

# THE PROFILE OF A CHURCH PLANTER

## Part One of Three

*By Glenn Smith*

What are the essential qualities necessary in the life of a church planter? When I say “essential” I literally mean essential! These are the non-negotiables, the personal characteristics that one needs in order to be able to spiritually lead any new church. I want to present 4 personal qualities that should be present in increasing measure in the church planter.

The first quality is **spiritual vitality**. Spiritual vitality has to do with one’s relationship with God. It is important for all people in spiritual leadership to have a vital relationship with God. But for church planters it is crucial! Why? Because church planters are embarking on a mission that is an enormous threat to our enemy Satan. Church planters are stepping into the front lines of intense battle. Satan will do everything possible to prevent the planting of new churches because he knows (to quote Peter Wagner) that church planting is the most effective method of evangelism under heaven. He knows that new churches are powerfully effective at moving people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Do not be naïve. Church planting is a dangerous thing! Do not think for one minute that you will not be opposed in the spiritual realm! Every church planter I have ever known has encountered obstacles and struggles that were clearly initiated by our adversary, or they encountered unusual difficulties that provided exceptional opportunities for the evil one to do his work.

So how do you prepare? You must make sure that your relationship with God is intimate; that you are grounded in His Word, and that you are genuinely alive to Him. The practice of spiritual disciplines is foundational. A life of consistent prayer and an authentic walk of faith are non-negotiable. Sensitivity to the movement of God’s Spirit is a must. The church planter needs to be keenly aware of God’s presence within and around.

It is also important for planters to have an awareness of God’s power at work in their lives in the past. This lays a foundation for ongoing dependence and courage. They must be conquering any addictions such as workaholism, pornography, or rage. They must have an increasingly dynamic walk of faith, hope, and love. Spiritual vitality is critical when stepping into this type of spiritual battle.

The next quality is **personal mastery**. By personal mastery I mean that the church planter has a high degree of self-awareness and emotional maturity, and as a result is a lifetime learner. The planter must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They must know how to capitalize on their gifts and abilities, and they must know how to minimize the impact of their personal weaknesses and growth areas. They must also be devoted to ongoing development in important areas of personal deficiency.

However, for this to be true, church planters must have a high degree of emotional maturity. They must not be easily threatened or fearful of being honest with themselves and others. They must be comfortable with the fact that they have not arrived, but are on a journey of personal discovery and development. Peter Senge describes personal mastery as the discipline of personal growth and learning. He states, “People with high levels of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results in life they truly seek.”<sup>1</sup> Personal mastery enables us to take strong initiative and be creative even when we do not have all the answers.

People who have a high degree of personal mastery are also aware of how others perceive them. How did they achieve self-awareness and perception awareness? By inviting and reflecting on feedback. It has been said that feedback is the breakfast of champions. By listening and reflecting we become confident in our strengths and aware of our needs. This type of confidence is reflected in hope and courage without arrogance. Personal mastery enables us to receive constructive criticism and then benefit from it. It also enables us to freely affirm others and lift others up above ourselves.

The third quality is **marriage and family readiness**. Make no mistake about it; church planting will add stress to your marriage and family. It is important that you and your spouse have developed healthy ways to communicate openly and directly about the sensitive issues in your marital relationship, in your parenting, and in your personal finances. It is crucial that the spouse of the church planter be supportive of this new venture of faith. It is also important for the spouse to define what role they believe God is calling them to fulfill. No healthy person expects a church planter to have a perfect family. However, it is important that the planter be a model of family health and maturity.

It is not uncommon for the adversary to direct spiritual attacks at the family of the church planter. We must remember 1 John 4:4 which teaches us “greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.” The natural stresses along with the spiritual challenges will expose weaknesses in the marriage and family. The church planter must be totally committed to his/her family and provide protection and care while tackling this dynamic new work. I do not believe that God will ever call us to sacrifice our family for the sake of ministry. However, I have seen God use the task of church planting to make families stronger. We must be clear on our priorities and be diligent to maintain a healthy balance between family and ministry.

The fourth quality is **clarity of calling**. Depending upon your theological tradition, you may see the issue of calling quite different than others. However, one thing is sure; you need to have a deep conviction that this is what God is leading you to do at this time.

In church planting you will be confronted with many unexpected challenges and disappointments. There will be times when you feel like the wheels are coming off. There will be times that you will likely feel discouraged and frustrated. There is a high

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<sup>1</sup> Senge, Peter. *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990. P. 141.

probability that you will be hurt by some of the very people whom you trust and depend upon.

Without a clear sense of calling it will be easy to throw in the towel. Frankly, most church planters quit within 3 to 5 years. I've seen several quit after one year. Did God call them to something different that quickly? Did they walk away from a calling? In all likelihood, they did not have a deep conviction that this was something that they were divinely called to do. Without clarity of calling there will not be persevering leadership. Without persevering leadership there will not be a sustained, transformational work of God.<sup>2</sup>

These are the essential personal qualities: spiritual vitality, personal mastery, marriage and family readiness, and clarity of calling. Writing about personal qualities the Apostle Peter said "if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> The church planter needs to be pursuing and modeling these qualities in increasing measure.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on calling see our other articles in this series in The Church Planters Notebook at [www.nciglobal.org](http://www.nciglobal.org).

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-9.

<sup>4</sup> We highly recommend that all prospective church planters complete a quality assessment for church planters. NCI offers an excellent assessment. Contact [info@nciglobal.org](mailto:info@nciglobal.org) for more information about the church planter assessment or go to our website [www.nciglobal.org](http://www.nciglobal.org).