CHAPTER 8

Question: Does This Fit Me?

If I've done my job, by now you are considering the implications of this book for your own life.

If you are up to your neck in plans to plant a church, I hope what I've written helps you to hit the ground as a Level 5 multiplying church in microcosm. If you are struggling at Level 1 or plateaued at Level 2 you need to understand that planting a microchurch would breathe life and vision into your church. If you are at Level 3 you must accept that you've been given much so much will be required—you should begin to develop strategies to platform a movement. If your church is a Level 4 reproducing congregation my prayer is that you will adopt a boutique operating system which is different from the franchise model that currently serves you.

My friend, Todd Wilson, wrote a book that would help you. It's available as a free download at exponential.org. It's called, *The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*

The book is a great tool for assessing the feasibility of microchurches as an operating efficiency in your overall multiplication plans. I'll summarize 10 assessment questions asked by the book, but you will do yourself a favor if you download and read it in entirety.

1. Is micro-church the right next step for us?

You may find that microchurch is a model that allows you to multiply because of its limited costs. Or, you may have moved from megachurch to planting several sites only to realize that the individual sites carry a burden of overhead that is too much for the health of your church.

In these cases, or any other, this is the primary question. You'll be better equipped to answer it as you answer the other nine.

2. What is our motive for considering micro-church?

Ask yourself, "Why am I even considering this?" You'll probably get several answers. Prioritize them then ask the question again. Try to sort out your root motivation. Ask, "Do I see this as another opportunity to add capacity or am I willing to let go of people, money and control to expand the Kingdom of God? These answers are crucial.

If you haven't already download *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church* and read it together with your team. Be sure you get your motivation carved in stone as the journey in front of you will be more revolutionary than evolutionary. You aren't just adding a new

piece of software, you're adopting a different operating system. Discern whether you have the courage necessary to revolutionary change.

3. How do our core values impact our decision about micro-church?

Examine your calendar and budget. These will reveal your core values more effectively than looking at the mission statement on your website. Engage your most trusted leaders in a discussion about the implications of your core values intersecting with a movement of microchurches led by freelance pastors. Ask how birthing such a movement would impact what you've built around your current value set.

The Exponential FREE eBook *Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication* (available for FREE download at exponential.org) introduces a simple model for a healthy culture. Compare that model to your current value set before deciding to move ahead with multiplication.

4. What does microchurch look like in our context?

Churches that choose to empower members as elders or leaders of microchurches will naturally extrapolate the strengths and benefits of existing systems. The key is to adapt them to an entirely different operating system. The goal isn't to create micro-cathedrals or micro-megachurches.

This is a different organism. It is a minimal expression of the body of Christ reaching into communities of people otherwise untouched by the gospel.

Churches will naturally extrapolate the strengths and benefits of the mega and multi models and adapt them into the micro. Consequently, for most churches the default approach will be extending what's already being done into new locations. Specifically, most churches will likely be attracted to the potential for replicating their training content/Sunday programming into new, extended, lower-cost venues that have the potential to reach more people (the love language of Level 3 addition-focused churches). The most natural expression equates to the convergence of small groups, technology, high-quality training materials, and decentralized delivery systems— all within our current grasp.

5. What does "wildly successful" look like in our context? Will our default way of implementing micro-churches produce the transformative impact we're searching for?

You need to describe your end goals before you set out. What would look wildly successful to you? Try not to attach numbers to this, but ratios. Think about a percentage of a community engaged with Christ. Or, you may want to see 90 percent of the people in your microchurches as a result of someone discipling them into Christ. A meaningful goal would be to ask what percentage of your members should be catalyzed by God's unique call for them and mobilized to fulfill that calling. Decide on these outcomes before teaching others to multiply microchurches.

The Exponential eBook *Dream Big, Plan Smart: Discovering Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication* (available for FREE download at exponential.org) will help you think through these factors:

A workable process for biblical disciple making; Both addition and multiplication capacity building;

The mobilization of Christ followers on mission within the sweet spot of their unique personal calling.

6. What strengths are we building on, and how might these strengths create limitations to true multiplication if we're not careful?

While good stewardship requires that you utilize past victories and practices wherever they are applicable, you need to be careful that you are not bringing limitations into what is a different operating system than the one that brought you to the threshold of multiplication.

The desire to "clone for quality," or to brand something builds on lessons learned and standards of excellence. But, be careful. These befit a franchise model of reproduction far better than a boutique model of multiplication. In the boutique model, people take more chances, make more mistakes but generate ministry more suitable to a different community than the one that birthed them. The franchise model works best if you need the safety of control mechanisms and you are trying to reach people of much the same socio-economic flavor as yourself.

