



Center for United States Missions

Mission Moments



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God's Genius Plan for Church Multiplication

By Rev. Dr. Peter Meier



When Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave his Church a vision and a mission. We call it the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20). The vision is that his Kingdom will permeate every nook and cranny to the ends of the earth. The mission is for his followers to make disciples as they are going about their every-day lives. The means to accomplish this was also given – Baptism and the Word of God.

St. Peter in his first Epistle, pictures how God's mission will be carried out, "Peter, an apostle (sent one) of Jesus Christ: to the elect exiles (chosen and sent ones) dispersed (scattered, sent out) in Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you."

It's genius.

The sent ones (believers) are scattered throughout the world, in various communities and neighborhoods, according to God's plan. We have been called and set apart by the Spirit through our baptism into Christ. God's grace and peace is ours. It's multiplied again and again to us. And we are the ones sent out to multiply it, that is, to share God's grace and peace with others as we are going about our daily lives. That's the basic element of making disciples. As new disciples are made, they gather together in groups of disciples (church) to grow in faith as they study and share the Word of God and receive His gifts in the Sacraments.

God's plan is genius. It's simple, reproducible. And it works.

The question I have is, *Why did he entrust his genius plan to sinners like us?* How are we doing when it comes to fulfilling *his vision*, engaging in *his mission*?

At the recent Exponential Conference, church planters and network leaders were challenged to think beyond addition to multiplication and hyper-multiplication. Disciple-making is *addition* of one new disciple or a new family at a time. This is the job of the local church, the people of God in their daily lives and spheres of influence. At the same time, local churches must think *multiplication* which involves releasing and sending people to plant new churches in new places to reach new people.

Addition takes place locally as new disciples are made. This is an essential part of God's genius plan. *Intentional multiplication* is also an essential part of God's plan to reach new groups of people with the Gospel. Multiplication involves sending Christian people to new places to plant new churches which will add new disciples and will intentionally multiply by releasing and sending people to plant in still new locations. Genius!

Jesus' goal is not to build bigger churches and to gather bigger crowds. That's not bad. We praise God when it happens. But when it does happen, the bigger church and larger crowd must *plan to release and send* in order to multiply according to God's intent. His goal is that his Church will fill every nook and cranny of the world! That requires releasing and sending on our part.

Merely adding and accumulating will not get the job done.

Today, the vast majority of churches in the US (80-90%) exist in a *survival culture*. The average church has below 100 members and struggles to survive. They focus on gathering and keeping the next few members, rather than on raising up and sending the next 10 leaders. They often operate with a "scarcity" mentality, protecting their resources. They are stuck.

Another group of churches have an *addition-growth culture*. About 10-20% of US churches are in this group. They are often growing in attendance, are externally-focused, making an impact in their communities. Some have added new multi-site locations. They are considering adding new staff, starting a building project, increasing support for missions and mercy work. How many of have also considered, *What if we plant a new church before we build? ...What if we plant a new church before we add staff? ...What if our next staff is a church planter? ...What if we designate a generous portion of our tithe for church planting?*

Less than .005% of US churches are actually multiplying churches, according to Leadership Network and LifeWay Research. These are churches that have multiplication at the core of their values and practices. They may be churches with as few as 100 members. They define success by their "sending capacity" rather than their "seating capacity." These churches have a culture of multiplication which tells the stories and celebrates the behaviors of multiplication. These churches will plant a church before they build or buy their own first building. They will send a church planter before adding their second and third staff members. They will commit a generous percentage of their tithes to church planting and prioritize that commitment. They will plan to start or join a network of churches who collaborate to plant new churches, and thereby accomplish more than any of these churches could do on their own.

God has a genius plan. It works. It has worked since Jesus' ascension. It begins with leaders who value multiplication as well as addition, and who want to be part of God's genius plan to call and send his people to every community and neighborhood until every nook and cranny of the world has seen the Kingdom of God in its midst. It begins with you.



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Moment Extras

Questions for Reflection

1. Would you say that your church has a culture of scarcity, addition, or multiplication? Why? What are the behaviors which describe your culture? (for an in-depth description of these cultures and how to change your culture, see the [free Exponential e-book](#) by Todd Wilson, *Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication*).
2. How might God have strategically placed you to be a part of his genius plan? What is your role as one who is called and sent by the Holy Spirit? Pray about this.
3. What difference would it make if your church embraced the values and behaviors (culture) of multiplication? What would be different about the way you operate?
4. What are the first steps you will take to learn more about the culture of multiplication and how to shift to that culture in your church?
5. Consider this list of [25+ Church Multiplication Models](#). Many of these can be done by small churches who have the passion to multiply. Which one could work in your context (or a nearby context)?

Resources You Can Use

[Exponential.org](#) has many free e-books which focus on the cultures and behaviors of multiplication. Especially check out the following:

- Josh Burnett, *Start a Movement – Plant Pregnant*
- Kevin Cox, *Small Church, Big Impact: A Call for Small Churches to Multiply*
- JD Greear, *Sending Capacity, not Seating Capacity: Why a Church Gains the Most When It Sends Its Best*
- Ralph Moore, *You Can Multiply Your Church: One Journey to Radical Multiplication*
- Larry Walkemeyer, *Flow: Unleashing a River of Multiplication in Your Church, City, and World*
- Todd Wilson, *Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication*
- K.P. Yohannan, *His Burden is Light: Experiencing Multiplication through Letting Go*

[Ed Stetzer & Warren Bird, *Viral Churches*](#). Based on a study that was commissioned by the Leadership Network, this book reveals the best practices in church planting and uncovers the common threads among them. The authors clearly show leaders how to plant churches that create a multiplication movement and offer inspiration for them to do so. The book addresses their questions about what to do next in their church planting strategies, in light of research on what's actually working best.

[Ralph Moore, *How to Multiply Your Church*](#). Existing churches simply cannot *add* enough new believers. The good news is that by *multiplying*--steadily and strategically planting new churches that, in turn, plant new churches--the global Church creates more of what Ralph Moore calls "harvest points." Moore shows church leaders why multiplication is the key to growing God's global kingdom in their communities, and offers proven methods for implementing multiplication in existing churches.

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