

CHAPTER 2

Five Benefits of Multiplication

As we continue to ask, “Why multiply?” we must move beyond imperatives to benefits. These are related to the forces pressing us to multiply, but we’d do best if we see them as opportunities to grasp rather than reactions to pressure.

1. Multiplication Expands our Reach and Go Capacity

By investing too narrowly in one place, we skip over opportunities in other locations—be it across town or halfway around the world.

The churches that I pastored in Hawaii illustrate these opportunities. We have people from other cultures who worship with us. One man, Junji Ono, who moved to Hawaii from Japan launched a string of Japanese-language churches in Hawaii, Texas and Japan, One of our local church plants planted churches

in Thailand. The church I most recently pastored is looking at mandarin speaking Chinese immigrants through the eyes of its mandarin speaking members. The goal is not to bring these people into the church but to plant a microchurch in their midst. The same goes for recent Filipino immigrants.

Recently, my friend Corey (who is my successor at Hope Chapel Honolulu) asked our congregation to lift their hands if they spoke a language other than English at home. About eight percent of the people raised their hands. Corey then explained that if we truly see ourselves as a global/local church, we should begin planting microchurches via our family connections. From there, we will find access to other nations.

While recent immigrant cultures remain under-evangelized a few individuals function as token members of churches representing the dominant culture. This can give us a false sense of well-being—we feel that we are reaching the “world at our doorstep.” But this approach falls short of real effectiveness. Equipping these “bridge people” to lead microchurches would give us increased opportunity for penetrating unique cultures right in our own backyards.

Microchurches also reach across generations. I found it easy to disciple the millennials in our church. Most are looking for understanding about finance and marital issues, this gives older people access to their lives. But beyond that, we’ve been grooming several of them to launch microchurches among their peers. Their natural craving for intimacy and their bent toward friendship circles make this a no-brainer. Microchurches eliminate much of this. It is only when a microchurch grows explosively that the congregation faces these problems. Microchurches work in Nepal

and New York. They will work where you live if you give them a shot.

PS150, planted by Randall and Annie Kalama, serves a half-dozen ethnic groups that include prostitutes and drug addicts among those they disciple. And many of these people have been redeemed and returned to society. The church mixes privileged middle-class people with the hopelessly homeless. Microchurches force people into relationships. Love, when it enters the picture, crosses all boundaries.

2. Multiplication Helps Reach the Culture

Evangelical Christians are a cultural minority. But that means there is great opportunity for disciple making, evangelism and church multiplication. Persecution in China forced the church to emulate a simpler approach that more closely approximates the book of Acts. The result was fantastic growth. We could do the same but without the persecution.

We are not persecuted in the U.S., but “Christendom” is a thing of the past. In a minority position we must rely on relationships and discipling to further the gospel. Between 2007 and 2014, the religiously unaffiliated or “nones” in the United States grew from 16 percent to 23.⁹ That’s one percent per year forsaking God. We can wring our hands over this, or we can see this as a signal that our culture is ripe for a spiritual awakening. Couple that attitude with the thought that new churches evangelize more quickly than older ones and we have a roadmap into the future.

As we’ve become a cultural minority, our mission field has actually increased. There are 224 languages represented in the L.A. County public schools.¹⁰ What a incredible opportunities we

possess! Most larger American congregations are middle-class, white or African-American.¹¹ Simultaneously, we have pockets of immigrants who are looking for friends to welcome them into our country. Microchurches could reap a huge harvest by adapting to fit the cultural expectations of these people. This invasive stance is a direct response to Jesus' words in Acts 1:8.

These opportunities to multiply churches transcend race. As much as we hate to admit it, our culture is divided along class lines much like Europe. We may not label anyone as “nobility,” but we act as if they are. The problem is that these classes don't mix as well as we wish. Middle-class churches don't do particularly well at integrating ultra-wealthy, or very poor people. To reach unique pockets of people, we must tap into their cultures through whatever relationships we have. Microchurches provide an excellent venue for multiplication among people a little unlike us.

An effective church should look like and reflect the people in the community. The typical American church-planting project brings in outsiders to plant. Then they attract a following through advertising that brings people in the front door. Most *missional* efforts target people through ministry to physical needs. Even so, the abundance of U.S. church planting remains in the middle-class. Microchurches allow for cross-pollination. I have a friend who recently retired as the president of a large bank. He could plant a microchurch behind the gates of his exclusive community. Again, the microchurch can touch a unique pocket of unreached people.

