

Faith Pulpit

Lessons in Church Planting from the Apostle Paul

Many people have a mistaken idea of missions. If you ask them, “What is a missionary?” they immediately think of someone who goes to a foreign land, learns a foreign language, and works in a foreign culture. In one sense they are right, but in another they are wrong. They are right in that many missionaries do go to foreign lands. They do learn foreign languages. They do work in foreign cultures.

However, they are wrong in thinking that this is true of every missionary. If you were to ask these same people, “Who was the greatest missionary who ever lived?” they would immediately say, “the Apostle Paul.” It is interesting, therefore, in studying the life and missionary work of the Apostle Paul to note that Paul did not learn a foreign language to do his missionary work.

He used the Greek language, which he already spoke. He also used Aramaic on occasion, and perhaps Latin, but these likewise were languages he already knew.

Moreover, Paul did not go to a foreign land to be a missionary. Except for his time alone in the desert of Arabia, he was born, lived, and died in the confines of the Roman Empire. He did not go to Parthia, Elam, Germany, or Mesopotamia. Moreover, he did not have to learn a foreign culture. The nearest he got to a foreign culture was in Lystra where he had to deal with the frontier Lycaonian subculture (Acts 14:11–18).

In a very real sense, therefore, the Apostle Paul was a home missionary. Though a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he was a Roman citizen, and his mission was to plant churches all over his own land, the Roman Empire.

We can learn much about home missions and church planting from the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. Let us touch on five principles of home missionary church planting as seen in the life and work of this great missionary.

First, the home missionary church planter must be a saved individual. The Apostle Paul met the Lord and was converted on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–6).

Second, the home missionary must be trained and have some experience. Paul was trained at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and later by the Lord (Galatians 1: 11,12). He gained hands-on experience by working in the church in Antioch under the tutoring of Barnabas (Acts 11:25,26).

A church planting home missionary today also will do well to get some training first in a Bible college and/or seminary and then some experience working in an established local church before setting out on a church planting ministry.

In Maranatha Baptist Church of Grimes, Iowa, which has just been newly planted, several key individuals are college and seminary students from Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary who are interested in eventually going out into a church planting ministry on their own. The church planting work in Grimes has added a valuable dimension to their education.

Another key individual at Maranatha of Grimes is a lay leader who is the head of a family and who plans to go help other church planters start new churches when he retires from his secular work. He gained valuable experience working in several local churches before coming out to help start Maranatha.

A third lesson we must not miss in studying the church planting ministry of the Apostle Paul is that the church planter must be called to that type of ministry. It is very clear from Acts 13:2 that Paul and Barnabas had such a call. A call from God to this kind of ministry is an absolute necessity because church planting is hard work. It is also at times discouraging work. The church planter must know that God has called him to such a work, or he will be tempted to quit.

While Acts 13:2 makes it clear that Paul and Barnabas had such a call, it does not show that John Mark was called. Later, John Mark quit (Acts 13:13). We do not know why John Mark quit, but we do know that he did.

A fourth lesson we can learn from the church planting ministry of the Apostle Paul is the value of established churches taking an active part in church planting. The church in Antioch of Syria was deeply involved in the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas.

The church at Antioch prayed for them and sent them out (Acts 13:3). It was a tremendous help to the missionary efforts of Paul and Barnabas to have the church at Antioch behind them. It also was a great blessing to the church at Antioch when from time to time the mission team reported back to the mother church (Acts 14:27).

In the church planting effort of Maranatha Baptist Church of Grimes, two churches in particular helped the effort greatly by giving encouragement, guidance, prayer, and financial support, as well as families to form the nucleus of the new church. Urbandale Baptist Church of Urbandale, Iowa, and Saylorville Baptist Church of Des Moines, Iowa, gave invaluable help to firmly plant Maranatha. Because of their help, Maranatha reached a record of 55 in attendance before the church was six months old. Several other churches also helped by raising up prayer support.

The United States today is a needy land, just as the Roman Empire was in Paul's day. More established churches need to catch a vision of the possibilities of planting churches in the next towns. Since missions is dear to the heart of God, God will surely bless those churches which actively help plant more churches (Philippians 4:19).

The fifth principle of church planting we can glean from the ministry of the Apostle Paul is that while he knew there are some methods to be followed in planting churches, and he used many of them, he also knew that, most importantly, planting churches means reaching people.

So whether it was in Philippi working with Lydia and the jailor (Acts 16), or in Corinth working with Titus, Justus, and Crispus (Acts 18:7,8), or in Thessalonica with the devout Greeks and the chief women (Acts 17:4), Paul sought to gather together people to plant the new church.

Buildings are helpful. Finances have their part. But the most important ingredient in church planting is people. The earnest church planter will quickly make that part of his thinking. This is another important lesson we can learn about church planting from the life and ministry of the greatest missionary who ever lived, the Apostle Paul.

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Dr. John Hartog II (D.Th., Grace Theological Seminary and D.Min., Central Baptist Theological Seminary), was a beloved professor, pastor, and scholar who faithfully served the Lord for over 50 years. He earned degrees from Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, Grace Theological Seminary, and Central Baptist Seminary. Dr. Hartog was a passionate teacher and pastor, spending much of his life at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, where he taught for 23 years.

Known for his deep love of Scripture and engaging teaching style, he made a lasting impact on students and congregations alike. Dr. Hartog's legacy is one of unwavering devotion to Christ, a love for God's Word, and a heart for ministry. He went home to Heaven on August 18, 2024.