

**“CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE TEACHINGS  
& PRACTICES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:  
A RESPONSE TO JACKSON WU”**

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It has been argued that Church Planting Movements do not appear in the Bible, and therefore are unbiblical or extra-biblical. For some observers, this begs the question: What else in our contemporary expression of church is not in the Bible?

1. The office of “pastor” (the word in its singular, as a church leader never appears in the Bible).
2. The “church building” never appears in the Bible.
3. The word “Trinity,” so central to theological orthodoxy, never appears in the Bible.
4. The word “seminary” or even the notion of seminary never appears in the Bible.
5. The contemporary expression of “church staff” never appears in the Bible.

We could continue this list for pages, including such extra-biblical mainstays of contemporary church life as: indoor toilets, family life centers, children’s education buildings, baptistries, pulpits, pews, mission agencies, endowments, building committees, Vacation Bible School, committees in general, scholarships for seminary students, tenured seminary faculty, retirement funds, parsonages, etc., etc. If we extend the argument into today’s gospel proclamation arena, we would also have to denounce as unbiblical or extra-biblical: the use of microphones, radio, television, the Jesus Film, satellite gospel television, inoculations against diseases, hospitals, medical missions, etc., etc. Unless a polemicist is prepared to attack these extra-biblical aspects of contemporary church and mission life, then one must conclude that his decision to attack Church Planting Movements is arbitrary and myopic or, at best, inconsistent.

Does that mean these aspects of contemporary church life, these extra-biblical roles, and institutions should be dismissed because they are not "grounded in Scripture"? I think not. They are all aimed at the core of what church is intended to be: a community committed to obediently following Christ, and by so doing, extending and expanding the life, ministry, teaching, and mission of Christ Himself.

Church Planting Movements are a fact of contemporary church expansion, and are consistent with the patterns that led to the remarkable expansion of Christianity in the early Church as well. Today, literally hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, of lost Hindus, Muslims, Chinese Folk Religionists, post-Christian secularists and others have come to faith through the phenomenon of Church Planting Movements. To dismiss this reality, because some contemporary churchmen fail to see it in Scripture, is to dismiss the eternal salvation and ongoing discipleship needs of the countless lost souls who have come to faith and ongoing discipleship through Church Planting Movements around the world. I am grateful that many other churchmen and women have seen in the rapid growth of the early Church the same patterns that we identify in Church Planting Movements today.

Church Planting Movements are not the invention of missiologists, nor are they a theory that "might be possible." Rather, they are a description by missionaries of the phenomenon that they have observed and, to the best of their ability, described. Mission researchers today are tracking more than 200 of these phenomena around the world today. That these missionaries have attempted to find biblical precedence and sanction for these movements should not surprise us – we are a biblical people.

The more appropriate question we should be asking is: Are Church Planting Movements consistent with the teachings and practice set forth in the New Testament?

To answer this question, we should examine the “Ten Universal Elements”<sup>1</sup> found in every Church Planting Movement in light of Scripture. These universal elements are:

- *Extraordinary Prayer*
- *Abundant Evangelism*
- *Intentional Planting of Reproducing Churches*
- *The Authority of God’s Word*
- *Local Leadership*
- *Lay Leadership*
- *House Churches*
- *Churches Planting Churches*
- *Rapid Reproduction*
- *Healthy Churches*

These ten elements are found in every Church Planting Movement that have appeared in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. A critique of Church Planting Movements without asking, “Are these ten elements consistent with the New Testament pattern of kingdom advance?” is a misguided critique. So let’s examine these ten elements in light of Scripture:

1. *Extraordinary Prayer* - was extraordinary prayer consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Psalm 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.
- Matthew 9:38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.
- Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.
- Mark 9:29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer.
- Luke 10:2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.
- Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer....
- Acts 3:1 Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer....
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray continually....

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<sup>1</sup> "In *Every Church Planting Movement*," in David Garrison's *Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), pp. 171ff.

2. *Abundant Evangelism* - was abundant evangelism consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...
- Mark 1:38-39a Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues....
- Mark 16:15 And He said to them, Go into all the world, proclaim the gospel to all the creation.
- Act 1:8 But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
- Act 17:17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.
- Act 19:8, 10 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.... This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

3. *Intentional Planting of Multiplying Churches* - was intentional planting of multiplying churches consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
- Luke 5:1-11; 9:1; 10:1; 1 Corinthians 15:6; Acts 2:41 Just as Jesus chose Twelve, they themselves multiplied into 72 who then multiplied into 500 who then multiplied into 3,000.
- John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
- Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.
- Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

4. *The Authority of God's Word* - was the authority of God's word consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Matthew 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

- Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
- Luke 24:45-46 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,
- Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

5. *Local Leadership* - was local leadership consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Acts 6:3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them
- Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
- 1 Corinthians 14:26 When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.
- Titus 1:5 ...appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.
- 1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

6. *Lay Leadership* - was lay leadership consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

- Matthew 4:18-20 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.
- Mark 3:18 ...Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot.
- Luke 5:30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"
- Acts 4:13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

- 1 Corinthians 1:26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
- 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant— not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7. *Home Cell Churches* - were home cell churches consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

Jesus brings worship and communion with him into the home. He teaches, does miracles, heals and is worshiped at Peter's house in Capernaum (Mark 2, 9), at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2), in the homes of Zaccheus (Luke 19), and the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 12).

- Mark 2:1-2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.
- Luke 10:7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.
- Acts 5:42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.
- Acts 8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.
- Acts 12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.
- Romans 16:5 Greet also the church that meets at their house.
- 1 Corinthians 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.
- Colossians 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.
- Philemon 1:1-2 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier and to the church that meets in your home.

8. *Churches Planting Churches* - were churches planting churches consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

Jesus expected each of his disciples to bear fruit (Luke 19:13-26; John 15:8). So he sent them out two by two into all the surrounding villages to establish His kingdom (Mark 6, Matthew 10, Luke 10).

In the same way, He equipped the early church to spread the gospel and establish churches wherever they went.

- Acts 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
- Ephesians 4:11-12 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up
- 1 Thessalonians 1:8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it....

9. *Rapid Reproduction* - was rapid reproduction consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

Jesus summoned disciples to follow Him immediately and they did.

- Mark 1:18 At once they left their nets and followed him.
- Mark 1:20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.
- Jesus drew enormous crowds of followers from the earliest days of His ministry.
- Mark 2:2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.
- Acts 2:47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- Acts 14:21-23 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
- Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.
- Acts 19:20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

10. *Healthy Churches* - were healthy churches consistent with New Testament patterns of Kingdom advance?

Jesus defined the health of the church in relation to Himself, as His body. It was built, not of bricks and mortar, but of His Spirit and the fellowship of His saints.

- Matthew 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Likewise in the early church, church buildings as we know them today appear nowhere. Instead, the believers worshiped wherever they were—home, synagogue, temple, riverside. What mattered was the vitality of the body of Christ.

- Acts 2:41-47 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- 1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
- Ephesians 4:12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

### **Conclusion**

And so, now, we return to our question: Are Church Planting Movements consistent with the teachings and practice set forth in the New Testament? Unless one is prepared to dismiss these ten elements as inconsistent with the teachings and patterns of the New Testament, one must conclude that Church Planting Movements are, indeed, quite biblical in both their nature and expression.

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