

CHAPTER 11

Summing Up

The future is never predictable. Trends continue for decades before some “tipping point” event or new innovation disrupts life as we know it. This can occur in imperceptible ways, or it may be a product of deliberate action. What we know for certain is that different outcomes only result from a change of input. The future of the Church is no exception.

Turning the Tide

Todd Wilson and Will Mancini’s book, [*Dream Big, Plan Smart*](#), begins with a question, “What will it take to move the multiplication needle from less than 4 percent of U.S. churches ever reproducing to greater than 10 percent?”³³ This presupposes that 10 percent and above is a tipping point, after which the church will regain influence in the culture. Ask yourself these questions:

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- *What if we could get from 4 percent to 10 percent of churches reproducing? What might happen if we did?*
- *What if those churches planted one church every two years, beginning in 2020 (something my Russian friends think is too small a goal)?*

The answer is that if 10 percent of the estimated 330,000 churches in the United States planted one church per year between 2020 and 2040, we would grow to 785,903 churches (this figure does not include any compounding factor—it assumes that each newly planted church does nothing). The Church would grow by 138 percent compared to population growth by 13.4 percent. *We would outpace population growth.* That would change our culture. Factor in the fact that new churches usually reproduce more easily than established churches, and the numbers are unbelievable.

For just six percent of churches to begin reproducing is more than reasonable. It's within easy reach. It only takes a change of mindset. We need to think “more is better,” instead of “bigger is better.” We don't even have to abandon Level 3 behaviors to adapt to Level 5 accomplishment. We can, and should, pursue addition and multiplication at the same time. The sweet spot is where you add numbers, so you can increase multiplying capacity. A larger church has the capacity to spawn many new ones. Again, the distinction between a portal and a platform come to mind. I'd far rather die knowing that I was taking upwards of a million people to Heaven than to think I'd settled for the biggest church in the state.

So how can we get from church planting that doesn't keep up with population growth to church multiplication that shapes culture? The answer is for people like you to accept church multiplication as normal behavior for a church that has disciple

making as its purpose. I believe every church should multiply numerous times. If small churches currently do the heavy lifting, the future will look dramatically different than if successful Level 3 and 4 leaders get into the action. Some studies have shown that the churches who multiply are healthier and have an easier time finding internal leaders than those churches that don't multiply.

Multiplication Is God's Desire

In Genesis 1, God told mankind to multiply and fill the earth. Man's response was the tower of Babel.

In Genesis 11, everyone gathered rather than scattered as God had commanded. He had to disrupt Babel through confusion over language to accomplish His purposes.

In Acts 1, Jesus pressed toward multiplication that fills the earth. This time, the response was a megachurch in Jerusalem. It seems He unsettled things by allowing persecution that led in the direction of the yet unfulfilled prophecy: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

We are at a standstill in terms of cultural penetration. The surrounding world is rapidly secularizing— even growing hostile to Christ-followers. The population grows while the church does not. If we don't act, God will. If we change our paradigm, now, the future will be easier and brighter. If we do not, it will not.

'We Could Have Done More'

The Church is in trouble. That fact is undeniable. But it's not too late to turn the tide. We have a decade or so before we lose enough momentum and failure is the only option. If people like you and

me learn to multiply, we can see a good down payment on the Great Commission in our lifetime.

Someone recently asked me, “What would you do differently if you could live life again?” My answer, “not much.”

Given my family background, in addition to American and church culture at the time I was growing up, I would do pretty much everything I did. I have some regrets, but not many.

A different question is more meaningful, “What would you do if you were just out of high school and felt called to pastoral ministry?”

That was me. A Bible college degree, apprenticeship, and building the biggest church possible were my aspirations (I was thinking of about 200 people). If I was 18 years old in today’s climate, I would do lots of things differently.

For starters, I would trade professional theological education for someone who could disciple me into ministry.

I’d become an engineer, which reflects my native interests. Along with John Wesley, I would earn, save, and give all I could. Finally, I would seek to multiply a thousand “microchurches”—congregations planted by a pastor who intends to remain in their career and independent of the church for financial support. Hopefully, at least half of those would multiply further generations, and some would grow to “macro” status.

Alternatively, I would choose the same career path but change one thing. Instead of planting churches with Level 3 as the goal (as we did), I would use the concept of a microchurch to:

- Enlist more labor for the harvest.
- Hasten the multiplication rate of our churches.
- Aim to bring a million people into churches we planted.

As it stands, the movement we started includes around 200,000 active Christ followers—we could have done more. My question for you is, “Could you multiply microchurches?” If you pastor a megachurch coupled with multi-sites, microchurches is an inexpensive next step.

If you dropped out of pastoral ministry because your church and a separate job were too much for you, then you might give this another look. A microchurch should not take much more time than any high-commitment role in a larger church. If you can delegate, you should find it easy to look someone in the eye and say, “I put in my 40 hours this week, and I find time for this. I’m not asking any more of you than I ask of myself...”

Perhaps you lead one of those groups that dropped out of traditional evangelical churches for whatever reason. My challenge is simple: Don’t hide your light under a bushel, seek the Kingdom first, and multiply what you enjoy.