

50 Things Every Church Planter Should Know



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Chapter 1: 5 Characteristics Needed to Be a Church Planter

Church planting is a difficult, but rewarding assignment in ministry. All pastors and planters should operate under a calling of God, but it does appear to me that there are some unique qualifications for church planters.

From experience, here are five characteristics I believe it takes to be an effective church planter:

1. **Love of risk** – There is an entrepreneurial heart in most church planters I have met. Church planters love things that are new, changing and growing. They have an entrepreneurial spirit about them, embrace change readily and get bored with status quo. This characteristic can bring it's own problems, which leads to number two.
2. **Willingness to be patient** – Notice I didn't use the word patience, even though that's part of the fruit of the spirit all believers should be developing. Effective church planters are willing to be patient for God to do His work. The balance between these first two is a constant challenge, because church planters are wired for growth, but effective church planters develop a good plan, surround themselves with the right people, and then wait as God works.
3. **People who believe in you** – Church planting is not to be a lone ranger activity. Without the structure of an established church, church planters must depend on people to help develop ministries and systems. Effective church planters learn to rely on volunteers for success and are willing to share leadership and responsibility with others to plant the church.
4. **Healthy family life** – Church planting is a family activity. If a planter wants to be effective, he or she must have a healthy family life. Ministry is tough, so this is true for all ministries, but church planting, because of the unique uncertainties and risks involved, places additional stress on a marriage and family. Effective church planters begin with and maintain a healthy family life.
5. **Close walk with God** – Church planting will test a person's faith many times. Church planting is not always popular in some church communities and can make a planter feel like an outcast in the church community. The risks involved and the waiting process challenge a planter. Church planting, like all ministries, is an act of faith and requires constant communication with God. Effective church planters continue to build and draw upon a strong relationship with Christ throughout the process of planting.

Again, many of these may not be unique to church planters and are possibly shared by others in ministry, even in many secular settings, but my experience as a planter of two churches leads me to believe these are critical needs for a church planter.

Chapter 2: 5 Things You Should Do After Feeling The Call to Plant a Church

There's one question I get asked more than any other when it comes to church planting. Typically it's an Email or tweet that asks:

“I feel called to plant a church. What do I do now? What's my first step?”

Sometimes my initial advice is, “Run as fast as you can!” Just kidding. Although that would give you a testimony like Jonah.

Here are 5 immediate steps I would recommend:

6. **Check your heart** – Are you sure planting is what you are being called to do...or is it a desire because everyone else is doing it? It's fine if you are. We need church planters. But, we also need people willing to help established churches thrive. It's hard work to change what's established already...but so is church planting. Make sure you know what you're getting into is what God's drawing you into.
7. **Check your spouse's heart** – Church planting is not a sole venture. No ministry is for that matter. If you are married, you will need to be on the same page with your spouse. No. Doubt. About. It. Trying to do this without complete buy in from both parties will destroy one or the other...the plant or the marriage.
8. **Determine where you feel called to plant** – That's an important beginning step. Much of your future steps will depend on this one. Many times you already know this and I think God gives tremendous latitude in this. We need churches lots of places. But, this will be one of the most difficult decisions you make if you don't know. I once thought I wanted to plant in New York City. I still might someday. But, when I spent time talking to God about this, I sensed Him releasing me from the desire and pointing me in another direction.
9. **Find others that are interested** – This is critical. If you tell me you can't find anyone...and I hear it often...I'd seriously question how successful you are going to be. Just as with Elijah in 1 Kings 19, in my experience, God is always “reserving” (1 Kings 19:18) people who He plans to use in the vision He is shaping in you. To build a body you need those who are part of the body to start.
10. **Find experienced help** – It can be a denomination, another church, or an experienced pastor or mentor, but don't do it alone. Let me say that a little clearer. DON'T DO IT ALONE. Too much has been learned about church planting to miss out on someone else's experience.

Chapter 3: 3 Challenges Every Church Planter Must Face

As I mentioned earlier, church planting isn't easy. There will be good days, but there will be a lot of bad days, too.

The best way to overcome the challenges of church planting is to identify them before you even start the planning process.