Chris Backert is the national director of Fresh Expressions US, an international movement of missionary disciples cultivating new kinds of church alongside existing congregations to more effectively engage our growing post-Christian society. In a recent press interview, Backert shares, “We're working with a church in

Reading, Pennsylvania, that has six or seven microchurches, all led by lay people. One is a microchurch of hunters, another is a gun club, one for bikers, one for artists that meets in an art studio, and one that calls itself ‘the house church for sinners.’¹²

My friend, Brian Sanders, leads a mixed bunch of microchurches, in Tampa, Florida. Their network of microchurches reaches into every corner of society. Some have grown beyond a size that would cause them to function as micro. To do this, they work with leaders that most pastors you know would reject. The thing about them that stands out is their willingness to embrace diversity within the boundaries of New Testament teaching.

3. Multiplication Carries Unique Financial Advantages

Currently, American churches spend a lot of money on church programs, short-term missions, and traditional missionaries overseas. This is fruitful, but expensive.

In the US, we spend approximately \$1.5 million for every Baptism (including buildings, programs and salaries to get them there).¹³ That translates to the cost of five 2018 Ferrari 488s, or the total cost of shelter, food, water and education for 500 refugees from ISIS living in Jordan—and that’s just the cost of a single baptism in the U.S.

Boomers and Silents provide most church income. Sixty-nine percent of all charitable donations come from people currently above the age of forty-nine.¹⁴ One study suggests that over the next three decades, church income will fall by more than 70 percent due to life expectancy of these generous donors.¹⁵ This will seriously damage our ability to sustain huge mortgages,

facilities maintenance and the staff to support the programs familiar to us today.

Decrying expenses won't solve anything. Finding a better way to steward money will. We need sustainable models if we hope to recapture the hearts and minds of America.

The strength of microchurches led by freelance pastors is that they are financially sustainable from the start. Pastors disciplined by other pastors sidestep student loans. Freelance pastors need little or no salaries. Smaller groups built around circles of mutuality rather than triangles of hierarchy will find low cost alternatives to large church campuses. And all of the above would allow church planting by capacity building, one disciple at a time, rather than the need to accumulate ever larger crowds to support the financial demands of Level 3 growth.

Level 5 multiplication requires liberated financial systems whereby growth can be scaled without a proportional demand for additional financial resources. The microchurch offers this benefit.

Vocational Costs

One of the problems facing the American church is the cost of fulltime, vocational salaries. This works well in the Level 3 church where increased attendance can fund increasing salaries.

However, this co-dependence between full-time staffing and church growth limits the church's ability to make investments in multiplication.

The less obvious problem is that of the pastor who *struggles* to remain a single-vocation pastor. That can lead to the need for money as the primary priority in the congregation. There are vocational pastors the world over, but they are not the norm. The extremely gifted leader will be paid a fulltime salary as are the

pastors in European lands where the government underwrites the church. But, across the globe most pastors serve as volunteers or with limited remuneration.

The relationship between church multiplication and evangelism in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the issue of vocational or bivocational pastorates cannot be ignored. The possibility of microchurches led by freelance pastors who maintain a separate career is enticing. I'll get into more about freelance church planters a little later.

Church Planting Costs

Even the way we plant churches is expensive. This is largely driven by the full-time salaries discussed above. The norm is three years of full-time salary and insurance for the planter plus a generous budget to underwrite operations. One denomination told me that they regularly invest \$350,000 in every church they plant (2018 costs). I met with one group that is more frugal than others. They spend just \$125,000 per church plant, launching more than two dozen churches in a decade-and-a-half. Their largest plant numbers 600 people, but the overall average attendance is 40 during the first two years. Some of their churches have reproduced, but the parent organization underwrites these projects. They do better than most, but the model will be hard to sustain if they lose the fundraising exploits of their current leader. And, if you consider bang-for-the buck, both models reap extremely expensive results.

Big, expensive churches are here to stay. We must appreciate the ministry they do and the heritage they give. But, if those, mostly Level 3, congregations could see themselves as sponsors of microchurch movements the tendency toward exponential growth would be unavoidable. The very angst we feel over the

appropriation of funds could lead to new wineskins for a new day. This is a positive that we cannot ignore.

4. Multiplication Opens Doors to Millennials

The United States is a vast mission field. Ed Stetzer estimates that there are 584 “unreached and unengaged” people groups in our country.¹⁶ The standouts are among the millennial generation. Think of them as a “millennial mission field.” Their numbers are greater than the population of many nations.

No monolith, Millennials comprise a multiplicity of unreached people groups. But some generalization will be fruitful for the sake of brevity.

The greatest growth among religious “nones” is among the millennial generation.¹⁷ They aren’t “returning to church” in early adulthood, as boomers did. Many were never there in the first place. They espouse liberal values, setting them apart from mainstream evangelical Christians. This renders them critical of large church budgets for property and program while poverty exists at home and abroad. Liberal views also cause evangelical Millennials to question the church’s lack of outreach to everyone from illegal immigrants to the LGBT community.

Millennials crave relationships and value them over expensive programming. Evangelical Millennials want a church that is a relationship rather than an event.

