CHAPTER 1

Multiplication is the Logical Next Step

The great function of the church is the Great Commission: "… to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). You might summarize this as everyone on earth praying, "Thy will be done …"

Form is another matter. Both a Level 3 addition church and a Level 5 movement seek to make disciples of all nations. But the forms and strategies they implement differ significantly. Our ongoing task is to discover the most Biblically consistent, effective form to fit the function of world domination through love that works for each of us.

Multiplication is Biblical

The primary explanation for why we should shift from forms and strategies which produce addition to those resulting in multiplication is that it is biblical.

Regardless of the forms we choose, we must be faithfully committed to, and be good stewards of, Jesus' command to "go", "make" and "teach" in the Great Commission. The bulls-eye of these action words is a surrender to the Lordship of Jesus that produces transformed lives.

Arguably, the Level 3 church seeks to optimize the teaching dimension while falling short on the "go and make disciples" bit. The Level 5 multiplying church must seek the holistic intersection of all 3 commands.

In the Greek, "go" communicates, "as you are going"—suggesting that being a follower of Jesus is something we do naturally, on a regular basis. While the fruit of our faithfulness to this command produces fruit geographically to the ends of earth, it's not referring to a special "missionary mode" reserved for a few select saints. Instead, Jesus expressed this part of the Great Commission to define a way of life for His followers, a mindset to inform their understanding of what it means to be His disciples. Disciples are always in a state of readiness to engage in this mission.[4]

In its early days in Jerusalem, the Church functioned at Level 3, locally. It became a megachurch in one day and remained that way until persecution forced change. It took on Level 4 reproduction attributes (adding preaching points) only after Saul's persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19- 20). From Antioch outwards, it looks like Level 5 multiplication.

The Jerusalem church was a megachurch that almost accidentally planted churches due to persecution. The first church planters were those who ran away due to the threats of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:57-8:4). Philip got something going in Samaria and if it lasted, it became a church, though Acts mentions no Samaritan follow-through. Others spread the gospel in Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch because of the same mistreatment. There seems to have been little motivation for intentional church planting in Jerusalem.

Antioch, however, sent missionaries who planted churches. Antioch was a substantial church that intentionally commissioned some of its best leaders to take the gospel to other locations. This single congregation generated the movement in the West that we enjoy today. Real multiplication is found, not only in the wider travels of Barnabas and Saul, but specifically after Paul was stoned and left for dead in Derbe.

He and Barnabas snuck back into that city and went on preaching "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith…. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:21-23 ESV). When they appointed select disciples as elders they, themselves, became Level 5 church multipliers.

The choice is never to grow *or* to plant. It is always to do *both*. They should naturally happen together. The power is in the AND, not the tyranny of the OR.

Addition and multiplication should walk hand-in-hand. All churches should attempt growth, and all should reproduce

themselves toward new congregations. There is little merit in size for size sake. And there is nothing gained by keeping a church small. This book is *not* an argument for small over large. In fact, using a multi/micro approach, a church of 30 can reproduce as easily as a church of 3,000 (and smaller might actually make it easier).

The bottom line: Let your church grow as big as it can, but whatever its size, seek to value multiplication as the intentional and natural outcome of healthy, Biblical disciple making. Do this Jesus' way, as you seek to "make" and "teach" don't leave out the "go."

We've Got Room to Expand

The second reason why we should multiply our congregations is that we have lots of room to grow and evangelize our country.

By 200 A.D., the Church had grown from zero to about 1.8 million out of the earth's population of 250 million people, or about 7/10ths of one percent of the world. That incredible growth came mostly through multiplication. Eighteen centuries later, roughly 33 percent of the people in the world call themselves Christians. That's good, but two-thirds of the people on earth remain estranged from Christ.

Christianity currently grows faster in Nepal than anywhere. Nigeria boasts the highest rate of Christ followers per capita. Asia, Africa and Latin America see serious church growth in the macro sense. Church multiplication is a primary cause for success in these nations.

But this kind of growth isn't happening in America.

Between 1990 and 2006 the number of people born in the United States equaled the size of the church in 1990. The

downside to this is that the church was almost exactly the same size in 2006 as it was in 1990. Sixteen years and many more large churches brought no measurable growth to Christianity in America.[5]

Evangelicals numbers are growing. But compared to the overall population, our share of the pie is now smaller. Between 2007 and 2014, the evangelical segment of the U.S. population fell by 0.9 percent.[6]

It is possible for your church to grow rapidly while falling behind the growth curve in your own community. More people attend U.S. churches than ever before but when measured against the larger population, we're still a shrinking minority. We need to stop measuring church growth and begin measuring cultural penetration.