From my experience, here are three challenges that most church planters experience. These are usually transferable to all church pastorates, but especially planters...

11. Finding Internal Financial Support For Your Church Plant.

In any church plant, the money will always be tight. There will never be enough. It's in very rare circumstances this is not true.

My strong word of encouragement is to strive to rely less on outside help and more on those God has called you to minister with in the church plant. The time you spend jumping through hoops for a few dollars from a denomination that often come with multiple strings attached, you can spend building maturity in your people who will support you financially.

12. Protecting Your Own Marriage.

Men and women are different and will react differently to the move and to the stress of planting. I've found it can be an excellent balance if the two are in sync with each other and communicating well. You should both be equally called, but your initial enthusiasm may not be the same.

I've observed many planters, especially those with young children, while they are experiencing the thrill of a new calling, their spouse is changing diapers during the day. If the planter isn't careful, totally unintentionally, he will appear to over-emphasize his role and diminish the wife's role.

Don't get so distracted by the plant that you aren't equally excited when your 18 month old learns a new trick. It is important to remember each spouse's role is equal in importance and value in the process of planting.

13. Determining Your Location.

I talk with so many who feel they are called to church planting, but can't discern where they are supposed to plant. Many are looking for a location. A specific address. The exact right building, in a certain city, on the right side of town. I get that too. You want to know where God wants you to be.

Unless you have clear direction or clear indication not to go somewhere, my advice is simply to ***plant where you land***. Seek opportunities that appear to be open doors, pray for clarity, but if God doesn't intervene or interrupt, plant. Plant where you land, where you see a great need, where your heart seems to take you. You can follow your gut if you're following Jesus.

I learned this principle in a very practical way. At one point, I felt my "calling" was to plant a church in New York City. Cheryl and I love the city. We had heard the great need. We visited the city to pray. I walked the streets of the upper West Side of Manhattan and talked with God. I said, "God, if you want me to plant a church here, give me an overwhelming love for these people." In a rare time of hearing clearly from God, I sensed God say, "Ron, as long as you have a heart for me you will have a heart for people; wherever you are." I believe God released me to plant...plant where there are people who need to be reached.

I think God may call you to an exact location. He may even give you a clear address. He may have one exact building in mind. But, many times, He may give you some latitude in your selection. Certainly in the precise location within your city. People seem to need Jesus everywhere I go.

Chapter 4: 5 Legitimate Fears of Planting a Church

Having participated in two church plants as a planter, and now working with church planters on a regular basis in a coaching capacity, I know first hand the fears associated with planting a church. It's a leap of faith and one God is calling many to these days.

My theory here is that recognizing the fear and realizing their legitimacy is part of guarding our hearts against them. The fact remains that for a church plant to be successful, at least in Kingdom terms, God must provide His grace.

Here are 5 legitimate fears of church planters:

14. **No one will show up** – If we do all this work and it doesn't work...what will we do? You'll be thankful you were obedient to what you believe God called you to do and wait patiently for Him to provide. We had to consistently remind our core team that God was in control of numbers. Our job was to be faithful. That doesn't mean you stop inviting people or investing in the community around you, but you trust that God will stir hearts for His work.
15. **We can't afford it** - You probably can't. There will seldom be enough money...or so it may seem at times. God calls us to big tasks. Church planting is hard...and not cheap. But, the Lord will provide resources for His vision. Again, that doesn't mean you don't need to educate people on the needs or help them understand the command, value and blessing of giving, but it does mean you trust God even when the checkbook balance is low. It also doesn't mean you won't have to wait to make major purchases or there won't be times you have to wait until "Sunday's offering" to get paid. Our paycheck was delayed several times the first couple years so other bills...and other staff...could be paid...but we were never hungry.
16. **I don't know what I'm doing** – Isn't it wonderful? It means you're insufficient without His sufficiency. What a great place to reside! The great news is that many have gone before you. Learn from others and stay on your knees before God.
17. **People will leave** – True. Most core teams are cut in half in the first few years. At first I thought we were to be the exception. We weren't. Other people will come and never return...But, some will stick. And, they will have hearts for the vision. And, in them we rejoice at what God has done. We build our teams around those who God sends to us and who remain steadfast to the journey ahead. That team may change several times the first few years.
18. **We don't have a building** – No, but you probably don't have a mortgage either. And, you're raising up an army of volunteers for set up and tear down. You are building service and sacrifice into your DNA as a church. Isn't it wonderful! Don't lose that atmosphere and culture of dependency, even when you have a building someday.

