

The Spontaneous Multiplication Of Churches

George Patterson

Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to look on the fields that are ready for harvest (John 4:35). So—let's do it. How many men and women and children, persons with feelings like ours, still know nothing of Jesus' sacrificial death and life-giving resurrection?

Our Lord sends us to disciple every “nation” (people group) by training them to obey all his commands—which include, of course, discipling *others* (Matt. 28:18-20). This means that we disciple a “nation” only when it is permeated by obedient disciples who also disciple other unevangelized peoples. So we don't simply go and start a church among a people. We, or those we send, must start the kind of church that grows and reproduces spontaneously as churches will, in daughter churches, granddaughter churches, great-granddaughter churches and so on. *Spontaneous* reproduction of churches means the Holy Spirit moves a church to reproduce daughter churches on its own, without outsiders pushing it (Acts 13:1-3).

I began training pastors in Honduras in a traditional theological institution and had the traditional problems for the traditional reasons. I assumed the bright young men I trained were dedicated because they came to our resident Bible school. Our plan was for them to return to their hometowns as pastors. But the graduates found the gold lettering on their diplomas did not go well with the whitewashed adobe walls back home. It enabled them, however, to earn more in the office of the Dole Banana Co.

My raspy supervisor had the gall to blame us teachers; he told us, "Close the school; start discipling the people.

"No," I argued, "they're too hard."

"Excuses! They're poor, semi-literate, subsistence farmers but you teach as though they were educated, middle class Americans."

I wrote my missionary buddies from language school, now spread all over Latin America, fishing for sympathy. They had the same problem!

"I'm a teacher without a classroom!" I complained.

"So," my supervisor rasped, "teach by extension."

"What's that?"

He handed me a smelly old saddle, explaining, "You're promoted. This is the Chair of Evangelism and Church Planting in your new extension Bible institute."

After a few weeks of blisters on my south side I learned to communicate with the mission mule and announced, "Hey, I can do this TEE stuff. It's great."

My supervisor warned me, "Then your students had better raise up and pastor their own churches or we'll close down this Theological Education by Extension, too."

I took the pastoral studies to family men (Biblical "elder" types) in the poverty-ridden villages, mountains and cities. Unlike their single young sons, they had crops, jobs or family responsibilities that kept them from going off to our resident Bible school. They also lacked the education to absorb its intensive teaching. But these older men, with roots in their villages and barrios, could begin pastoring with the respect of their people easier than the single young men could. By God's mercy I slowly learned to evangelize and disciple these *elders* in a way that enabled them to raise up and pastor their small village churches. As will be the case in many of today's remaining unreached fields, we began to see growth not through any one church growing big or fast, but through the slow, steady reproduction of many small churches.

I could have avoided years of sour stomach groping for principles of church reproduction had I looked first in the operator's manual. New Testament discipling principles, conscientiously applied, are enabling churches to reproduce in Honduras and many other fields. We must distinguish between these general *principles* and culture-specific *applications*. Some of the methods cited below, for example, will not fit in your golf bag if you work in Tokyo. But the Biblical principles themselves, if applied with culturally relevant methods, should enable churches to reproduce wherever there is plenty of "good soil." Theologically speaking, good soil is *bad people*, and lots of them (Rom. 5:20-21; Matt. 13:18-23; Eph. 2:1-10). Field testing of programs based on these principles give consistently good results in Latin America and Asia, including hostile fields where evangelism is illegal.



In 1965, George Patterson began working in northern Honduras with the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society. He adapted theological education-by-extension to "obedience oriented discipling." He trained Honduran pastoral students on the job as they raised up and pastored over 100 churches. Patterson continues to work with the CBHMS (now called Mission America) training missionaries for church reproduction. He also directs a ministry called Cultural Adaptation Training. (CAT).

The simplicity of the principles disappoints some educators. They expect something more sophisticated, at least new or expensive. Missionary or not, one can multiply disciples doing these four simple things:

1. KNOW AND LOVE THE PEOPLE YOU DISCIPLE (just as Jesus emptied Himself of His heavenly glory and power to become a man, take on Jewish culture and draw near to the publicans and sinners).
2. MOBILIZE YOUR DISCIPLES IMMEDIATELY TO EDIFY THOSE THEY ARE DISCIPLING (don't just educate for some vague future).
3. TEACH AND PRACTICE OBEDIENCE TO JESUS' COMMANDS IN LOVE, ABOVE AND BEFORE ALL ELSE.
4. ORGANIZE YOUR CHURCH OR PROGRAM BY BUILDING LOVING, EDIFYING ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLES AND CHURCHES.

If you are already doing these basics effectively, you may now take a nap. Otherwise, read prayerfully the explanations below and record the details you plan to make a part of your ministry:

1. KNOW AND LOVE THE PEOPLE YOU DISCIPLE

We must know and love a people before we can disciple them. When Jesus told His disciples to "Look at the fields", they were finding it hard to love the Samaritans around them; they could not see them receiving God's grace.

Limit Your Area of Responsibility to One People or Community.

We must focus on one people group, the one God has given us. Paul knew his area of responsibility before God (II Cor.10:12-16; Acts 16:6-10; Gal. 2:8). He knew what kind of churches to plant and where. For a *movement of church reproduction* a church planting team needs a clear focus from God. My area was "the Spanish speaking people of the Aguan Valley and surrounding mountains." It helps to be exact.

