

CHAPTER 10

Five Tangible Steps Toward Level 5 Multiplication

When we build a church-planting pipeline into the fabric of our disciple-making process and develop a simple plan that guides a leader from a questioning “pre-believer” to an equipped “church planter,” we begin to position ourselves for multiplication.

We like to look at every new convert as a potential overseas church planter. Most won’t ever plant a church, let alone do it overseas, but by raising the bar this high for ourselves, we pull everyone farther than they would go otherwise. At the end of the day, a new disciple should understand five to seven steps leading to planting a church on their own. You’ll need to structure your own process, but here are some steps you can take in that direction...

1. Learn more and build a working theology.

A wise friend once scolded me, “If you ain’t reading, you ain’t leading!” (he used “ain’t” to amplify his words). It stuck. And it should stick on you. If this book has your attention, seek out others who like it. Check the endnotes of this book for sources, then look for them on Amazon. Search the “customers who bought this item also bought” function on Amazon. Take advantage of the hundreds of free tools at exponential.org. Read Roy Moran’s *Spent Matches: Igniting the Signal Fire for the Spiritually Dissatisfied* with eye toward free-standing microchurches when he describes his approach to what are essentially home groups attached to his church. With a few tweaks, we found Moran’s model a near template for how to operate a, “single-salary, freelance-pastored microchurch.”

Build a small library and soak in it. After that, assemble notes and compare them to your Bible. Build a working theology to describe how you might launch a church multiplication movement from within your local church, including only your disciples and theirs in the task. I like to have a written theology for every element of a new project. It’s His church; it should involve His values.

Multiplication leader Rac Racoma planted three microchurches among troubled Filipino youth in Hawaii. Most were in their late teens or early 20s, Rac was in his early 50s. Rac is impatient with people who camp out on theology while the fields remain ready for harvest. I asked him, “What would you say to pastors of a conventional church that might motivate them to launch a movement of microchurches?” He said he would encourage them toward “seriously looking at their present standards on church

leadership and to take the risk that comes with lowering that bar in developing leadership. Also, to look into having a measuring system that compares present systems' effectiveness in engaging marginal people groups to start a microchurch and to begin seeing with softer eyes the potential of people of less recognition.

“It’s really about allowing people to express their giftings. As leaders, we are to assist them in getting them there.”

2. Recruit and disciple a few radicals.

To help you use what this looks like practically, I’ll break down the process into steps:

Look around you for the people in your church whom you believe could successfully launch a “discipleship-trained, single-salary, freelance-planted microchurch” six months from when you complete your personal theology of microchurch and its place in the ecosystem of evangelical Christianity.

Narrow the list to those who like change and are likely seen as a little radical. (These are the early adopters and map makers we talked about earlier.)

Approach these potential leaders individually, disclosing your idea. After mutual prayer, recruit three or four people, no more than seven.

Disciple these people, beginning with your written theology (which should be pretty informal). After looking through your stuff, read and discuss books that might stoke their fire. Download some of the free tools at exponential.org and then use them to make disciples who might plant microchurches.

That was the easy part, but probably the less productive of the groups you might recruit.

Think of radical political groups, whether it be the Soviet Revolution a century ago, Shining Path in recent years, David Koresh and his tragic following, or the recent outburst of violent Islam. In every case, these groups found it effective to search out unhappy disaffected people who believed the world could be a better place if it weren't for systems that had turned unresponsive to the truth.

A lot of Christ followers fit that profile. Who are the believers who have left the local church, “to preserve my faith”? They are ripe for revolutionary activity. They hunger for more than “attractional churches” can possibly offer. These people are connected with others of their ilk. My only advice here is to get to know some of these people and then see where your friendship leads.

I recently met a young man who fit the above profile. He professed hatred for “your typical church.” I asked him if he would consider gathering a few friends for a “Beer, Barbeque and Bible talk.” The idea would be to Xerox a passage of Scripture and then ask everyone to come ready to talk about it the following week—no sermon, just the Spirit and the Word (no singing either). He jumped on the idea. If that's too radical for you, you might want to rethink the criticism of Jesus for hanging out with winebibbers and sinners.

3. Plant a church as an experiment.

Send some of these disciples out to launch a microchurch with the understanding that it might always remain micro, or it may grow to whatever size the Lord deems appropriate. But they should understand that you expect them to multiply a new church within

the first 12 to 18 months. We can experiment, but we should always think four generations out (2 Timothy 2:2). This removes the pressure to put big numbers on the board as soon as we hit the field.

Small scale R & D (research and development) is crucial to a megachurch. If your team is used to starting everything big, they won't easily handle a big failure. I have a friend in Oregon who pastors the church that planted more than 60 congregations before we ever planted one. We're talking about a church bigger than most in the state, and it got that way while multiplying congregations. Then the original pastor died. His successor never attempted to plant until I badgered him into it. Sadly, two things went wrong:

1. I pressed him to plant without first making disciples who were up to the task.
2. They invested big money and a sizeable chunk of their members in what could only be described as an experiment. When it went down in flames, I was the real culprit (in my mind, not theirs). But the church elders couldn't stand the failure.

They were used to being "best" at everything. They never tried to reproduce again. Had that pastor not fallen for the argument that suggests you must start big to be significant, this church might have still failed. However, they would probably have kept at it until they understood what they were doing.

Treat this as a prototype. You won't get everything right the first time, but you can learn from your mistakes. If the first one fails, don't give up. Do an autopsy to discern the cause of the failure and be sure to avoid the mistakes in your second attempt.