These fears are legitimate...real fears. Don't be ashamed that you have them. The key is not to live in them, but to live and walk in the faith that God will complete His plans and enable those He calls.

Chapter 5: 5 Dangerous Thoughts for Church Planters

Allowing fear to overcome you can cripple you as you start to plant your church, but that's not the only danger. False assumptions have the same potential to set you down a dangerous path.

From my experience, here are 5 false thoughts that many church planters have:

19. **If we build it, they will come** – They might. They might not. Actually when God builds it they will come.
20. **We need to pay someone to do this** – You could, but chances are there are people with margin in their schedule, looking for a place to serve, who don't necessarily need your money right now, as much as they desire the opportunity.
21. **Some people will always stay** – They won't. Period. Some will leave even if you do everything the way they wanted you to do them. And if you change anything you may be helping some make the decision they may have been talking about but just haven't done.
22. **I need to know everything that's happening in my church** – You could try, but the church would be very small and the potential will be very limited. And, I like to ask myself...is it my need to know or my need to control?
23. **I'm responsible for everyone's spiritual maturity** – You're not. Period. You teach. God's spirit grows as they yield to Him.

Of course these are just a few dangerous thoughts for church leaders. While you may focus all your energy in overcoming the fears of church planting, don't forget to balance your thoughts and keep these false assumptions from impacting your ministry potential.

The key is to always remain grounded in Truth, knowing what God thinks about you and that everything you're doing is through His grace and strength.

Chapter 6: 5 Steps to Successful Launching Your Church Plant

Having planted two churches and after helping numerous non-profit ministries see their start, I've learned a few things. I've also learned there are a few common steps in a successful launch.

Here are 5 steps to a successful ministry launch:

24. **Establish Vision** – Get a clear, easy to understand, worthy vision that honors God and brings good to other people and for which people can get excited.
25. **Recruit the Right People** – Recruit people who love the vision as much as you do. If you can't find like-minded people, it will be very difficult to be successful in the new ministry. I always believe, and have witnessed it repeatedly, that if God is in this, He has already been shaping the vision in other people's minds. We just need to find them.
26. **Equip and assign** – With people contributing, determine the tasks needed to accomplish the vision. Help people understand their unique role in accomplishing the vision and assign them to specific tasks. Give them the resources they need and make sure they are clear on their assigned role.
27. **Energize Your Core** – Keep people motivated towards the vision by continually reminding them of the overall purpose and their significant place in accomplishing it.
28. **Release People to “Be The Ministry”** – Let people do their part to accomplish the vision. Give real ownership. Delegate. Don't control.

It doesn't really matter what the ministry is...the launching process is relatively the same. You should know I'm a simple-minded guy. But, time and time again I've seen simple work. Sometimes we over complicate things.

I'm not saying simple is easy. It hardly ever is. I'm saying that we should not make the steps more convoluted than they actually are and that the more we can simplify the steps into an easy to understand format the easier it will be to complete them.

Chapter 7: 5 Suggestions When Planting a Church in a New Community

A few years ago, I was asked for any suggestions I have for planting a church in a different community from where you currently live and know. There is a group of 25 plus people who are leaving the comforts of home in California traveling to the state of Idaho to plant a church. I love that kind of faith.

If you don't know, [Grace Community Church](#) is my hometown, so I was very familiar with our community, but I planted a church before this one in a city in which I didn't know anyone well, so I have some experience in this area. Still, as I thought about these suggestions, I really believe they are shared for any church plant (perhaps even any church.)

