

## Chris Question Friday: Things I Wish I Had Known About Church Planting

QUESTION: What things do you wish you had known before you planted your church? (by Todd in Baltimore)

ANSWER: Good question, Todd. I was so naive when we planted three years ago. The sheer metric tons of stuff I didn't know then that I know now could feel volumes of books. However, there are a few things that come to mind as great lessons I learned the hard way.

**1. Half of your core team will leave you in the first year.** I heard other church planters say this, but I didn't believe it. Going into year two I had already lived it. At present we only have one couple from our original core group. Some moved out of town...others lost the vision...others never got it in the first place.

**2. Never pick staff from outside the church.** I kept trying to bring in staff members from the outside. They were already "ruined" by other churches and just couldn't grasp the concept of what God called us to do. We have had much better luck by recruiting staff from within Compass Point.

**3. You can't build a church on college students.** Our first year we had almost 70% college students...almost all unchurched. They were great...they worked hard...they grew spiritually...they developed into good leaders...they left town when they graduated. Christmas and summer got pretty ugly around Compass Point the first year! College students are wonderful folks to have on a church plant team...just know they are temporary.

**4. Never count on the money until the check arrives.** We met with the pastor of a mega-church (the parents of one our core team went there) and he did the whole "dog and pony show" while we were there. He kept saying that the church "would help us out financially" to give him a call when we needed it. We called...no reply. After a bunch of calls, emails and a few snail mail letters I finally got a note from his secretary telling me that they were tight on money and couldn't spare any. Two Sundays before she contacted me they had raised millions of dollars (it made the state denominational paper) in a single day to fund several satellite

video-venues in order to perpetuate the pastor's "cult of personality". Just a complete lack of integrity!!!

**5. Recent church planters are your best resource.** The greatest advice, financial gifts and friendship I have ever received is from guys that planted within the last several years. They will cry with you, rejoice with you and sacrifice for you. As long as I live I will remember the day that the pastor of local church plant (less than 3 months old) handed me their last \$250 because another church (mentioned in answer #4) didn't come through and we couldn't pay rent (God bless you Hal). To this day other church planters are some of my closest friends and greatest source of inspiration. God uses them in mighty ways to speak into my life (God bless you Gary, Shawn, Travis and Adam).

**6. You can always plant another church...you can't always have another family.** As much as I love church planting and shepherding people...I love my wife more. As a man with a divorce on his record, I can tell you nothing...I mean nothing...especially ministry...should ever get in the way of your family. That also reminds me...if your wife is not on board with planting a church....don't plant!!!

**7. Spend more time reading the Bible than other books.** Church growth, church planting, church strategy and church leadership books are great...but I spent way too much time pouring into them (at the beginning) and not enough time in God's Word. The best church practices, strategies and leadership ideas can be found within the pages of the Bible.

**8. Get out of the freakin' pulpit every once in a while.** Pastors have this idea that the world will fall apart for their church if they don't preach every Sunday. I gotta tell you...preaching week after week without a break will dull your abilities. Taking a break every now and then gives other leaders a chance to step up and you a rest to get fired back up. Nothing makes me preach better than being out of the pulpit for a week or two. Nothing grows our leaders like me being out of the pulpit for a week or two.

**9. Don't fall in love with some else's community, vision or calling.** I got fired up by reading books by Andy Stanley and Erwin McManus. Unfortunately, I fell in love

with their calling...and their community. God didn't call me to shepherd the people of Los Angeles or Atlanta...he called me to shepherd the people of Lakeland, Florida. I wasted way too many days trying to be Mark Driscoll and Ed Young. Jr. when God just wanted me to be Chris Elrod and to love on the people of Polk County.

**10. Pray, pray, pray!!!** When things suck...pray. When things go well...pray. When thing look hopeless...pray. When things look successful...pray.

There is a bunch of other stuff...but the answers above are probably the most important lessons I learned along the way. Ultimately, seek God and His Word for your unique vision, community and calling. What worked for others may not work for you!

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