Moreover, church attendance doesn't always translate into cultural "lift." We focus on evangelism while neglecting poverty, crime and oppression. To combat this, churches have coined terms like "missional church," or "missional Christians." Every church should reflect Jesus' calling, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come" (Luke 4:18-19, NLT). Our mission expects true spiritual transformation of communities, not just individuals.

Let's stop rejoicing over the crop in the barns. We need to look at the fields yet to be harvested. To pastor the biggest church possible is noble, but it still doesn't lead to the greatest impact.

Both the church and the culture will change drastically in the next two decades. The escalating secularization of our culture will

result in a continued social reorganization with values foreign to the gospel. Change is upon us, and it's mostly negative if we steer the same course as before. But it can change for the better if you and I choose a different strategy from what appeared effective while we lived it.

From Mega to Multi to *Multiplication* Movement

The third reason for multiplying churches, instead of just getting bigger, is logistical. We're bumping against a ceiling. No church will grow beyond the gifting and abilities of its leaders. Huge churches have hugely gifted leaders, but even these guys bump against logistic ceilings. Land use, parking space and other factors produced the multisite movement which does help churches move to more aggressive addition growth (including reproduction). However, multisite governance realities and increasingly complex management systems inevitably hold them back from true multiplication. The multisite model will achieve Level 4 reproduction at best.

Small to Medium Church Multipliers

We have Jesus' promise and commands, a calling and desire to be faithful and fruitful, and vast resources at our disposal. However, most church planting in America is the purview of small to medium churches. More than 20 percent of new churches come from churches numbering fewer than 100 in attendance. Congregations smaller than 500 people produce a whopping 60-plus percent of church plants. The good news is that our largest churches are beginning to pick up on church planting. Some are

starting with small groups as extension services and experimenting from there.[7]

Churches as Launch Platforms

What if every church could see itself as a launch platform for new churches, or compare itself to an internet platform like Facebook which would allow members to take the gospel story to people in their unique circles of influence? Our larger churches often look more like an entertainment site—Netflix comes to mind, than a platform for members to carry a message into their varied communities. What if we looked at the "bicultural" people from different racial groups, or different socio-economic backgrounds (extremely rich or extremely poor) as bridges into their own cultures? They could be compared to Barnabas or Paul, who were Jews reared in Gentile cities. These people could learn pastoral ministry in one culture, then reproduce it in another.

A couple of decades ago, Ralph Winter wrote about "cultural dissonance in evangelism and church multiplication." If I, as a white middle-class person, begin discipling an unchurched, white middle-class friend who grew up in church, then that is E-0 evangelism. Make that a person like me who grew up with no church background or understanding of the gospel, and you get E-2. Suppose I begin discipling a Chinese-American who grew up in a Buddhist family; then, we're looking at E-3. In other words, there are three cultural barriers between me and the person I intend to disciple. Most churches attempt E-3 by asking people to make the cross-cultural journey from where they live to fit into "our culture." They not only need to heed our message, but they are also required to adopt our cultural trappings. This makes little

sense. We're asking potential converts to make the missionary journey instead of doing it ourselves.

We readily spend huge amounts of money to send missionaries overseas as traditional E-3 missionaries. With the advent of freelance church planters trained in local churches, I'm proposing that we do E-3 evangelism in our own cities and towns. Let's stop asking people to become like us. Instead, let's send people who fit into both worlds so they can address each context in culturally appropriate ways.

What if we could find a way to make experimenting with church multiplication less risky and more pervasive? What if Level 3 churches became launch platforms for new churches rather than new sites. They would immediately achieve Level 4 status, release the new churches to launch others, at will, and you hit Level 5.

My Story

Let's start with a disclaimer. I've coached many of the people you'll meet in this book—but my experience rests there. As I write, I'm newly retired as a vocational pastor. I've got a new ministry job and am also busy planting a church as a freelance pastor in San Diego. But as a movement, Hope Chapel has only dabbled in new expressions beyond mega and multisite churches. However, we are beginning to pursue it as a model for planting any church. Even if we plan to grow a large congregation we'll want a pastor to prove that they could do what Rick Warren did—plant in a living room.

