



Tips on Church Planting

In the past year, I've read many articles and books on the *whats*, *whys*, and *hows* of church planting, but I have seen precious little on the *don'ts*. Here's my list of seven pitfalls to avoid:

1. *Thinking you can "do it better" and thus should plant.* I've met too many people who talk about planting just because they "know how to teach" or "have support and money," when the real reason they want to plant is that they are disgruntled with their current place of ministry and think they can do it better. Planting a church just because you think your current pastor is not "in the know" is the wrong reason to plant.
2. *Thinking your theology degree makes you an expert on church planting.* Your credentials don't make you an expert at something only God can build. Genuine humility will allow God to show you what you still need to learn in the school of spiritual discernment so you can plant a church that is truly focused on Jesus.
3. *Thinking your connections are the key to growing your church plant.* Just because you know a lot of people doesn't mean they will all be flocking to your church. What's more, the people who need to be coming to your church are people you don't yet know, because they are the folks who are—at the moment—outside the church. We need to learn how to talk to people on the outside, not settle for rubbing shoulders only with those already on the inside. If comfort is what you're after, church planting is not the job for you.
4. *Thinking your personal charisma will draw people to your church.* The qualities that truly impress people are authenticity, a sincere desire for community, the ability to walk alongside a brother or sister even when it is not convenient, and being family to the unloved. With the state of the church today, people witnessing that kind of authenticity might understandably ask, "Is this really a church?" Now that's something to aim for!
5. *Thinking that working with friends will be paradise.* Partnering with good friends can be both beneficial (because friends have high expectations of each other) and extremely draining (because when the inevitable conflicts arise, friends often clam up rather than confront each other and risk the friendship). Unresolved conflicts have a devastating effect on ministry. Do yourself a favor: Commit to a high level of honest communication, then paint the absolute worst-case scenario to friends before inviting them to join your core team. If they still want to come alongside you, at least you warned them—but definitely refrain from passing out any major titles until you've weathered a few tough times together in the ministry.
6. *Thinking it'll be easy.* Even with Jesus by our side, establishing a church is not for the faint-hearted. Even when you do everything the church-plant books say you should, there will come a time (probably many times) when you will wonder if you heard God correctly. It will be hard work every day, and while it's a ride worth taking, it may not be the ride for you.
7. *Thinking that it will be too hard to do.* On the other hand, some people considering church planting think it will be insurmountably difficult. Some people do fail, but what makes a successful church start is not only an

authentic call but commitment to the task at hand for a designated time period. You will need to give the plant time to grow. One year is not enough time to determine if you should close up shop. With God all things are possible (Mark 10:27), and if you've been called for "such a time as this," then you'll need that perseverance to see the harvest.

In his book *Planting Missional Churches* (Broadman & Holman, 2006), Ed Stetzer reminds all potential church planters to make sure they possess the necessary characteristics, a certainty of call, a community/people group to serve, and extraordinary faith. "Though every pastor needs faith, the church planter needs extraordinary faith," he writes. If you are a woman thinking of being a lead church planter it is important that you recognize these qualifications, because as a woman you will already have the societal/church biases stacked against you. The only thing that will keep you standing when the valley periods of planting come (and, trust me, they will come hard and fast at times) is "the call."

Starting a church is an amazing adventure—lonely but rewarding. I encourage you to be authentic, be faithful, and don't overanalyze the journey. Your vision and your values should be the core of your calling. So before you venture out, venture in—inside the person you are now—and find out who you are becoming and what God wants you to do to help other comers in the journey. Only then will life flow forth to the church as God flows through you. ■

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