

Legacy Church Pastors Need Not Fear Losing Leaders by Implementing a #NoPlaceLeft Strategy

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Let me start with a confession. The first time I heard of the #NoPlaceLeft vision¹ and Church Planting Movement strategies, I immediately assumed that these trainers and practitioners wanted to see the traditional church die. The fourth field in the Four Fields training involved new church starts and rapid multiplication that was surely going to take the best leaders with pioneer-like qualities away from legacy churches who desperately needed people to be setting the example. In this article it will be clear that my initial fears of a #NoPlaceLeft strategy were unmerited. Being willing to let catalytic leaders go has only served to see their passions grow like wild fire throughout our “legacy church”. The following article is mostly aimed at legacy church pastors and leaders who, like me, at one point were curious, yet apprehensive to engage in a #NoPlaceLeft evangelism and disciple making strategy.

The odds of making #NoPlaceLeft a reality in the United States and to the ends of the earth are exponentially greater when legacy churches are trained and engaged. A legacy church is simply an established church in a brick and mortar building with traditional leadership models and a known reputation and history in their geographical location.² But, there is a twofold problem: Christ followers aren't living out their identity as ambassadors and pastors are being passive. Firstly, many of these churches seats are filled with Christians who have been tempted

¹ #NoPlaceLeft is a voluntary network of individuals and existing churches devoted to co-laboring in God's Harvest through prayer, evangelism, intentional and reproducing disciple making, gathering new believers into new or existing churches and equipping leaders for exponential engagement until there's no people or ethnic group, city or population segment lacking access to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:23). See www.noplacelleftdu.com, last accessed Sept. 2016.

² A “legacy church” is one that is characterized by traditional Western practices that have been maintained to some degree even as the broader culture has changed around them. The term is not monolithic as legacy churches come in all sizes and with various liturgical practices. In general, however, many (not all) of the American churches that are plateaued or declining fall into this category.

to believe the lie from Satan that evangelism and discipleship is only a task for the select few who have been given special gifts and passions.³ Pat Hood in his book *The Sending Church* brings clarity to people who think this way; “If we think some are ‘called’ to missions and others aren’t, then we’ll be content to pay for others to do missions for us. But when we realize we’re ‘called’ to missions, everything changes.”⁴ Secondly there are many pastors and leaders in these very churches who have fallen into passivity by not loving their people enough to ruffle the feathers of members who have shirked their responsibility to be an ambassador for Christ.

So what’s it going to take to get these legacy churches trained and engaged? Yes, it will take a movement of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and understanding on the responsibility and privilege of seeing the Great Commission fulfilled and obeyed. Yes, it will take Christ followers coming to an understanding that making disciples is an act of worship, not an option for worship. Yes, it will take patience and perseverance for the many failures that typically come ahead of the successes. But perhaps more foundationally, it will take pastors and leaders who can surrender their fears of losing people all for the sake of the Kingdom of God to keep advancing. Alan Hirsch, a missionary pioneer in his own right, agrees when he says the following: “A missional church needs missional leadership, its going to take more than that traditional pastor-teacher mode of leadership to pull this off. Leadership always provides a strategic point of leverage for missional change and renewal.”⁵

³In total transparency, I will tell you that there are members of the church I lead that still feel this way, but I love them and will continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and growth to those individuals so that they can be a part of what God is doing among us and consequently share our joy.

⁴Pat Hood, *The Sending Church: The Church Must Leave the Building* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 181.

⁵Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 153.

Multiplication Has Always Been the GOAL

In your church mission and vision statement, are you already using language that communicates multiplication? Certainly you have heard the phrase ‘disciple-making disciple,’ or ‘church planting church’ by now? You see, we have language like this all over churches in our country, but few churches are actually seeing it happen. Multiplication is not just a #NoPlaceLeft strategy, it’s a Jesus strategy: “His whole evangelistic strategy—indeed, the fulfillment of his very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave—depended on the faithfulness of his chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduce and taught their disciples to reproduce.”⁶ Jesus prays for his disciples’ disciples in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, “*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:20-21). He prays for the world that would later believe, clearly Jesus expected multiplication.

In his book, *Church Planting by the Book*, E. Elbert Smith reminds us that this has always been the goal ever since the start of the Christian Church:

Persecution against them resulted in the church’s first martyr—and also in the gospel being extended to the Samaritans and the African continent. This pattern of members from the Jerusalem church evangelizing wherever they went is continued in Acts 11, where they also planted the next church in Antioch. This church in Antioch was then used to start other churches that would spread the gospel throughout entire regions. The church planter’s goal is to start churches that will start other churches, leading to multiplication like that pictured in the book of Acts beginning with the first church in Jerusalem.⁷

⁶Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1964), 99.