Over the years, I've pastored two (smaller) megachurches, and we've grown a movement of free- standing medium-sized churches. We allowed them to function as a movement rather than as a network or mini-denomination, which gave us the freedom to focus on disciple making rather than governance (more about the

difference between networks and movements later). But it seems that what small churches have done in the past can also be done by megachurch pastors, especially those with multisite experience.[8]

Reviewing Level 5 Multiplication

Before we go any farther, let's review the Level 1- Level 5 multiplication model. Think of a Level 3 congregation as a high-impact church; some have used the term, "lighthouse church." Some Level 3 churches have tens of thousands of members. Others may represent just a few hundred people in a smaller community. Level 4 is a church that clones itself in a variety of ways. Most often, this takes the form of multiple church services. But it can add capacity by planting a *network* of churches that look much like the sending congregation.

A Level 5 congregation seeks to move a step beyond networking to producing churches both capable of, and free to, pursue multiplication without a great deal of interference from the founding church. A multiplication movement looks like a scattering of boutique shops or restaurants.

Your Church As A Launch Platform

Your personality will draw you toward either Level 4 or Level 5 if you decide to launch churches. But, whichever path you choose, how can you do it efficiently and effectively?

We're looking for radically different results. Church multiplication easily trumps single-location addition. But, perhaps a major redirection isn't the best idea. If something is fruitful, hang on to it. But, you could run two operating systems at one time. A measure of caution accompanies any venture into new territory. I

once switched between Windows and IOS. The learning curve was steep. I discovered that I could partition my hard drive and run both systems at the same time.

Depending on what I was trying to do, I could move back and forth between systems and software. My proposal is that you run two systems *concurrently* if you are making the leap from Level 3 to Level 4 or Level 5. Keep doing business as usual while experimenting with the new system on the side. Compartmentalization is key here, though as there is nothing gained by destroying what you have along the way to something new. Graduating from Level 3 is more about evolution than revolution.

But while that advice holds for Level 3 guys, if you are planting a new church you do want to embrace a different operating system than that which may have birthed you. As you plan a new church, you should certainly build it around a Level 5 multiplication operating system. Take your key leaders through *Becoming a Level 5ive Multiplying Church* as a disciplemaking exercise. A book that would help you as the key leader is *New to 5ive: Starting a Level 5 Multiplying Church*. Build your culture around the challenges you uncover as you do this.

Learning a New OS

I want to introduce an operating system that we've used, successfully, in the United States. However, I learned it on a teaching trip to Sri Lanka. By reading their story you may be able to pick up on the operating system I propose with more courage than caution. Think of it as a parable. Stories can teach better than facts and figures.

Often, we discover that the world outside the United States is forced to act more like the first century church due to persecution and poverty. Their discoveries make good lessons. Look at this example of a multiplication movement instigated by a single church operating among a Hindu/Buddhist population.

So, here goes the story… It was late. My ride to the airport hadn't shown up. Travel during a civil war intensified my anxiety. If the driver didn't show soon, I would have no place to stay. After eight days of teaching, I had neglected to obtain local phone numbers. I was in trouble. I wouldn't even know how to use the phone system to book a hotel room.

Sri Lanka was at war with itself. The airport parking lot was closed to outside vehicles. Upon the arrival of a flight, you took a cab from the terminal building to a heavily guarded gate on the perimeter of the parking lot. To depart, you reversed the process. The threat of terrorism permeated everything.

When the driver finally arrived, he drove a new BMW. This one hadn't yet come to the United States. Being a car guy, I was curious about the vehicle. Turns out he owned the BMW distributorship for all of Sri Lanka. This was a wealthy guy—he was also a church planter several times over. He was late because one of the two churches he currently pastored held a goodbye party for him. It was his last night with that group. He proudly told me that the following week he would plant his fifth autonomous "microchurch." The man was a successful three-career pastor. However, he received only one paycheck – from his BMW business. While he was tri-vocational, his story can lead us toward a new concept: *a microchurch led by a single- salary, discipleship-trained, bivocational/freelance church planter.*

As we worked our way past sandbag-fortified checkpoints and machine gun-toting soldiers, he told me his story. He is the member of Living Way Church in Colombo, the country's capital city. At around 400 members, Living Way is a megachurch by Sri Lankan standards. This man and his family maintain membership there while he plants churches in poor urban neighborhoods. He's able to reach into communities where he wouldn't feel safe bringing his children. Every Sunday, he attends the mother church in the morning while pastoring one microchurch at 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, and another at 7 p.m. He's hardly busier than any Bible study leader in an American church. The difference is that he takes the church to unreached crannies of society.

