society)?

   e. What are the realities of life in a fallen world? That is, what “allowances” has God made due to our fallen situation (hardness of heart)? Divorce? War? When do we have to choose between the lesser of two evils? When do have to choose for the greater good?

   f. Similarly, how do we take universal and trans-cultural principles and apply them to temporal and cultural situations without compromising truth? (For example: idolatry).

   g. Furthermore, how do we distinguish between what is a non-negotiable (adultery, for example) and disputable matters left to one’s conscience (alcohol consumption, for example)? In these disputable matters we can never forget the principle of building each other up and of not being an obstacle in our witness.

   h. What are the governing authorities called to be and do? What should be the relationship between individual Christians and the state? Between the church and the state?
i. Are we asking the right questions?

Could it be said that the key for Christian life, ministry, and mission is holding equally to grace and truth?
Facing Cultural Issues – Guide for a Missional Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressing this issue will require:</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Repentance/Change in WV or action by us</th>
<th>Building a Relationship</th>
<th>Teaching/Preaching/Witnessing/Counseling</th>
<th>Political/Social Action</th>
<th>Cooperation with others concerned</th>
<th>Ministry/Outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will these be evident?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Commission?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Commandment?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Rule?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# ACTS 1:8 STRATEGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defined/Explained</th>
<th>Jerusalem</th>
<th>Judea</th>
<th>Samaria</th>
<th>Ends of the Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What will your church look like and how will you get there?

1. Thinking about models.

Well, do and then don’t. That is, learn as much as you can from models of church planting, church organization, church expression, and church ministry. However, don’t marry everything you do to one particular model. Don’t be a thoughtless clone. Clone church planting may work if the new church is planted in the exact same type of community and with the same kind of people as the one being copied. Unfortunately, that is rarely, if ever, the case. Whatever you learn from a particular model or style, make sure it is biblical, and then work prayerfully and hard at modifying it to fit your context.

2. Moving beyond models and thinking like a missionary.

   a. Keep the Wine (Baptist, non-alcoholic): Hold to the central, non-negotiable message.

   It bears repeating again and again. Your church plant must be both faithful to the whole biblical gospel and culturally relevant. You will be pouring the wine of the gospel into people’s lives. Make sure it is undiluted and pure. The wine – the message – will determine what you are. It will also follow the strongest voice; that is, make sure you are preaching and teaching the truth so that it is not hijacked by someone else with different doctrine or a different agenda. Stick to the Bible.

   b. Use new wineskins as needed:

      o Get over models and styles. Even after reading about and studying different models of church and church plants, move past models and think like a missionary. That is, what are the wineskins (expressions, models, styles) that will best carry and communicate the gospel to these people, this community, at this time?

      o Know you mission field (your people and your community). Too often planters don’t. They may think they do, but they have not taken the time to do the hard work of exegeting their community. Sometimes they are going home to the community where they grew up or went to school and think they know the people. However, times change, people move on, and communities transition. A good missionary landing in the heart of Africa will take the time to pray, research, learn the language, understand the culture, and build relationships. It is no different in any North American community. It may not take as long as it does in Africa, but it still needs to be done.

      o Get out of your box. Most planters think they are already out of the box. That is true, in the sense that they have climbed out of one box. However, they too often have
simply climbed into another (See model and clone discussion above!). Again, learn from others, but don’t assume that what worked elsewhere, with someone else, or even for you at another time, will work exactly the same again.

3. Culture matters.

a. Friend or foe?

There is nothing quite as controversial and misunderstood as the concept of culture and the relationship the church (and individual Christian) should have with the culture. It is too easy to simply dismiss culture as the enemy or to simply accept culture as a friend. The bottom line is that culture cannot be dismissed out of hand, for we all have a culture, live in a culture, reflect a culture, and are partially shaped by a culture—language, worldview, customs, mores, food, music, and on and on. It is, to a large degree, what makes us who we are. It is a mixed bag.

In reality, what most people mean when they dismiss culture or call culture an enemy is pop culture. Again, the bag is mixed. Just think about it. We may preach against selling out to culture (OK, pop culture) and avoid certain movies, music, and clothing styles, but then turn around and watch hours of football on TV or get consumed by March Madness. That, too, is pop culture, but just a little more acceptable . . . to most people.

So:

- Culture is not to be equated with what the Bible refers to the “world” when it tell us not to love the world. Certainly, there is overlap, and certainly they can be identified one with the other at times, but they are not identical.

- Every person has a culture (or more). It is the “house” they live in, as Ed Stetzer has put it.

- Every culture is fallen. There is good and bad in each. Yes, some are certainly worse than others (think Taliban or Nazi culture), but all cultures should be judged by Scripture.

- Having said that, however, it is always easier for me to judge another culture than my own, because it is my house. I live in it, I am comfortable in it, and I am often blind to its sinfulness.