This generation wants ministry that looks more collegial than hierarchical. They thrive on mutuality rather than prescriptions for success. This almost demands smaller circles of people meeting for mutual support and devotion Jesus’ mission from Luke 18. Much of this should take place in gatherings around food and fellowship

(Acts 2:41-47). Much of Jesus’ ministry happened over food. The most often used metaphor for the church in the New Testament is “family.” Families tend to do life over food and drink.

Charlie Dunn is a seminary graduate and former campus pastor of a megachurch. Today he effectively reaches millennials. During a stint in retail, he found that inviting people to church went nowhere: “Early on, I would try to get my co-workers to come to church, because that’s how I understood my role in evangelism,” he says. “I was part of a great and exciting church to which I wanted my co-workers to connect.”

They didn’t respond. As Charlie says, “Actually they did! They responded by saying they had no interest in going to a church, no matter how good the teaching, music or programming.” But... they would come to Charlie’s house for a cookout, birthday party, or game. “They were willing to study the Bible for five hours at a time, grill out, have a drink, and be a family together.”

When he set out to plant a church, Charlie felt unsure if he could accomplish the big splash usually associated with the project. He concluded that the “community” he built through neighborhood gatherings and daily gospel-centered relationships—the everyday stuff of life—was the seed of a church. And perhaps an even better representation of the family of God than a building or formal gathering.

In 2015, Charlie launched Hub Church in South Boston, Massachusetts. Born of deep relationships, the church currently exists as a network of three missional communities, with the intent of each person “learning to live in the family of Jesus by enjoying, embodying and extending Christ’s freedom and family, on a daily basis,” Charlie says. All the missional communities gather for

public services three Sundays a month while scattering to serve the community on the fourth.¹⁸

Ryan Paterson is an intentionally bivocational/freelance pastor and partner in a successful executive recruiting and coaching business in San Jose, California.¹⁹ He kicked off a string of microchurches among Millennials and Generation Z. When I met Ryan, he had launched a string of three churches and proudly proclaimed that two more would come online within the month we met.

As with others touching Millennials, Ryan points us toward close relational disciple making built around food. “I settled on gatherings around a meal, teaching as dialogue and discussion, and hospitality-based good works and mission,” he explains, “Take a moment to think of the people you have had in your home (or are friends with people in your church) that are not likely to walk in the doors of a traditional church building because of their pain, shame, and hang-ups about God, religion and church. This is an opportunity to see the gospel leap to these unreached places and for churches to form as a natural result of people coming to faith in Jesus where they are.

Consider Cornelius, Lydia, the Ethiopian eunuch, and so many others who brought their families, their households, and their nations to faith right where they were.”

For an entire generation to live outside the gospel is not new. God rescued our country through spiritual awakenings in earlier times. He is capable of overriding the culture now as He did then. He brought new life when despair was the word of the day. If we change our approach to this relationship we call church, we may well see an awakening that we cannot imagine.

This is a time for hopefulness and innovation. We can continue to blast away with our heavy and expensive productions, or we can tailor our delivery methods to the needs and desires of this generation. Smaller churches are well-positioned to meet the needs for both information and intimacy:

5. Multiplication Preserves Wineskins

We must plant churches if we expect to disciple our culture. A spiritual awakening simply cannot happen if all the fruit must find its way into old wineskins. Respectfully speaking, an old wineskin may be very spiritually alive, but it is old, by virtue of time and its cultural attachment to another day and generation.

Primary revival leadership usually emerges among frustrated people moving from the ragged edges of the church. These people collect a few followers and begin seeking God. The common ingredient for fellowship occurs when the Holy Spirit meets them in an unusual way through the outpouring of His gifts. They sense the power of God and see it as a mandate to change the church.

The group invents new ways to serve their community. The vocabulary communicates biblical truth through simpler, more up-to-date terminology. Religious formality is nearly nonexistent. The new ways are not so much tools of evangelism but implements of nurture. There is common ground among the believers. People take the Scriptures literally and cling to them in their daily life. There is often an accompanying presentation of God's power through miracles, spiritual gifts or worship experience. The new group bursts with enthusiasm while the established church enjoys business as usual. This is exactly how we got to where we are today. What I described above started back in the 1970s Jesus

Movement with churches led by natural entrepreneurs and gifted speakers. It morphed into the mega/multisite churches that guide us today. But it is a response to a different generation. We need new wineskins for a new generation.

We are not called to destroy old wineskins with new wine. Spiritual awakenings give birth to new ideas and different traditions. They engender new leadership that can upset a still functional, though set-in-its-ways church culture. Jesus never criticized old wineskins for being old. In fact, He said the old wine was valuable and that men would desire it over the new. He did clearly state that old wineskins would be broken by new wine and that the Father was faced with the need to preserve both the new wine and His older wineskins. We need new wineskins, today, more than at any time in the past few decades—and we need lots of them...