

Field 4 – Reproducible Church Formation

The Harvest Field

Objectives – The church planter will:

- Understand biblical church function and purpose
- Examine biblical guidelines for church health
- Do an honest evaluation of existing churches within their network
- Be introduced to tools for designing next steps in church formation

By church formation, we simply mean “bundling the harvest” and molding a collective identity as the body of Christ. This is not a task solely dependent on the church planter. It is God who establishes His church within His timing. For the church planter, joining God in this task means fulfilling certain tasks while delegating others. For the church planter the question is:

Key Question – How do we form the church?

Let us begin with the end in mind. For the church planter, it is necessary to think of church on these two levels.

- 1) What is a church?
- 2) What does a church do?

Taking time to pursue answers to these questions with the leaders of your network will solidify common vision and promote healthy evaluation of the steps needed to arrive at healthy church. Use the following studies to promote discussion. Take time to develop your own definition of healthy church based on the Word.²⁹

Self-Discovery Study – Healthy Church Identity

Read the following passages and discuss the descriptions of church identity.

<p>1) 1 Peter 2:9-10 -</p> <p>2) 1 Peter 2:5 –</p> <p>3) 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 –</p> <p>4) 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 –</p> <p>5) 1 Timothy 3:15 -</p>		
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Understanding biblical church function is essential. Biblical accounts provide precedents for church activities. Examining church function at the source will help us later evaluate existing church tradition that may or may not promote healthy advance.

Self-Discovery Study – Healthy Church Function		
<p>Read Acts 2:41-47 and Acts 11:19-26, 13:1-3. What do healthy churches do? Record your answers below.</p>		
<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p> <p>4.</p> <p>5.</p> <p>6.</p> <p>7.</p> <p>8.</p>		

²⁹ For further help with scriptural references concerning church identity and function see the compiled list within: “The Baptist Faith and Message 2000”, Article VI: The Church. Available for download at: www.sbc.org.

Tools for Evaluation -- Facilitating Healthy Church

One of the challenges of teaching healthy church is organizing the vast amount of material available in the New Testament for quick dissemination in advancing fields. For this reason, consider these simple tools for organizing the biblical content as well as evaluating next steps in church formation designed to help oral learners.

Two “Handy Guides” will be introduced.

1) The Handy Guide for the Man of Peace ³⁰

2) The Handy Guide for the Maturing Church ³¹

The first of these is intended as a starter. As the man of peace gathers his oikos around the gospel and begins discipleship, he is faced with a handful of simple questions that if not answered carry potential to stunt development of a new church. As a church begins, unexamined worldviews and previous religious practice, such as worship in temples, must be answered. In facing the issues of getting started, we have found the first of these two guides very helpful. It provides answers for the “Man of Peace.”

The Second “Handy Guide” is valuable for those churches that are either maturing or perhaps returning to health. Organizing a church around simple reproducible vision is a key to multiplication. Of course, maturity is a process. It is not produced in a single training. Thus the church planter is served to consider again the T4T process or mentorship as these materials are introduced. Those churches that have arrived at “maturity” are sometimes served to go back to the beginning, as maturity is not a box to check off but a reality that must be maintained and revisited over time as traditions often cloud true biblical expectation. This second “handy guide” has proven very valuable among existing churches struggling with extra-biblical tradition which has limited their ability to reproduce.

³⁰ This guide was created in the field as the need arose among new believers to answer several key questions in the initial formation of churches. Our partnership with Lipok Lemtur in pioneer fields showed us the need for this tool and served as the testing ground.

³¹ This guide was first introduced in the teaching of David Garrison. We have since made small adjustments to the format and content, but wish to credit Dr. Garrison in its creation.

Tools for the trainer – The Handy Guides to Healthy Churches.

The Left Hand – “Handy Guide” - for the Man of Peace

There are five questions that must be answered in the mind of the Man of Peace as he begins hosting a new church.

Who? When? Where? Why? What?

These are the 5 key questions of new church starts.



Question #1 – Who is the church?

This is a question that can be revisited with each contact with the Man of Peace, as the answer encompasses the many word pictures given in scripture, (Body of Christ [1 Cor.12:12-31], Bride [Eph. 5:22-33], People of God, God's household, Royal priesthood [1 Pet. 2:4-10], etc.) To answer this question for the first time, however, we have chosen one verse. Acts 2:41 shows us the entry point for the formation of the first New Testament churches.

“Those who accepted his message were baptized,
and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Three initial teaching points exist in this verse. First, when the message was presented, those the Lord called, accepted his message. By faith these were added to the family of God through the sacrifice of Christ. It did not stop there however. They also chose to identify themselves with Christ's body in his death, burial and resurrection through baptism.

This truth creates a second teaching point for us in this verse. Those who accepted the message were baptized. Baptism immediately follows acceptance. Here the point of emphasis is on both the immediate inclusion of some who in Acts 2:36-37 are said to have murdered Jesus, and the clear precedent of baptism after acceptance. This would seem to strike down any argument concerning the need to live up to any standard as prerequisite to baptism, as no more gross sin can be imagined than literally killing the author of salvation. It also answers potential false teaching concerning baptism prior to a personal confession of Christ.