Of course, these are given assuming you have a clear calling as to where you are to plant, but here are some of my suggestions for planting a church in another community. There are probably hundreds of others, but these were the first 5 that came to my mind:

29. **Learn the culture** – Every city, every village, and every group of people have their own unique identity. What matter's most? What do they celebrate? Where do people live and play? What do they do for fun? What's their language? What are the traditions unique to this area? What history do they value?
30. **Learn the competition** – Before you get too excited...it's not other churches. It's anything that has the people's attention you are trying to reach besides a church.
31. **Buy Into the Community** – Immediately find ways to get personally involved in the community with volunteer investment. That could be through the Chamber of Commerce, schools, festivals, etc. Give back...believe it or not, that gets attention.
32. **Have a prayer team** – There should be a group of people praying for this community, the church plant, and the leaders on a daily basis. Who are those people?
33. **Protect your family** – Just as church plants are stressful on the planter, they are equally challenging for the planter's family. This may be especially true in a relocation, since much of their support system is being replaced. Protect your family by being disciplined in your time and not losing them as your primary focus. As much as possible, involve them in the work so they understand it's value and get to share in the rewards.

Church planting is tough, but like all actions of faith and obedience, God uses the sacrifices to reach hurting people and change their life for His glory.

Chapter 8: 5 Characteristics to Look For in Core Members

I often hear church planters say to expect to lose half the original core members within the first year of a new church plant. While I agree that is the trend, I don't think it has to be that way. I am now in my second plant. With this second church we went about the core selection in a very methodical way, fully intending to keep all original core members if possible.

As the founding pastor, I actually interviewed all potential core members a couple of months before we had our first informational meeting. (I have a co-pastor, but he had not committed to the plant at this step in our formation.) Everyone I talked with was told they "may receive an invitation in the coming weeks to an informational meeting". Not everyone I talked with was invited. It wasn't that they weren't great people. In fact, I only talked with great people. It was that we were looking for some certain characteristics of great people.

What makes a successful core group? Some of these we didn't understand until a year or more into our launch, but we are so glad God led us to these characteristics.

Here are the common characteristics of our original core members:

34. **The people were placed on our hearts before we ever approached them.** Cheryl and I both agreed I should talk with each one.
35. **They were passionate about the church plant from the first conversation.** We didn't have to talk them into being core members. You might say we looked for the Mary heart not the Zechariah heart. (Luke 1) If they asked "When?" it was different then if they asked "Why?"
36. **They had a holy discontent with their current walk with Christ.** They knew they wanted something more, but didn't know how to address it.
37. **They understood and were willing to own the vision as their own.** They were willing to sacrifice and, once we started, would have planted the church even if no one else ever came.
38. **They planned from the beginning to contribute time, money and resources to the cause.** Everyone assumed responsibility.

Obviously planting a church should be a work of the Holy Spirit. As you are praying for the people God wants to use in this way, trust the impressions He places on your heart. You are certainly not a failure should you lose core members. I would encourage people to go elsewhere if their heart is not in it, but I do believe it is possible to keep all core members in a new church plant.

Chapter 9: 1 Question That Could Lead to Exponential Growth For Your Church Plant

In our church plant experience, the primary reason we continued to grow was because people got excited about what happening in the church and brought their friends. That's the short and the long answer.

We continually thought through ways to improve upon what we were doing, but the bottom line remained that it was the people attending the church that were growing the church. (Obviously, God grows the church...I get that...but He uses people!) As people get excited about what God is doing, they bring people with them.

With that in mind, here's a great question to ask if you want your church to grow:

39. Who are the catalyst type people in your church that if they ever get excited about your vision will bring others along with them to help implement it?

That's how we planted a church. We looked for people who had influence within a circle of people; whether in business, in their social life, or in the community, to find a core of people to start our church. Then we invested in them and released them to lead in the church. Years later, even today after I'm gone from leadership, the church continues to invest in people with influence in a circle of friends.

Look for and invest in people who others follow and the natural system of multiplication will work for your benefit and the benefit of your church.

Chapter 10: 10 Things I Would Do Differently if Planting Another Church

Having planted two church, I've learned a few things. Some of the things I've learned are things I wouldn't do again if were were planting another church.