I asked one of our planters, Jeph Chavez, “What would you say to pastors of a conventional church that might motivate them to launch a movement of microchurches?” His response is instructional for any leader:

“If our conviction is really to make disciples, then we must recognize that within our congregations, there are individuals who possess a call and the gift mix to pastor their own congregation. They may not be megachurch pastors or even conventional church planters, but they are called to pastor. However, if we limit their opportunity to just a home group or small group role within our congregation, we may never see their true passion and calling come forth. The autonomy that the microchurch movement offers becomes attractive to those that can recognize there is more in them than just pastoring a small group under their local church’s leadership and direction. It allows for a vision and uniqueness to come forth out of the individuals that otherwise would remain dormant or become a source of frustration and tension with the leadership. Unfortunately, this is why we see individuals leave the local church or just settle into a mundane, non-participatory role in the church.”

The Racomas have participated in our Kenya churches, training pastors there. But more exciting is the linkage between their Filipino family in Honolulu and villages in the Philippines. Rac and Veronica now organize a microchurch-planting operation more than 5,500 miles from where they live. It will travel through “persons of peace” they already know. They will use the alleviation of poverty to open the doors, but poverty relief isn’t the issue. Disciple-making and church multiplication are center stage.

4. Scale up from your experiment.

Once you have a working but flexible model, you can bring others into your disciple making; brag on the success of the first few churches, then preach about becoming a movement that changes culture.

We still get mileage from the story of our first daughter church in California. That story inspired Sonny Shimaoka to plant a church on the big Island of Hawaii on our first birthday as a church on Oahu. The important part of the story is that he lived and worked on Oahu. Twice a week, he flew to the Big Island as a single-salary freelance microchurch planter until his company closed operations on Oahu. Offered the chance to move with the company, he refused and moved to the Big Island where he found employment. The church eventually grew large enough to support his family and multiply several others. I tell that story often.

The secret to making this model work are the lessons you learn from the initial experiment. You scale up the successes by replicating what worked. You trim back whatever didn't work, freeing assets for what does. Begin to think about scaling up in terms of more microchurches. Make provisions for those that grow larger than what you expected. And plan on some people moving away and doing what they learned from you in far-off locations (or the next county). Plan to endorse multiplication growth. Be a hero maker—making heroes of the people who plant microchurches. Doing so will inspire others to give it a shot. By the way, don't give up just because one of your planters turns out to be a Judas. If Jesus took the hit, you can too.

5. Build support mechanisms.

If you build a franchise, it will be easy to structure a network that holds everyone together. I know of one successful Level 4 group that has this down so tight that their “church plant kits” include trucks fitted exactly to hold the identical batch of music/audio/video/signage/hospitality equipment that they issue every church plant. They centralize finances, with each church surrendering its entire offering to the central congregation. They’ve branded their package to a degree that a Fortune 500 company might envy. But remember that neither Jesus nor Paul named any church. And the church in Philippi didn’t look a whole like the one in Corinth.

Would I call the church I just described a success? The answer is a resounding yes! They’ve created a network that will change the communities where they serve. But, they are not, and will not, become a Level 5 multiplying network. The very control issues that make them a good network preclude the hodgepodge nature of a viral network.

If you launch a series of boutique or free-standing churches, your job gets a lot harder. But the potential to change history grows exponentially. You’ll need to establish strong but informal connectivity between the churches. Social media can be a great help here. So can a private-access website. Large training venues fit the picture but become less effective as the movement grows. We once assembled about 140 leaders and felt proud of ourselves until we realized that, at that point, there were more than 700 churches in the network.

Asked hard questions about our numbers, we grudgingly improvised a survey of all our churches (we had done this about every four years until it got too cumbersome, and we decided

it wasn't worth the effort). The survey was a simple email blast asking each church to identify those they had planted by

- A. The pastor's name.
- B. The location.
- C. The church name.
- D. The year started.
- E. An email address.
- F. Any known churches that they may have planted.

We followed this with a second email blast. The survey came to a total of 2,317 churches that find their roots in Hope Chapel. This was in 2016. Immediately after publishing the results, I got angry emails from two pastors questioning why their church plants weren't included in the report (because they never answered their emails). We also discovered five churches that were born during the six weeks it took to compile the survey. This is the nature of a movement—messy and uncontrolled.

In 1972, Jim Montgomery wrote *New Testament Fire in the Philippines* about the Foursquare denomination in that country. The group was recording more than 50,000 conversions per year with only two missionary families. He attributed their relative poverty to their success.

The denominational model was:

- A. Build a large church in a capital city.
- B. Establish a Bible college.
- C. Ordain graduates, sending them to plant churches.

Things got away from them when a student had to leave school to take care of a parent. This “unfinished student” made disciples

and planted a church. The denomination wisely endorsed the man and the church. Then one of that pastor's disciples moved away, made disciples, and planted another church. The denomination embraced this as well. Now they had two pastors with “inferior” training, but they also had a movement on their hands. The fire soon burned out of control.

Toward the end of the book, Montgomery expressed fear that the book would cause the denomination to devote more money to the Philippines in the form of training institutions. He thought that doing so would curtail viral growth. They did, and growth slowed to a crawl.

Though the denomination saw itself as a franchise, for a few precious years it functioned as a multiplication movement of boutique churches. They created new support mechanisms—the wrong kind. The early lack of control caused each church to function as a boutique until they codified everything.

If you're the perceived leader of a movement, you better learn to write. Amazon makes small-volume publishing work through both Kindle and their Create Space paperback books. Working with them is easy, and there's no cost to you because it's print-on-demand, which means no one pays until they purchase something (btw, I don't work for Amazon or get a kickback for mentioning them—just find them useful).³² However you do it, you need to grow into a role as head cheerleader and hero maker.