You'll find much more on this question if you download, *The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*

7. What barriers are we likely to face?

You will face barriers and growth resisting obstacles. Some are the tensions we discuss in the next chapter.

Perhaps the most obvious barrier to multiplication is management as you scale up from a handful of microchurches to hundreds of thousands. How will you retain a biblio-centric

posture throughout the movement? What must you do to keep everything focused on Jesus and on the mission of disciples making disciples? How will you preserve a culture that allows for every member of Christ's body to pursue their own unique calling within your expanding tribe? How will you handle matters of discipline as they inevitably arise? Will every microchurch be autonomous while linked through disciplemaking relationships or is that too loose for you?

Again, technology can be a huge help. When the first church I led began reproducing we didn't have the internet, email or cell phones. Today we can create private chat rooms and live online group conversations. The apostles, Paul and Barnabas, didn't even have an effective mail system to help support the disciples, deemed elders, and turned over the Holy Spirit in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23).

As your movement grows the barriers will slow you. In mathematics these barriers are known as "asymptotes." An asymptote is a limit or barrier that arises from within your practices, doctrines and cultural factors. The goal is to begin a new growth curve built along slightly different operating factors as each previous one slows. The reality is to ask God to help remove the limiting factor or to give you the wisdom to do so.
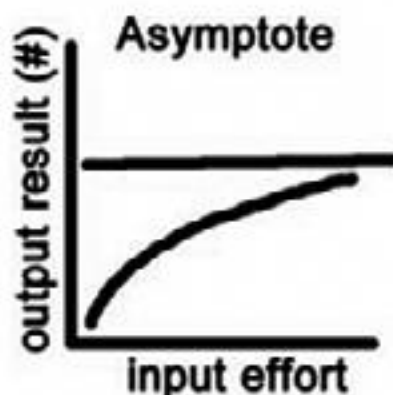
The Exponential FREE eBook *Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication* (available for FREE download via exponential.org) addresses this principle and offers keys to unlock the doors as you meet them. In more conventional churches these barriers appear as attendance plateaus around 120, 200, 500, 800, 2,000, etc. In movements the barriers are just as real and arise due to motivational, organizational and communications restraints. Asymptotes are unavoidable, but God will see you past them as you seek his leadership over his church(es).

8. Does the simplicity / complexity of our strategy inherently catalyze or hinder multiplication?

The complexities of running mega and multisite churches vie with the complexities of our current church planting models. All require intricate systems, skilled professional personnel and large budgets. This forces us into a "we can do it, you can help" approach to members as volunteers to maintain these organizations. If we adopt a "you can do it, we can help" approach to re-visualizing our churches as platforms for other people's ministries we can see entire movements of microchurches birthed from a single congregation.

Add in the complimenting factor of a freelance pastor and the costs of implementing the Great Commission look much like what it cost in the Book of Acts. Travel, food and shelter allowed a handful of ordinary people to take the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:19-22). Later the professionals, Barnabas and Saul, had the same limited costs to consider. The possibilities extant in multiplying microchurches led by freelance pastors brings

us back to the simplicity and limitless opportunity faced by these early Christ-followers.

9. What is our minimum ecclesiology for the structure and governance of church? Will that hinder true multiplication?

You need to settle on your own minimal ecclesiology, so you can operate with an open heart toward God and for the practical purpose of doing ministry biblically and righteously. If you choose to platform a movement using microchurches as a tool for multiplication, you will be questioned over issues of theology, structure and governance. The people who question you may substitute denominational or cultural church protocol for actual ecclesiology, so the answers you give must apply to churches of every size or stripe. You'll find a good case study in the podcast, *Play Thuno -- The World-Changing Multiplication Game.*

At the risk of becoming too prescriptive I want to offer two starting places for formulating a minimal, therefore more flexible, ecclesiology. The first is my friend, Brian Sanders, device. He simply asks that a church include worship (living under the lordship of Christ), community (mutual sharing and ministry) and mission (making disciples in unique places and living Luke 4:18). Another approach is to ask, "Are we equipping every member to minister as described in Ephesians 4?" and, "Do the functions mentioned in Acts 2:41-47 happen in our midst."

I'm including my own ecclesiological minimums here as thought starters. I only speak for myself, not for Exponential. Each person or tribe will need to think through three issues and arrive at their own minimums. I'm looking at three questions when

I think of minimums: What is a disciple? What is a church? What is a pastor?