⁷E. Elbert Smith, *Church Planting by the Book* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2015), 45. See a review of this book in this edition of www.globalmissiology.org.

The apostle Paul reveals he held this same view of multiplication when he called Timothy to make disciples. **2 Timothy 2:2** says, “...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

In this same vein, Leroy Eims says, “Jesus told us to do more than just get converts. He told us to make disciples. So you must stick close to the person whom you have led to Christ, and help him grow till he takes his place among those who can vigorously and effectively advance the cause of the Lord.”⁸ Multiplication is not truly accomplished until you see disciples reproducing themselves. In my experience, the strategies being promoted by #NoPlaceLeft trainers are accomplishing the multiplication that we have always known to be the heartbeat of Jesus when he trained the twelve. **Ephesians 4:11-12** reminds pastors that our role is to ‘equip the saints for the work of ministry.’ How are you equipping the saints of your church for the ministry of multiplication?

The Fruitfulness of Dying

If we want to see the Kingdom grow, there is a necessity of surrender many pastors may be unwilling or too fearful to give. At times, its only as we loosen our white-knuckled grip on the things that we think God has given to us that we die to ourselves and start to see the bigger picture. **John 12:23-24** says, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*” This passage is primarily about the death and resurrection of Christ, but there is also application for pastors as they lead their churches. In his book, *Gaining by Losing* J.D. Greear makes the following observation: “God grows his kingdom only as we take our hands off of the little portion he has given us, ‘die’ to our control of it, and plant it into the world.”⁹

⁸LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Corp., 1978), 83.

⁹J. D Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), 18.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who is notoriously quoted as saying – *When Christ bids a man to follow him, he bids him to come and die.*¹⁰ We know this to be true about our own walks with Jesus and in encouraging a person to repent and believe for the very first time. Why do we find it hard to believe this about our churches as well? Greear, again, is incredibly helpful as he says the following:

Life for the world comes only through the death of the church, not always our physical bodily death (though it includes that sometimes), but death in the giving away of our resources. Death in the forfeiture of personal dreams. Death in our faithful proclamation of the gospel in an increasingly hostile world. Death in the sending of our precious resources, our best leaders, our best friends.¹¹

There is wisdom for us from the Proverbs connected to this conversation of dying: *“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want”* (**Proverbs 11:24**). Are you willing to ‘*die to yourself*’ and release control of the people and resources God has blessed you and your church with in order for the Kingdom of Christ to grow?

Whose Kingdom Are You Building?

At this point, you must ask yourself the question: whose kingdom am I really trying to build, my own, or the Kingdom of Christ? Your honest answer to this question can be found in your reaction to the following scenario.¹² Imagine for a moment that you and other leaders had been begging God for revival in your church and city over an extended period of time. Now imagine that after months of waiting on God to move you sensed that he was answering you in the following way: *‘I am going to send a movement of my Spirit in your area that you have never seen before, but I am going to use another church and another pastor to do it.’* What is your reaction? When I first imagined that scenario my heart sank because I knew that I was guilty of

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

¹¹ Greear, *Gaining by Losing*, 20.

¹² This thought was originally cultivated after reading some personal testimony of J.D. Greear in chapter two of his book: *Gaining by Losing*.

wanting my glory to some degree more than I wanted the LORD's. Instead my response should have been that of **Psalm 115:1**: *'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!'*

We must remember that the kingdom of Christ is so much bigger than our individual churches. Sending our members to be missionaries in our city and/or plant house churches is a win for the kingdom and a win for our local church. A multiplying, sending church not only brings glory to God, but is also the kind of healthy church that grows simply because the Spirit of God is moving! Answering this question rightly will help us shift our focus off of ourselves and onto the world Christ has commanded us to reach. This priority shift will better help us define the win and gauge our success for the LORD, "...we gauge success not in the hundreds or thousands we get inside our buildings but on the hundreds and thousands who are leaving our churches to take on the world with the disciples they are making."¹³