Here are 10 things I wouldn't do again if planting a church:

40. **Limit God's vision** – We started as a church to reach one section of town. Now we are in two locations, reaching two entirely different segments of our community. God has continued to refine and shape our path as a church.
41. **Fail to challenge people to grow in their walk with Christ** – I don't know that I shied away from this; it certainly was my heart and our vision, but in the early days, I was very conscious of reaching the lost, so I may not have been as bold as I wish I had been in saying what needed to be said.
42. **Shy away from money talk** – So many people think all a church does is talk about money. We avoided this stigma from day one. In the process, we neglected to develop our core givers, we put ministries on hold we should be pursuing, and we robbed people of the opportunity to become generous givers and consequently to feel the reward of trusting God completely.
43. **Shy away from church people** – Early in our church plant, in an effort to stay true to our mission of reaching the unchurched and so as not to offend other churches, we tended to run from those who already belonged to another church. In the process, we injured some people who were also sensing God doing something in their life and we made ourselves very leadership poor.
44. **Resist leaders from other churches** – We wanted to plant a church for non-believers, but we needed leadership to do that. When leaders from other churches came, however, we were hesitant to plug them in for fear we'd be seen negatively by other churches. In the process, we missed out on quality leadership and we denied people the right to follow their heart.
45. **Expect everyone to be as excited a few years in** – The fact is, life changes. Some are starters and some are finishers. Some of the original people grew bored with things as they were. They had a great impact in our beginning, but sought opportunities elsewhere in later years...and that's okay.
46. **Assume everyone is "happy"** – I love what God is doing. I love watching lives change. God is doing something amazing among us. Some people just don't get that excited. It's not that they don't care or love our church, they just haven't received the same call on their lives I have.
47. **Wait to build structure** – In an effort not to be bound by traditions and organizational bureaucracy, we had little formal structure when we began. As we've

grown adding structure become unavoidable to prevent chaos. We've learned it's much more difficult to add structure once the organization is established. I would add the intended structure early, but in a way that allows for continual growth.

48. **Wait a while to reproduce** – We were 5 years old when we launched our second campus. I see churches do this in their second full year. There are so many in our city who need hope. Taking a risk on my own comes easy. Sometimes I'm too careful when representing God...as if He can't handle something so large. When God leads, I want to move.
49. **Wait too long to hire a business administrator** – This is a very practical piece of advice. With a background in business I was a natural to do this, but I hated it and didn't do it as well as it could be done. If a church is 400 or 500 hundred in attendance this becomes a full-time job. We were running well over 1,000 before we hired someone to do this and it crippled me in leadership.

Chapter 11: One Final Piece of Advice for Church Planters

So we've come to the end... 49 things you should know as a church planter.

But what's my one, best piece of advice?

50. Don't try to be a lone ranger.

That may work in western movies, but not in church planting. Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto...

If God is birthing a vision in you, the chances are great that He is birthing the same or similar vision in the hearts of others.

Find those who share your passion for reaching the lost and as you share your vision with them....

after you've prayed together tons...

then, if God is in it...

form a team...

To be successful you will need buy-in from other people. You may even need to give your vision away to people you trust.

I hear from those claiming to be church planters with a vision who say they have no one to help them plant. My best advice would be to wait until God reveals those people who are ready to share the burden with you.

There will be lonely nights out on the range of church planting. You'll be glad you have others around to encourage you to stay the course.

Additional Resource: Things Every Pastor Should Know Two-Sheet

I realize that it might be impossible for you to remember everything from this eBook. Therefore, here's a simple list of the things you should know as a church planter:

Before You Plant

1. If you're not a risk-taker, church planting might be very difficult for you.
2. You must develop a willingness to be patient for God to do His work.
3. Make the commitment to rely on volunteers for success and are willing to share leadership and responsibility with others to plant the church.
4. Begin with and maintain a healthy family life.
5. Continue to build and draw upon a strong relationship with Christ throughout the process of planting.
6. Check your heart and make sure you know what you're getting into is what God's drawing you into.
7. Make sure your spouse's heart is as in the church plant just as much as your heart.
8. Determine where you feel called to plant based on where God is pointing you.
9. Find others that are interested. I could be 10, 20, or 50 people.
10. Find experienced help. It can be a denomination, another church, or an experienced pastor or mentor, but don't do it alone.