Five Elements to this Operating System

Here are 5 takeways from this story. They constitute a new operating system that you could use while doing business as usual with the other 99 percent of your congregation: 1. A megachurch operating as a launch platform for church multiplication. 2. A career-holding pastor who leads a church (actually two of them) as a freelance church planter. 3. Autonomous microchurches planted by "lay pastors." 4. Church planters who remain in fellowship (and tithing to) their home church. 5. Penetration of corners of society that would otherwise not interact with the gospel.

These five elements, taken together, present you with a new tool for experimenting your way into becoming a church multiplier—at limited cost of money, manpower or momentum.

Success At Home and Abroad

This strategy has multiplied more than 2,060 churches (with just under half meeting in homes). Starting with just 28 people the

group has baptized more than 22,000 people since 1983. More than 18,000 people attend their churches. Persecution restricts the churches to evangelism through disciplemaking—they don't rely on "altar calls" or an attractional model. This is a country of persecution where both Buddhists and Hindus physically attack and persecute Christians. The group has lost people to bombs tossed into their meetings.

The dominant culture is Buddhist (Singhalese), after that come the Hindu Tamils. Finally, there is a minority of cultural Christians called Burghers, left over from days of British occupation.

The primary leader, Leslie Keegel, a Sri Lankan Burgher, who traded his Beatles haircut for a Bible back in the '70s. He has had a direct hand in 25 church plants. The church's Bible college accounts for 415 churches. The rest multiplied from the disciple-making efforts of those congregations. They seek to plant autonomous self-supporting, self-governing, and self- propagating churches.

Living Way Church is a multiplication movement, which so penetrates Sri Lanka that there are constant threats on Keegel's life. He is forced to live in a complex guarded by automatic weapons and fences with high-voltage wire that will kill an intruder.

By the way, the group has planted reproducing churches in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Bahrain, the Emirates, India and Bangladesh. I currently work with one of their pastors, Surekha Hulugalle, in the United Kingdom he re-ignited an aging movement of sixteen churches, taking them to 46 autonomous churches in just six years. He moved there as an IT professional and then planted a reproducing church. The BMW guy wouldn't talk cars or business. All he wanted to do was describe how his parent church and the disciples he was making

were helping to fulfill the Great Commission. Surekha now leads a small movement in the U.K. The keys to these stories are the twin concepts of microchurch and freelance pastors.

What's impressed me the most about the guy in Sri Lanka and Surehka is that they view their careers as providers of financial capital which sponsor ministry *away from* the marketplace. This is important, for us, because most of what American churches do, off campus, is focused on the marketplace. These guys are taking new territory—we can learn from them.

Defining Microchurch

By now, you know that what I'm calling microchurch figures big in my ideas about the future. It is the backbone of the operating system I observed in Sri Lanka. I also believe that such a vehicle fits into the near future of a church multiplication movement in the United States.

A microchurch is different from a bible-study in five ways:

1. It is semi-autonomous from the platform church that gave it birth. While answering to an elder board in a sending church, microchurch elders are the "troops on the ground." They make decisions necessary to expand the kingdom in their unique turf.
2. It responds to the "go" of the Great Commission rather than the "come" of Level 3 churches. Bible studies and marketplace missionaries both operate in close conjunction with a central church. "Come join us" is a subtle subtext to their message. The microchurch operates from an opposing paradigm—the idea is to take the gospel to people who would

not fit easily into the sending church. The motive is "go" rather than "come."

3. It brings church into cultures where people are not likely to identify with the cultural majority. Cultural similarities are part of the glue binding any congregation. People worship and play with people much like themselves. Microchurches utilize "bridge people" who are comfortable in more than one culture to penetrate unreached people groups.

4. Its elders are endorsed by the sending church as pastors, rather than marketplace missionaries. This generates a huge motivational difference. When a group can self-identify as a church its leaders carry the weight of spiritual authority and the responsibilities attendant to it.

5. It is authorized to celebrate the sacraments and reproduce itself as its leaders see fit. More than any other distinguishing factor, handling of the sacraments denotes a spiritual reality not found in Bible studies or marketplace ministries. This may be the determining factor in turning out a movement of culture-penetrating microchurches.