Psalm 67 is another helpful reminder. In it David is begging God for blessing: *"May God be gracious and bless us and make his face to shine upon us"* (verse 1). Yet the resounding gong of repeated language in this Psalm is seen in the phrase *'Let the peoples praise you O God, let all the peoples praise you'* (verses 3, 5). At the epicenter of the chiasmic structure is the heart cry of a missionary, *'Let the nations be glad and sing for joy'* (verse 4). So then, we learn that this Psalm is less about David and the nation of Israel, but more about the nations and their joy in the LORD. The blessing of God for the nation of Israel was never supposed to be for them alone, but God always had the nations in mind! I wonder if we as pastors and leaders are continuing to ask for his blessing in and over our churches and yet selfishly want to keep it for ourselves rather

¹³David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From The American Dream* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2010), 105.

than sending it out to the nations. If so, we are not building the Kingdom of Christ, but rather busying ourselves with building our own little monarchies.

Don't Be Afraid of the Risk

Because our discussion involves talking about raising up and sending out our best leaders away from the churches that we love and have invested so much in, we begin to understand the idea of risk. Will you be able to train new leaders? Will God provide people to rise up and replace the leaders that we have lost? Will you really be able to find new leaders out in the harvest before they are even converted to a new life in Christ? These questions are natural, and at the end of the day we must trust the LORD for the answers.

One answer we know for sure is that it is God's will for the kingdom of Christ to expand. When another famous missionary in history was convinced of God's will, he took risk. In **Acts 21** Paul was certain that God was calling him to take the gospel to Jerusalem, even though some would attempt to dissuade him, he obeyed the LORD. "Then Paul answered, '*What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*' And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "*Let the will of the Lord be done*" (**Acts 21:13-14**). John Piper observes in his book *Risk is Right*: "[Paul] did not know the details of what would happen there or what the outcome would be. Arrest and affliction for sure. But then what? Death? Imprisonment? Banishment? No one knew. So what did they say? They could agree on one thing: 'The will of the LORD be done.'"¹⁴

Risk is hard, but we typically understand that the greater the risk, the greater the potential reward. David Platt, the current President of the International Mission Board shares this vision when he states the following: "Discipling Christians involves propelling Christians into

¹⁴ John Piper, *Risk Is Right: Better to Lose Your Life Than to Waste It* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 28.

the world to risk their lives for the sake of others.”¹⁵ Of course this vision involves risk, but can you see the reward? The reward comes in obedience to Christ’s commands; it’s the joy that is the natural outcome of obedience (see **John 15:1-11**) and the exponential growth of the Kingdom of God in Christ! Are you leading your people by example by showing them that you are willing to take risk for the name of Christ. Maybe you view this #NoPlaceLeft training as a risk, but look at the potential reward!

FBC Roswell’s Experience in the Last Year

FBC Roswell began engaging with a #NoPlaceLeft training in the Fall of 2015. We have had plenty of failures, and some successes, but overall we feel that God is on the move. The biggest celebration is that we at FBC Roswell have seen a 400% increase of gospel conversations by our church members among lost people. A large number of our church members are engaging the harvest in a new way since our pastors and leaders started casting #NoPlaceLeft vision and training. This year we have made multiple avenues of training possible, from our VBS kids learning the 3-Circles gospel tool¹⁶, to our students getting training and doing House of Peace searches at the conclusion of the Disciple Now Weekend. We also have had a handful of weekend trainings and have had some Bible Fellowship classes pause their curriculum in order to get trained. Even our music pastor led a Wednesday night class equipping church members for leading short term discipleship in what we call “*10 Ways to Follow Jesus*” using the 3/3’rds process¹⁷ and highlighting accountability and obedience based discipleship. We are excited to see what God will continue to do as we continue to pray desperately to make #NoPlaceLeft a reality in Roswell and beyond.

¹⁵ Platt, *Radical*, 105.

¹⁶ See <https://vimeo.com/97258323> for a simple model of a gospel conversation using this tool.

¹⁷ For an introduction to this and other concepts found within a #NoPlaceLeft strategy, see the article in this edition (Oct. 2016) of www.globalmissiology.org by Chuck Wood and Carter Cox.