Overcoming the Fears and Challenges

11. Strive to rely less on outside help and more on those God has called you to minister with in the church plant.
12. Make a commitment to protect your marriage from the stress and busyness of church planting.
13. Plant where you land. Seek opportunities that appear to be open doors, pray for clarity, but if God doesn't intervene or interrupt, plant.
14. Don't worry about whether people will show up or not.
15. Trust God even when the checkbook balance is low.
16. Don't be surprised if there are time when you feel like you don't know what you're doing.
17. Don't get discouraged when people leave.
18. Don't think that not having a brick-and-mortar building will keep your church from growing.
19. Don't think that just because YOU build it, they will come.
20. Seek to look for volunteers to fill initial roles instead of hiring a staff person.
21. Don't assume that your core team will always be part of your church.
22. Don't think that you need to know everything that's going on in your church.
23. Don't believe you're responsible for the spiritual maturity of the people in your church.

What You Need for a Successful Launch

24. You must establish a clear, easy to understand, worthy vision that honors God and brings good to other people.
25. Recruit people who love the vision as much as you do.
26. Help people understand their unique role in accomplishing the vision and assign them to specific tasks.
27. Keep people motivated towards the vision by continually reminding them of the overall purpose and their significant place in accomplishing it.
28. Let people do their part to accomplish the vision. Give real ownership.
29. Learning the culture of your city is one of the first things you need to do.
30. Identify the things that have the attention of the people you are trying to reach besides a church and figure out a way to combat them.
31. Immediately find ways to get personally involved in the community.
32. Establish a group of people praying for your community, the church plant, and the leaders on a daily basis.
33. Protect your family by being disciplined in your time and not losing them as your primary focus.
34. The best way to find people to join your core team is to pray and see who God lays on your heart.
35. Look for people who are passionate about the church plant from the start.
36. Great core members have a holy discontent with their current walk with Christ.
37. Core member must understand and be willing to own the vision as their own.
38. Your core members should plan from the beginning to contribute time, money and resources to the cause.

Speaking from My Personal Experience

39. Identifying the catalyst-type people in your church that could bring others along with them is the quickest way to grow your church.
40. Limiting God's vision is one of the biggest mistakes you can make.
41. Be bold in challenging people to grow in their walk with Christ.
42. Don't avoid conversations about generosity and money because you're worried about losing people.
43. Don't exclude people from other churches who might be sensing God doing something in their life.
44. Don't resist experienced lay leaders from other churches who want to plug in to what you're doing.
45. Don't expect everyone to maintain the same excitement in year 3 as they have in year 1.
46. Don't assume that because people aren't "happy" they're not passionate about what your church is doing.
47. Add structure early, but in a way that allows for continual growth.
48. If there's an opportunity to reproduce what you're doing in another part of the city... do it.
49. Don't wait too long to hire a business administrator.
50. Don't try to be a lone ranger.

Additional Resource: 17 Months From Start to Launch: My Church Planting Story

One of the most challenging parts of launching a church plant is creating a timeline that enables your church to be fully prepared to hit the ground running on the first Sunday, but isn't so long that you lose valuable momentum. While the timeline we created for Grace Community Church isn't the blueprint, I believe it served us well in helping us equip our core team and leverage momentum in the community.

Here's a brief look at the 17 months leading up to the launch of Grace Community Church.

2004

May — I had an almost prophetic encounter with another pastor who encouraged me to revive the 10 year dream God had placed on my heart.

May-June — I took about 6 weeks to pray...

July - Approached my co-pastor to see his interest (He wasn't interested at the time.)

July-August — I kept praying during these months for clarity...

September – My co-pastor and I started dreaming together, he wasn't completely on board yet, but he was willing to see what God wanted to do...

October - December — I personally met with potential core members to share the vision, while my co-pastor and I kept shaping the vision...

2005

January – February — Core pastor agrees to be a part...we invited potential core team to an organizational meeting, committed core to vision, solidified core...

March – June — Core learnings – The core team divided responsibilities, then traveled to different churches, learning all they could about what a successful church might include.

July — Core Training – We met to make clear our vision and primary strategy.

August — Practice/Preview services – With these services, although we didn't promote them, we invited anyone who wanted to attend.

