

**Another Look at Successful Church Planting Movements:
What Does It Suggest for the Traditional Church?
By Bob Young**

Charles Kiser writes a blog at www.inthestoryline.com. Kiser is a church planter who is working to start a new church in Uptown Dallas that can connect with young adults who live in the Downtown, Uptown and Oaklawn areas of Dallas. He writes, “We dream that this church will release young professionals in the area to use their influence and capabilities for the purpose of participating in God’s restorative work in the city of Dallas.” You can read about the work at his blog and at the church’s website.

Earlier this year (May 18, 2009), he wrote a report about a Church Planting Movement (CPM) workshop he attended. I planned to write about this earlier, but the information is still fresh and relevant. You can read the entire blog along with more church planting information online. I summarize, quote, and reflect.

In May, Kiser attended a four-day workshop focused on Church Planting Movements (CPMs) with David Watson of CityTeam Ministries. Mission Resource Network hosted the event. Watson is a former church planter in Northern India, where 40,000 churches have begun in the past 15 years. He is now a strategist and trainer for an ever-growing network of approximately 200,000 churches throughout the world. These churches, according to Watson, average about 63 members per church—12.6 million new believers in the past 15-20 years. By comparison, Churches of Christ count about 40,000 churches and 5 million believers worldwide. Watson’s work is featured in a book by David Garrison (*Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*).

Watson’s perspective on church planting is seen in “21 Critical Elements” of CPMs. Kiser provides his own description of the list with the disclaimer that it may not be Watson’s exact list. Here are some significant factors that make CPMs successful. My point in writing is that they are important in any church anywhere. Read, contemplate, and dream.

- Group process is more important than individual process
- Prayer
- Focus on Scripture, inductive Bible study processes (“Discovery Bible Study”)
- Focus on households and existing social units rather than individuals
- Making disciples of Jesus rather than converts to a religion or a particular church of congregation
- Obedience to the commands of Jesus rather than accepting and obeying doctrinal distinctives
- Give lots of people access to the church, develop relationships with non-believers
- Ministry focus is on meeting people’s needs which leads to evangelism
- Continuing contacts and sense of timing to know when people are ready
- Intentionality and planning
- Finding persons of peace, i.e. receptive, influential persons who provide gateways for a social unit coming to Christ
- Culturally and contextually appropriate evangelism, i.e. communicating the good news in ways that make sense to people in their particular cultural context
- Starting more churches (Watson defines as “groups of baptized believers in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that gather to worship, fellowship and nurture one another, and, outside of gatherings, endeavor to obey all the commands of Christ in order to transform families and communities.”)
- Reproduction at every level—disciples, leaders, and churches
- Indigenous leaders, i.e. cultural insiders are the best church planters
- The work of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture

- Persecution
- Mentoring which is the work of developing the whole person
- Self-support, in Watson's view there are seldom paid ministers, no buildings to maintain
- Redeeming the culture, not just individuals
- Awareness of spiritual warfare

According to Watson, the basic process of starting churches is as follows:

- church planter establishes access through friendships with disconnected people
- church planter serves and loves these disconnected friends
- church planter identifies a person of peace out of those friends
- church planter works with the person of peace to invite the social unit (family or affinity group) into a 15-30 week inductive Bible study led by the person of peace or someone else from the social unit
- the group decides to follow Jesus and becomes a church
- new churches send out church planters to start the process again

I appreciate Kiser's report because he suggests some items that those of us who are serious about church growth, church planting, and evangelism can incorporate in our own spiritual lives and ministries. In these he distills some principles for application within the context of Restoration churches.

- **Prayer.** Watson mentions that the common denominator among their most fruitful church planters is prayer. Some spend 3-4 concentrated hours each day in prayer. Remember that all of them have jobs outside of church planting, yet they still make time for this kind of prayer. We are not praying enough about the most important things in the world. Kiser concludes, "I will, therefore, make a plan to pray more. And then pray more."
- **Church planting is a lifestyle.** (I would add that Christianity is a lifestyle.) It is not a job; it is a lifestyle. People must be around us enough to see consistency between our private and public life. We find it easy to compartmentalize our role as a Christian (or as church planter), rather than seeing this as an extension of our lifestyle. This is not to say that boundaries with family and solitude are not important; they are part of the lifestyle. But, we must invite friends into all parts of our lives.
- **People of peace.** This concept is probably new to many. Some of us have been tuned into the concept of people of peace but have not pursued it fervently. I saw this principle at work over 20 years ago, but have not cultivated it. I am not certain it is always possible. I saw it work in a specific setting where a group of folks were highly connected. Today social groups are more fragmented and disconnected. Families are less likely to live in the same geographic area (very few extended family units). The concept may have some applications in smaller, rural areas where we often seen extended family units and people of peace as a negative rather than a positive. The point is at least this: we must begin conversations with a new set of folks. Kiser concludes, "I will commit to pray, look for and draw out such people of peace God might be raising up in our midst."
- **Obedience-oriented conversation about Scripture.** The focus of many contemporary endeavors is the inductive study of Scripture that seeks to discern how one will be obedient to the word they are hearing from God. In our conversations about the Bible, we must recognize the process and not jump ahead: observation, interpretation, application.
- **Reproduction.** We value reproduction, but others push this value even harder. Reproduction demands mentoring: model, equip, watch, and leave. Watson says this process can take as little as 3-4 months in a new church. Mentors model only once or twice before allowing others to take over. This challenges our current views of leadership, responsibility, and accountability. But we must also be cautious about rapid reproduction for the sake of reproduction. Many efforts are slow and frustrating (and were also in the NT). We want to connect to God, but growth as an end goal and justification is misguided. Bigger is not necessarily better. Cancer grows and reproduces at a rapid rate, but it not a good thing. Rapid

growth is not the end goal; the goal is faithful embodiment of the gospel. God is the one who grows the church, not a certain process.

- **Maintain a high view of Scripture.** We must distinguish what is biblical and what is cultural given that Scripture itself is a culturally conditioned document. This challenges us to define our interpretational guidelines, but is essential for inductive Bible study to move ahead to its logical conclusion.
- **Maintain a high view of church.** The church is the embodiment of the gospel as a community. We are struggling in our current context because (in the name of assimilation) we are trying to understand how/if people can belong before they believe. The short answer is no, yet Paul seems to assume in 1 Corinthians 14 that unbelievers were observing or participating in the life of the church and even encountering God as a result.
- **High view of teaching.** While we should seek the best teachers possible, we have belittled and demeaned teaching by removing it from the practical realm. Give me a teacher who understands life. Some understanding of Scripture is also essential, but teaching cannot be focused only on Scripture. The teaching role is very apparent in Scripture, both in contexts with non-believers and believers.