I want to be careful to note that though I'm writing in light of microchurches, these thoughts would qualify/disqualify some of the more well-known institutional congregations in America. In my mind these minimums apply to every church. Not everything we call a church meets these minimums.

- **Disciple:** Jesus bookends the markers for true disciples through his words to his own. The first qualifier is a follower of Christ who invites others to follow—a fisher of men. The second qualifier is one who obeys all that Jesus commands. This definition includes a person doing daily devotions, giving to the church and growing in Christ. But it does not stop with these rather static notions. It demands a more radical surrender. If a person is making disciples while following Christ and living in obedience they are a disciple. If they don't meet these minimums I can't see the disciplemaking process as fully functional.

- **Church**: A church is a gathering of Christ-followers where two scriptures come into play. The first is Acts 2:41-47. If I don't see the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, answers to prayer, generous giving, God-praising and effective evangelism I can't call it a church. The second qualifier is that each member plays a part in the building up of the body, using their gifts toward this end. The church is a body, and each member plays their part to grow to maturity and effect change in the world through love and operation with their individual spiritual gifts. That is, the fruit of each believer's faith is action, and these actions build up the body as a whole (Eph. 4:10-16;

1 Cor. 12:4-31). This is more an outcome of spiritual maturity than a prerequisite for launching something. However, if these are missing, it's time to reevaluate your ministry.

- **Pastor or Elder:** The word pastor (poimen) appears only in Ephesians 4. The connotation is that this person governs and teaches. The Greek term is different but the function equates to that of an elder (presbuteros) or overseer (episkopoi). The term elder first applies to maturity as both Old and New Testaments use the term in regard to age. For me this means that the more mature Christ-followers in a community present the threshold for inclusion as elders. After that, I'm looking for proven ministry and the endorsement of a sending church and its body of elders. I get frustrated with the term elder, or even deacon, when applied to a politically appointed group of people who don't actually function in a governing/ teaching capacity. The Great Commission is all about going and teaching. If these functions are absent, the title becomes meaningless.

Again, you need to develop your own minimums. As you do, remember that if they are too loose the will cause blisters like a shoe that is two sizes too large. If they are too small the option is to go barefoot or cut off a couple of toes. Your ecclesiology must fit both scripture and the unique callings of those you would equip and platform.

10. Where are we on the innovation curve, and how does this affect our decision?

As I approach this question, I feel compelled to quote rather than summarize. I lifted the following paragraphs from *The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*

When Leadership Network convened some pioneering churches in 2001, multisite was an "innovation." Many of these churches created the maps for the rest of the church world. Experts suggest that at the time, only a handful of multisite churches existed in the United States. Today, less than 20 years later, Leadership Network reports more than 8,000 multisite churches.

This increase represents what communications professor Everett Rodgers popularized as the *diffusion of innovation* theory. Rodgers sought to explain how some ideas turn into innovations that spread to the masses. He identified five categories of innovation "adopters," including innovators (the pioneers that create the maps for everyone else, representing 2.5 percent of a population); early adopters (the people who first embrace the innovation before it's even fully proven, representing 13.5 percent); the early majority (34 percent); the late majority (also 34 percent), and the laggards (16 percent).

Let's assume "micro-focused" churches are an innovation waiting to happen. Currently, we're in the early stages where the innovators (2.5 percent) will begin experimenting and creating the maps for the future. Where should your church be on the innovation curve? Don't jump too quickly. Where you *want* to be might not be where you *should* be!

Consider three Additional Questions:

1. Where do my heart and head say we'd like to be on the curve?

Your heart may be telling you one thing, but is it the right thing? Does your heart align with your head?

2. Where have we historically been on the curve with past innovations?

The past is our best predictor of the future. Do you have a pattern and history of being innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, or laggards? You may not know it, but a pattern is likely embedded into your DNA and culture, and that's hard to change.

3. Given the reality of our history and context, where is it prudent for us to be?

Should you wait for some roadmaps and stability to minimize risk? Or should you jump in early?

As you approach these 10 questions and work through your church's response, keep in mind both the potential opportunity for multiplication, as well as the potential distraction. As we look toward Jesus' multiplication vision for His Church (Acts 1:8), the emerging microchurch era offers real hope for multiplying His witnesses "to the ends of the earth." Stewarded with multiplication as the goal, we will make quantum leaps toward seeing the less than 4 percent of churches in the United States increase to a Kingdom-advancing tipping point of 10 percent.