

Chapter 1

Reality Check

Is what you're living for worth Jesus dying for?
~ Oscar Muriu

I'm assuming that you're reading this book because you're passionate about seeing God's Kingdom grow and advance, and are committed to becoming a Level 5 Multiplier. Making such a life- and church-changing shift isn't easy. It requires us to face some sobering realities and confront how we define success, and then discern how that definition is driving our current scorecard.

Allow this chapter to be a self-assessment of sorts to help you reflect on your church's foundation. Is it a foundation aligned to produce disciples and multiplication? Or are you set up to produce converts and cultural Christians? What adjustments are needed?

The Search for 'Radically Multiplying' Churches

It's easy to find wildly successful churches doing all the right things for addition growth. It's far more difficult to find radically multiplying churches like Ralph Moore's Hope Chapel that are experiencing and igniting multiplication growth. Today, more than 2,300 churches can trace their roots to the seven churches Ralph started in the 1970s. That's radical multiplication! Far more significant than the current numbers is the reality that these 2,300 churches have multiplication so deeply embedded in their DNA that the resulting additional churches—which will be started over the next 10 years—will likely be mind-blowing.

Let's define "radically multiplying" in a way that's so different and so aggressive—compared with our current paradigms and measures of success—that few people would argue if it were addition or multiplication. The fruit of these churches is such a testimony that these congregations are radically multiplying without the need for a definition.

Multipliers: Leading Beyond Addition

Several years ago, our Exponential team set out to identify ten radically multiplying U.S. churches—just ten that we could highlight and learn from. With more than 350,000 churches in the United States, that ten represents just .003 percent of churches. We spent months looking and inquiring, but we couldn't find ten. We couldn't find even three.

Something is just not right. If the Church is made to multiply, why don't we see it happening?

With most every problem comes the promise of opportunity and change. As a leader, you're perfectly positioned, amid all your struggles and tensions, to be a change maker and a Multiplier. That may sound counter-intuitive, but it's true. That change starts with embracing new ways of thinking. Moving the needle from less than 4 percent of U.S. churches ever reproducing to greater than 10 percent will take a groundswell of next-generation leaders like you who will look beyond the prevailing measures of addition growth and adopt new scorecards of multiplication growth.

You are creating and cultivating a culture in your church. There is no stopping it. Just as the sun rises and sets each day, your core values and convictions are always there, transforming your thinking into actions that functionally form your church's unique culture. How you face and maneuver through the tensions you experience might be the most significant blessings you have in shaping your church's culture and DNA.

Like the small rudder on a large ship directing the ship's course, the stewardship of the culture/DNA in your church may be the most profound role you play as its leader. Unfortunately, changing an existing culture is not as easy as simply adjusting a rudder. The process of building a healthy culture of multiplication starts with courageous leaders getting honest about their current scorecard.

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Our Current State of Affairs

In our 2016 anchor book, *Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church*, Exponential laid out five different levels of multiplication to help church leaders determine where they are and where they want to go. Ultimately, these multiplication levels help answer the questions, “Where are we now, and how can we know if we’re on the right track?”

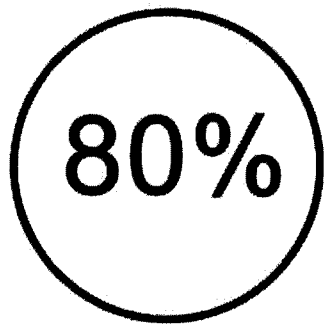
As Ed Stetzer says in his foreword to the book, “When leaders grasp the next step to take, it enables movements of multiplication to not only become a goal but an attainable goal and, at some point, a *realized* goal.”

Below, we identify the five levels or cultures of multiplication. Read the descriptions and then go to becomingfive.org to take Exponential’s FREE online assessment. It will help you identify your church’s current level of multiplication and to discern the culture you’re aspiring to create in the future.

Level 1: Subtracting

Approximately 80 percent of U.S. churches are subtracting (attendance is decreasing) or have plateaued. This 80 percent stat

Subtraction and Plateau



Scarcity Thinking

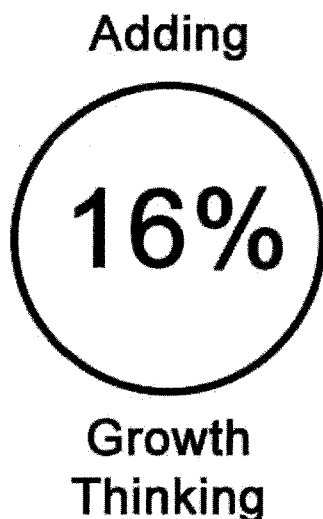
tells us that the vast majority of churches in the United States exist in a survival culture characterized by scarcity thinking. These churches are living in a culture that simply makes it difficult for them to even *think* about multiplication.

Typically, Level 1 leaders live with financial tensions that produce a scarcity mindset, which shapes their culture and how they approach ministry. These churches struggle to pay a full-time pastor and then strive toward being able to afford their own facility. For leaders of Level 1 churches,

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planning doesn't look too much beyond getting done what needs to be done for the next couple of weeks. The senior pastor is running hard to keep up with everything, and the exhaustive to-do list doesn't leave much time for developing leaders. The church depends on the weekend gatherings for financial viability. So it's not surprising that the weekend services become the focal point. While there may be talk of growth, most of the energy is spent on keeping up with the needs of people and running Sunday services. Most strategic and vision conversations about the future end with, "We will [fill in the blank] someday when we can afford it." Unfortunately, that elusive day rarely comes for most Level 1 churches and leaders.