September 11, 2005 — Launch church –

The rest is our history post-launch...

Additional Resource: Church Planting FAQs

Still have questions about your church plant? Here are a few answers to some of the most frequently asked questions I receive:

1. How many did you launch with and what environment did you gather in? How did you use it to attract people?

We began with 22 core members (11 couples) and 3 full-time staff members (and their families), who were prepared to work bi-vocational if needed. We met in my living room and in smaller meetings for five months, but other people heard about what we were doing and wanted to be a part before we officially launched. We then borrowed a coffee shop operated by another church and met there on Sunday nights doing training two months before launch with a group that had grown to about 50 people. In the month prior to launch, we moved to another church's facility on Sunday nights where interest continued to build and we had over 100 people joining us for training.

We added music when we moved to the training period at the coffee shop and in the church facility. We didn't have a full band, but we did have a style similar to what they could expect to see once we launched.

2. Since you started with mostly unchurched people, when did you establish an elder team? Also, from whom did you use for this?

We received great advice from several churches, including Rob Bell's church, that as founding pastors we should not give away the vision too soon to elders who may not own the same vision yet. We waited two full years before we officially had elders. Right now, three and a half years later, we have three elders, my co-pastor, one of our core members, and me. We plan to add elders in the next couple years as God leads us to the right men. These also will need to be men who, in addition to the normal Biblical requirements, will have been with us long enough to understand and own the vision of our church.

3. How important was your focus on small groups from the beginning? What percentage of your membership regularly gather in small groups during the week?

We have tried to be prepared for every environment before we launch it. We aren't afraid to make people wait until we get things right. Therefore, we "practiced" groups with the original group of 50 or so people who were with us for the first official training in the coffee shop. We divided into four groups and after going through about 12 weeks together we found leaders from within these practice groups and officially launched ten initial groups. Right now we have average about 70% of our Sunday attendance involved in groups, when you include adults, youth and children. (We do signups a few times a year and will again this Sunday, so that number is an average over time.)

4. What's the best way to keep the vision reviewed/renewed with core members to keep momentum and excitement?

We talked about vision constantly in different ways. With a simple strategy it was easier to communicate with people. The first thing to note is that you can never under communicate the vision. Just when you think you've talked about it until you're blue in the face, people are just starting to get it.

With an elder structure of leadership, we we're able to control the focus of energies for the church, always closely pushing towards reaching the vision.

5. What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of your church plant as a discipling community?

Strengths. We had an exciting and attractive environment. People easily felt they can be a part of something.

Weaknesses. We lacked enough quality leaders. We did not have some of the structures in place we needed systematically to assimilate people through the strategy.

6. What aspects of Grace would you encourage other pastors to emulate in a church plant? Change?

We planted with people who had a passion for spiritual growth but were dissatisfied with the church choices in the community. We called it a "holy discontent". We would look for that again. Also we would try to repeat the things we are noted for and that have become trademarks of Grace that I mentioned above, such as a heart of generosity and community investment.

As for what we would change, look for more leaders to start with. We shied away from churching people not wanting to take from other churches but it left us with a void of leadership we are just now filling.

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[About the Author]

As pastor at [Immanuel Baptist Church](#) a church leader and the planter of two churches, Ron Edmondson is passionate about planting churches, but also helping established churches thrive. He thrives on assisting pastors and those in ministry think through leadership, strategy and life. His specialty is organizational leadership, so in addition to my role as a pastor, he consults with church and ministry leaders.

He has more than 30 years leadership experience, mostly as a self-employed business owner, and have been in full-time ministry for just over a decade. Ron has successfully led the restart of one church and the planting of two churches. He has a seminary master's and a master's in organizational leadership.

On a more personal note...

The greatest times for Ron are with my wife Cheryl and our amazing adult sons, Jeremy, his wife Mary, and our youngest son Nate. Almost 20 years ago, he founded a non-profit ministry called [Mustard Seed Ministry](#), which provides devotional resources, conducts family, marriage and parenting, and church leadership seminars.

Ron write almost daily on leadership, church and family. To sign up for these blogs on a reader or by email, click [HERE](#).

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