- There should be humility and caution, therefore, as one seeks to make the gospel culturally relevant. On the one hand, it MUST be made culturally relevant; on the other hand, careful! Don’t let culture drive the message and don’t identify the message with the culture. Culture can thus be a friend. You can take advantage of some elements of culture (even popular culture) to present the gospel –
Mother’s Day, Independence and patriotic holidays, sporting events, and so forth. Culture can also be a foe. You can let culture drive what you say or don’t say in your preaching and teaching. You can lose your prophetic voice (how about preaching against slavery in 19th century southern states, against tobacco in North Carolina, for civil rights in the 1950s, or against materialism, gluttony, and obesity today!).

b. Solid core or rigid boundaries?

The tension, therefore, is the old one between legalism and license. You can go far either way. Knowing the word and praying for wisdom in applying it is the key. As in all of life, some boundaries must be drawn (thus the BF&M 2000), and those are always controversial. Perhaps more importantly in church planting is a clear understanding of the core – core doctrines, core values, and core practices. When these are understood and clearly stated, you don’t have to keep drawing new lines and making up new rules. You simple refer back to what has already been agreed upon. Does this style, attitude, action, statement, whatever, line up with our core beliefs and values? If not, then there is no reason to believe it or do it.

c. Going counter-cultural.

If culture is both friend and foe; that is, it just is inevitably part of who and where we are, then what about a church being counter-cultural? Should it be? The answer is “definitely.” But, that doesn’t mean it is a-cultural (without a culture or totally divested from culture). It also does not mean that a church should be only or primarily known for what it is against. Being counter-culture is not just preaching against the culture. Being counter-culture is providing a kingdom alternative to the prevailing culture. It is the church demonstrating a biblical community, in word and action, that is a taste of heaven and counter to the sinfulness in the dominant culture. It is the old challenge of being in the world but not of the world. It is being culturally relevant in a counter-cultural way.

People know the culture is messed up, even though they may be up to their eyeballs in it. Violence, addictions, corruption, greed, destroyed lives and families – they know the culture is sinful. A myth about postmodern people is that you have to make the gospel “palatable” for them to respond. Not so, according to those effectively reaching postmoderns. They want to know what the Bible says, plain and simple. They may argue with you and give you fits, but they want the undiluted truth. You certainly need to communicate in a way that is understandable and relevant, but it does not have to be “palatable” in the sense of watering down the message or avoiding controversial issues.

Your church plant, therefore, has the opportunity to show what a kingdom community looks like in the midst of all that – love, compassion, mercy, holiness – basically being and living like Jesus. Nothing could be more countercultural. Take a vocal stand when
necessary, yes. Be prophetic when necessary, yes. But be known and demonstrate most of all how life is to be lived as a community of Christ followers. Easy, isn’t it?
RE-THINKING CHURCH PLANTING

Church planting among Southern Baptists has come of age. Most churches and leaders recognize the need for more new churches. There is also agreement that we need a variety of styles, models, and sizes. We especially need churches that address cultural, affinity, and language issues. There is ongoing debate about exactly how to plant a church, how to fund a planter, if at all, and other methodological and strategic issues. However, with a healthy survival rate of new SBTC churches, a baptism ratio of three to one over established churches, and the fact that many new churches are becoming multiplying churches themselves . . . well, the statistics show that things are going quite well.

Having said that, one of the values of the SBTC church planting team is constant evaluation and re-thinking. After five years as a team, it is good to revisit what church planting is really all about and what the implications are for both new and established churches.

Church planting is not the end, but a means to make disciples. The Great Commission given by our Lord was to make disciples, not to plant churches. However, we plant New Testament churches because they are the local, contextual, culturally appropriate expressions of the Church, the Bride of Christ, which is itself the agent and sign of the eternal and universal Kingdom of God. Local churches, therefore, are the best means for making disciples of Christ who serve in his Kingdom. Therefore,

Planters must first be missionaries before they are anything else. Yes, planters must be pastors, teachers, evangelists, organizers, counselors, strategists, and leaders. They must, however, first be missionaries in their communities and to their people. They must first study, exegete, and know the people and the community they are called to reach. They must ask, “What will a Biblical disciple of Christ look like here and now?” Too often planters come to a people group or a community with a predetermined model and style. That leads to a cookie cutter approach that is limited in effectiveness. The planter must be willing to jettison all methods, strategies, and models until he knows his community thoroughly. Church planting is not about planting the ideal church for the planter. Nor is it about planting the ideal church that worked elsewhere or at another time. It is about planting a church that will make disciples from among a specific people, in a specific place, and at a specific time. Therefore,

Model and style follow missiology and ecclesiology. Said another way, ecclesiastical form follows ecclesiological function. The first question is “How will we make disciples from among this people/community?” That is the Great Commission. The planter should be able to describe what a disciple will look and act like in his own cultural context. He should be able to describe how Jesus’ commands to worship and pray, love and serve,
know and do, give and go apply to the disciple’s life and to the congregation of disciples, the local church. The planter must ask, “How do the Biblical functions of the church manifest themselves in current time and space?” The Bible, after all, is relevant to—and judges—every situation, culture, and time. Can the planter say how this is so in his unique context?