In regards to taking risk and seeing fruitfulness from dying, that is where things get difficult for me personally. If we are going to see a Church Planting Movement start in Roswell and spread throughout the West, we need to be willing to lose some of our best people. In our church we have a young man who has been essential in promoting #NoPlaceLeft training. As a pastor, I have to loosen my grip and say, '*LORD take him where you want him to go*'. If he can stay here while starting house churches in our city, I would be incredibly grateful. If he leaves he takes one of my wife's best friends including her talents and skills being invested in the music ministry. But most importantly, we will lose his passion for the gospel and pioneer-like giftings. Even so, if the LORD sends him out, it will be a win for the Kingdom of Christ! God sent his best by sending his Son to the earth to redeem and rescue his people, so how dare I be unwilling to send our best out from FBC Roswell?¹⁸

We also have an older couple that has been engaged in this training from day one. We are praying that they would start a new church work in the city. Its possible that they could stay plugged in at FBC, but not at the same level. Not to mention a gifted and talented young man who has the calling to lead and preach. He currently translates all of our sermons into Spanish, yet we are currently training him to go start a new church. Losing these people would be hard for sure, yet we must continue to place our faith in God to provide others to train and lead. If we are just as passionate about seeing the Kingdom of Christ grow, how could that not be attractive to new converts and leaders?

Ideas For Moving Forward

There is a practitioner on staff at a legacy church in Memphis, TN who has seen God turn the hearts of many pastors and church members towards a serious priority of making #NoPlaceLeft a reality. Kicking against the goads of my constant appeal to quote him, he

¹⁸ "Releasing Your Best for the Mission of God," *NAMB*, accessed August 24, 2016, <https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/releasing-your-best-for-the-mission-of-god>.

humbly persevered in his request to remain anonymous. Thus, for the sake of this article, I will simply refer to him as Joe. He offers three pieces of advice coming from years of experience of sifting out the best practices in his local context.¹⁹

Experimentation – Joe acknowledges that every church is going to have different experiences when using new tools for the mission. It is normal to see some attrition of believers who over the years have gotten used to being lazy. Knowing that you may walk through some failures is a healthy expectation and will help you learn from your mistakes. Anticipate attrition of new groups, disciples, and churches that are started. Some will sustain and some will not. Don't be afraid of failure since we all are "failing forward." In regards to this advice, Joe reminded me of the old adage: "If you shoot for the moon, even if you miss you will land among the stars." The point is trying something is always better than doing nothing.

Be Adaptable – He understands that different people view resources differently in their cultural context, yet still encourages flexibility. In one example Joe gave, he tells a story of another practitioner desperately praying to find a person of peace in the mission field and not finding one until the last day of their trip. So, in the spirit of being adaptable, he simply adjusted his schedule to the schedule of the harvest. This man cancelled his plane flight understanding that his investment in the kingdom was worth more than the cost of his plane ticket. Imagine applying this concept in your local church when it comes to your strategy for missions and discipleship. How can you re-appropriate your time and resources in an effort to maximize your people for the mission of Christ?

Exponential Mindset – Joe mentioned that far too often churches and leaders have an incremental mindset, which says '*we will try this new thing for a time, but if we don't see results within that timeframe, we will scrap it all and start over.*' In contrast, the exponential mindset

¹⁹Anonymous (Joe). Interview with Aaron Colyer. *Personal Interview*. Memphis, TN (via FaceTime), August 2016

pushes through the dark times of kingdom laboring until the wind blows into the sail of your efforts. Engage the lost, train the saved, share the gospel like a virus, train apprentices to obey all that Jesus commanded, gather them into healthy reproducing communities and develop reproducing leaders. Remember how Jesus persevered through the temptation of Satan in the wilderness resulting in **Luke 4:14**, "*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.*" Don't relent! Expect breakthrough!

Conclusion

In closing, I want to leave you with the counsel of an expert. Steve Smith, author of *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, offers the following advice after the last two decades of seeing churches in the West get serious about evangelism and discipleship.²⁰ In a recent interview Steve said, "Since 1999 I have seen churches implement these strategies across the globe. In all that time, I have never seen a legacy church fall apart. In fact, it is the opposite. Churches that adopt these strategies always grow in size in addition to starting a multitude of new churches!"²¹ In that conversation, he continued to passionately cast vision for legacy churches. His prayer is to see these established churches turn into church planting catalyst. Ask God to give you a vision that is so much bigger than just your church. Can you imagine making your church a training base that does not just influence your community, but expands to the ends of the earth?

²⁰See Steve Smith's book, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution: The Story Behind the World's Fastest Growing Church Planting Movement and How It Can Happen in Your Community!* for additional resources in regards to implementing a #NoPlaceLeft strategy in your church.

²¹ Smith, Steve. Interview with Aaron Colyer. *Personal Interview*. Houston, TX (via FaceTime), August 2016

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