Level 2: Plateaued Level 2 leaders are in churches that have survived and may be growing. But these leaders' mindset lies in a state of tension between scarcity and growth. They have growth in their sights with Level 3 at the pinnacle, but their scarcity thinking constrains growth and multiplication. Their focus and aspirations center on growth and addition, and their primary characterizations are, "tension, scarcity, survival, and growth." Level 2 churches are often torn by the tyranny of the *or*: "Now that we're financially stable and holding our own, do we put money into staff *or* a permanent facility?" Lacking vision and values for multiplication, the priority of actually releasing resources to multiply just doesn't measure up to the perceived reward at the top of Level 3.



Level 3: Adding *Some 15 to 20 percent of churches that find themselves at Level 3 are growing by addition, not multiplication.*

A Level 3 leader prioritizes growth and is seeing attendance increase. Many Level 3 churches are often externally focused, making an impact in their communities, and many have added multisite venues. Most of the largest and fastest-growing churches that make our "envy lists" are actually Level 3,

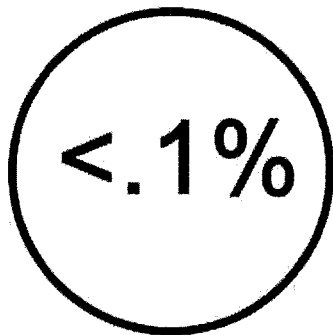
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and their leaders are conquerors with a demonstrated record of taking the next hill. They've grown accustomed to finding and solving problems that limit growth. While these leaders don't *want* to fundamentally be about the numbers, they also know that numbers matter. Income is directly proportional to attendance, and the number of volunteers needed increases as attendance increases.

Level 4: Reproducing *Approximately 4 percent of U.S. churches reproduce programmatically as part of their growth.*

Level 4 leaders sense that there is something more than attendance growth and are drawn to a future that's more about planting new orchards than putting more trees in their orchard. However, while they may aspire to move to Level 5 and might be making progress, too often the tensions and forces pulling them back to Level 3 limit their ability to move more fully to Level 5. Level 4 churches are as passionate about leadership development systems that intentionally produce leaders who "go," as they are about producing systems that develop leaders to stay. They are birthing and taking ownership of a strong value of multiplication, including putting behaviors and practices in place that are consistent with Level 5 churches.

Multiplication



Movements Thinking

Level 5: Multiplying *Currently represented by less than .005 percent of U.S. churches.*

The numbers don't lie. Very few U.S. churches experience a multiplication culture. Level 5 Multipliers pursue planting churches as a normal and regular part of their existence. They continually develop and send people to plant. These leaders plant hundreds of churches and send thousands of people to be part of church-planting teams over their lifespan. Their scorecard is more about "who and how many have been sent" than "how many have been accumulated." Level 5 leaders see their

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church through a Kingdom lens. Their burden is more for Kingdom capacity than for local church capacity. These rare churches develop a DNA so strongly centered on multiplication that they would have to *try* not to multiply.

Churches with a multiplication culture have broken free from the bondage of Level 3 addition thinking and have put practices in place that close the gap between multiplication behaviors and aspirations. They are courageous leaders who are more burdened by building Kingdom capacity than local church capacity. They are Level 5 Multipliers.

*To read full lists of characteristics for each multiplication level, see Appendix A in our free eBook *Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church*, available via exponential.org.*

Addicted to Addition

In their book, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (based on findings from Leadership Network's State of Church Planting study), authors Warren Bird and Ed Stetzer give us a vital reality check: "In spite of increased interest in church-planting ventures, there has yet to be a documented church-planting movement, which involves the rapid multiplication of churches rather than the simple addition of churches."¹

Stetzer and Bird go so far as to call this pursuit of growth an "addiction."

"Our 'viral church' idea is about falling in love with multiplication," they write, "and abandoning what seems to be an addiction to addition."²

As a leader, are you addicted to addition growth? Think hard before you answer. What does your current scorecard reveal about your motives? This question might be the single most important one you ask. Our motives tend to define our priorities, behaviors

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and ultimately, our results. At the highest level, are you driven by addition, reproduction, or multiplication? Are you satisfied being the very best Level 3 church you can be, growing as big as you can and reaching as many people as possible? Or are you seeking to move to Levels 4 and 5 that require a new scorecard? (We'll talk more about motives and your personal scorecard in chapters 6 and 7).

The bottom line is that we're facing an epidemic of addition lust. We've defined the measure of success in the U.S. Church based on the Level 3 scorecard versus Level 5. As missiologist Alan Hirsch writes in *Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church*:

“Our definition of success seldom reaches beyond addition-growth. This is important because we generally get what we're aiming for. If all our exemplary churches and leaders are at Level 3, then our standards of success are in fact limiting our missional potential. We need to think much bigger and reach much higher.”³

As we look toward 2018 and what it means to be a hero maker (a Level 5 Multiplier), we come face-to-face with the truth that our addition-focused scorecards are holding us back from becoming leaders who multiply disciples that birth new communities of faith. Our current scorecard stands in the way of us becoming Level 5 Multipliers.

Regardless of the level you find yourself at today, the important thing is to consider where you are, where you'd like to go, and what you need to change today to move yourself in the right direction. Part of that change will require you to honestly test the foundation of your church. Is Jesus truly the foundation? Or have you built your church on other things? In the coming chapters, we'll look at why our foundation is so key to creating a scorecard that sets us up to become Level 5 Multipliers.

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Putting It Into Practice

- *Why are you and your team responding to and engaging in the multiplication conversation now?*
- *How do you measure growth in your church? How do you measure health?*
- *If you wrote your church history as a story, what would the major chapters be about? Who would the heroes be?*
- *In what specific ways do the time and financial resources necessary for overcoming growth barriers in your church compete with multiplication activities? In what ways could they be complementary?*
- *Why is a reality check vitally important for replacing unhealthy addition-focused activities with multiplication activities and values?*