The second question relates to form. Here is the tricky part. The ecclesiology—nature, characteristics, ordinances, mission, order of the church—must be biblical (see BF&M 2000, Article VI for the essentials). The ecclesiastical form, that is, the methodological shapes, styles, models, systems, processes, programs, events, relationships, and ministries must be culturally appropriate. This is really inevitable. Every church reflects a culture, it just is not always the appropriate culture. Whether jeans, suits, wing tips, sandals, cowboy boots, ties, guayaberas, covered heads, separate seating for the sexes, hymns, praise songs, coritos, piano, charango, guitar, Bach, Rodeheaver, Stamps-Baxter, Third Day, Sunday School, home groups, pre-fab communion crackers, passed around loaf of bread, pews, padded chairs, pulpit, stool, steeples, multi-purpose, committees, teams, 11 AM worship, door-to-door, bulletins, web sites, or any other form, they all reflect somebody’s culture from some point in time. Everything we do in church, even the Biblical functions described in Acts 2: 43-47, is wrapped in cultural expression. If this is the case, then,

Let’s be careful not to make church an idol. That is, let’s don’t make our expression, our form, of church an idol. Whatever the style, whatever the model, whatever the size, whatever the method, whatever the cultural expression, the question should be, “Are we making disciples of Jesus?” If anything gets in the way of that Commission, it is an obstacle, if not an outright idol. If we criticize how others are doing it—whether traditional or contemporary, mega church or house church, purpose driven or program driven—it is a sin. Hold to doctrinal purity; be flexible in method and expression. Consequently, we arrive at this conclusion:

We need to agree on a church planting ethic to practice. If the point is to make disciples wherever we go and not to exalt any one form or expression over another, then church planters and those who support them should commit to some basic principles. One, no criticism of style or method. A healthy debate and an honest critique of methods and style are certainly acceptable. We should all want to hear from others and do better. What we do not want to do is to offer dismissive criticism of what others are doing differently from us. Let God determine and correct if it is ineffective. Let God bless and honor if it is Biblical and effective. We need all kinds of churches and all kinds of approaches to fulfill the Great Commission.

Two, an appreciation for what others have done, are doing, and will do. No planter or church has the corner on the market of effectiveness. What a church, new or established,
is doing may certainly be out of my comfort zone, but if God is being glorified and disciples are being made, I need to get over it. It is not about what I like. We need to remember that we all stand on the shoulders of saints who paid the price long before we came along. We also need to remember that we are all only a short decade away from being criticized by the next generation. It is God who has called and who is equipping those who are rising up to follow us.

Three, a commitment to pray for, encourage, and cooperate with what others are doing, both through giving and going. Too often we talk about “kingdom work,” when what we really mean is “my piece of the kingdom work.” Can we commit to pray for others even if they are doing something really different, or really traditional, or really edgy, or really formal, or really contemporary, or whatever?

Four, a focus on conversion growth that leads to disciple making. Whatever the style, model, or method, if disciples are not being made then legitimate questioning is warranted. Perhaps the planter is imposing a particular model that is simply inappropriate for the context. Perhaps the focus has been on attracting believers from other churches. Whatever the case, the planter must start with the clear understanding that the church is to glorify God, exalt Jesus, be empowered by the Holy Spirit, all for the purpose of leading lost people to become disciples of Jesus. Again, a missiological thrust must drive church planting.

Church planting is sweeping the country (a web search on Google for “church planting” yielded 1,110,000 results). Most denominations are making it a priority. Planting networks are springing up across the country – across the world, really -- and across denominational lines. More and more men and women are being called to be planters. Better assessment and training systems are being developed. It is all very exciting . . . and risky. Still, there is no better way to fulfill the Great Commission. Let’s celebrate together what we are all doing cooperatively in the SBTC.
Questions for further reflection:

1) Have I taken the time to fully evaluate my church’s evangelism, outreach, and missions strategies? Who are they targeting? Are they primarily “synagogue” or “Mars Hill”?

2) Can I describe those who are in the “synagogue” and those in the “Mars Hill” demographics?

3) What do I need to do to get myself and my people more interested in and engaged with the “Mars Hill” demographic? What needs to change in our attitude, our strategies, and our methods?

4) What are some practical, beginning steps we can take as a church to get into the “Mars Hill” community?
**Suggested resources**


Guder, Darrell L. *Missional Church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America.*


Hunsberger, George R. and Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Church between Gospel and Culture.*

Hunter, George G, III. *How to Reach Secular People.*

___________. *Church for the Unchurched.*

Minatrea, Milfred. *Shaped by God’s Heart: The passion and practice of missional churches.*

Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*

___________. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*

Wilkens, Steve and Mark L. Sanford. *Hidden Worldviews: Eight cultural stories that shape our lives.*