Finally those who were baptized were “added to their number.” This means they had a recognizable membership. They knew who was in and who was not. The church is open to minister to all but exclusively formed around those who have followed the Lord in obedience, the first steps of which are acceptance and baptism.

Do you have the expectation of large harvest? Having 3,000 baptisms on the first day of the church most certainly meant multiple baptizers. No one man could keep up with the needs of this multiplying community.

Question #2 – When do we meet?

Here the answer is not written in stone; in fact, the precedent of the first church will point to daily meetings (see Acts 2:46). What can be stated, however, is the need for a regular plan for meeting.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Many cultures not known as “time oriented” have struggled with this question. The question for us as cross-cultural workers is: should such a schedule be imposed? The answer here should err on the side of freedom. Timing and length of service is not mandated in scripture. Consistency, however, is a must among new believers from belief systems that promote private worship. The goal is to establish the habit of meeting and seems to be the command of Hebrews 10.

Answer: Each new church start should set a time and day for regular meeting at least once per week. As a new family is created, our lives together should be set apart and considered as holy unto the Lord.

Key Question #3 – Where do churches meet?

The answer is the New Testament precedent. See the following study from the from Acts and Paul’s letters.

Self-Discovery Bible Study

Read the passages and answer the question.

Question – Where did the churches meet?

Acts 2:46 /5:42 /16:40/ 17:5-7/
18:7/ 19:9/ 20:20/ Romans 16:1-5 1
Cor. 16:19/ Col. 4:15/ Philemon
1:1-2

1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
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11.		

Answer: In each case, the New Testament precedent is clear. In fact, no other venues exist in scripture.³² Following the example of scripture means churches meet in homes. Take time with your disciples or church planting team to discuss reasons for homes as the venue for church. This exercise can create valuable discussion, but may not be needed for the pioneer Man of Peace who is likely to simply follow scripture. Challenge the believers in your church. Would they be willing to offer their home for expanding the kingdom? Hosting a new Bible study, or the willingness to host a church fits the biblical precedent established in the study above.

Question #4 – Why do we gather as church?

The answer here is our primary motive.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it for the glory of God.”

This is a simple instruction for the church. Every activity the church participates in should pass the 1 Corinthians 10:31 test. Anything not committed to glorifying God is outside the realm of healthy church activity. This simple instruction is the charge of every believer. Mutual accountability to this command must be the “DNA” of our churches. This is the only pure motive. Anything less is an impure offering.

The scripture also offers mutual accountability and encouragement as a motive for the habit of meeting together.

³²Some may claim Acts 2 as an exception to meetings in homes. It can be defended, however, that the purpose of Temple meetings was ongoing evangelism as the believing community engaged their Jewish brothers. The second possible argument is the lecture Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus where Paul is said to have continued in teaching for two years. It is of note, however, that Aquila and Priscilla who were in Ephesus and would have had access to the hall chose instead to use their home as the host of a church (see 1 Cor. 16:19, which is written from Ephesus).

Hebrews 10:24-25 say, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Vision, accountability and encouragement are resources that must be regularly renewed. Like food for the body, or fuel for a machine, these benefits of body life keep us moving in the right direction. Do not forsake the assembly! Among converts of eastern religions, which view worship as an individual right, corporate worship and accountability may be new concepts. While the Holy Spirit will generate an intrinsic motive for fellowship, the habit of meeting corporately must be modeled. Doing so will expose new believers to the intended benefits of body life detailed in Hebrews 10:24-25.

Question #5 – What does a church do?

Here we need to make a simple list of activities of the first church recorded for us in Acts 2:38-47.

Self-Discovery Bible Study		
Read the passages and answer the question.	Acts 2:38-47	
What did the first church do?		
1.		
2.		
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Present the gospel – call for decision – v. 38 Baptize the believers – v 41 Commit to leader’s instruction – v 42
Fellowship – love each other - v 42 Break Bread – Lord’s supper/meal - v 42 Prayer – v 42
Give to the needy – v 44-45
Meet regularly – v 46
Praise God – v 47

Do you consider these the functions of a healthy church?

What, if anything is missing in the list of healthy function you created from Acts 2:38-47?

Remember, we are suggesting a starting point for the house or man of peace. New believers, or families of new believers expected to reproduce these functions are the starting point of a new church. Once this level of healthy church function exists, self-awareness, or a corporate commitment to identity as the body of Christ, remains as a necessary qualifier of church.

We have seen repeatedly in the field, church function proceeds maturity. This means, the activities of a church, in obedience to the Christ’s commands, are the starting point for church. This does not discount the need for formal church identity, leadership or church discipline as believers stray from healthy function. Each of these elements of maturity will necessarily follow and help to bring order to a body’s obedience to the Lord’s commands.

For this reason, the church planter should evaluate the intended results of beginning discipleship. Introduction and expectation of obedience to the Lord’s commands are a catalyst to healthy church function and can be expected from the beginning. Obedience corporately, adds the elements of body life demonstrated in the first church recorded in Acts 2:28-47.