At home or abroad every discipler needs to ask: "For whom am I responsible?" If a missionary fails to do this, the geographic and ethnic limits of his ministry remain blurred. He will jump from opportunity to opportunity. I asked one of these wandering gold prospectors in Central America what his area of responsibility was. "Oh" he said, "I am winning the country for Christ." He goes from city to city preaching in prisons and army camps; he bombs villages with tracts from his Cessna. It's fun and folks back home eagerly finance it. But he will never plant a reproductive church until he learns to hold the people of a community in his heart.

Choosing your people in a new field needs study and prayer. Confer with other missionaries, nationals and God Himself for guidance. I found a map of my area made by Texaco (I don't know why; the average town only had two cars, one of which ran). But it showed where the villages were and kept me from getting lost so often. So, find the population centers, where you can buy safe milk, where others are not discipling and—even before the milk—where folks want to know God and enjoy Him forever.

Knowing a people means more than finding how many tons of figs they exported last year, that the average adult male has 7.4 children or that their legislature has two chambers. It means touching the heart of individuals. Laughing with those who laugh. Weeping with those who weep. Playing marbles with 2-year old Chimbo and checkers with his grandpa (or whatever they play in the town square). It may help if you let him beat you. This applies to arguing religion, too. It's dangerous always to be "right" when you're the new kid on the block. Learn to appreciate the people and their ways, even the toothless old men. Listen and learn until you have discovered those things in their folk religion or culture that help communicate the gospel.

Once you know your area and people, discern which segment among them is most receptive to you and to Jesus Christ. To penetrate restricted, resistant fields, aim first at the working class or an oppressed minority. This contradicts some popular church growth theories. We are not dealing with second generation growth in Pasadena, California, however, but the *initial beachhead* where people get a curved blade in their ribs for witnessing. Jesus did not begin His public ministry among the influential middle class and natural leaders in the political nerve centers of Rome or Jerusalem, but with the working class upriver in Galilee where they spoke Hebrew with a backwoods accent—otherwise He would have been crucified prematurely.

Let the Church Be of the People.

Like most inexperienced church planters I started "preaching points" at first, instead of genuine New Testament churches. Someone went every week to a community where a group gathered to hear their pulpit oratory and sing (well, at least to sing). Converts were not baptized. Local leaders were not trained. The Lord's Supper was neglected. No one knew for sure who were Christians. Obedient, sacrificial discipling gave way to entertaining (a tradition brought by American missionaries). Preaching points develop a personality of their own; they stubbornly refuse to evolve into obedient, giving, reproductive churches. They become sponges soaking up the time and efforts of outside workers and producing nothing—except where God's sheer mercy overrides our routine.

Find what a church's people can do and plan that, before planning its structure, forms and organization. I hope it takes you less time than it took me, to learn that formal pulpit preaching is ineffective (often illegal) in many of today's remaining unreached fields. You can preach the Word with Power in many other ways, if you know your people. We used dramatic Bible reading, songs with music and lyrics composed by nationals, poems, symbols and story telling. They sang with more enthusiasm when they composed songs in the local style. Bach would have croaked (so would the average director of contemporary church music). But the music was *theirs*. I'd spend days preparing an evangelistic sermon for our first trip to a distant village. They'd listen politely. Then I learned to let them dramatize Bible stories in their own way (one rehearsal fifteen minutes beforehand). They let local non-Christians play the fatted calf and other minor roles in the Prodigal Son and the whole community complained for weeks. Not about the terrible acting, but about the jerk who was too greedy to wait for his old man to die, to get his hands on his inheritance! Which all lead to more conversions than a year of my sermons.

Let the new church's self-identity be evident. Know exactly what you are aiming at within the community: a well-defined body of obedient disciples of Jesus Christ. Once I made the mistake of allowing more outside helpers to be present than members of the community during the first baptism and celebration of the Lord's Supper. The church died at birth. There must be a majority from the community itself, especially at the first Baptism or worship meetings, or the church is not born as a distinct entity within the community. Our converts felt that they had simply been added to some organization of the outsiders. I robbed them of the thrill of looking at each other and saying, "We are now the church here!" They must see the new church being born as a part of their community.

List What You Will Do to Reproduce Disciples among a People.

What you do first often determines the direction of your work, for good or bad, for years to come. Will it lead to reproductive churches? The right steps will vary for each field but will always include teaching the converts first to obey Jesus' basic commands (Matt. 28: 18-20). Take the shortest route possible to start a real church: a group of believers in Christ dedicated to obey His commands. In a pioneer field let it start small, perhaps with only three or four members. It will grow if you disciple the people as Jesus said.

The first question you ask about an unreached people group is, "Who can best reach them?" The answer is often, "Church planters from a people that is culturally closer than we." You, or the missionaries you send, may need to train and mobilize church planting team members from another people group that is more similar to your target group in race, politics, economic level, education, lifestyle and world view.

Let's assume you research well all the factors: race, culture, logistics, urban versus rural backgrounds, language similarities, education and economic levels, etc. You learn the language. Then you go in a crowded bus to your new field, with a team of church planters as similar to the local people as possible in every aspect. Some or all of them may be from another developing country. You are happy because they do not have to make that long cultural leap that delays church planting by years (the less responsive the people are to missionaries, the more crucial this cultural fit). Now you finally arrive, unpack your toothbrush, take a deep breath, pray, step out the door and find fifty thousand people living around you who think Jesus was John Wayne's cousin. Now what?

Avoid institutions if possible at this beachhead stage (community development programs unrelated to church planting, schools, clinics, etc.); they will come later. In Honduras we developed community development work but it grew out of the churches, not vice versa. We taught obedience to the great commandment of loving our neighbor in a practical way. A poverty program can aid church planting if the two are integrated by the Holy Spirit. But churches dependent on charitable institutions are almost always dominated by the foreign missionary and seldom reproduce. Your local missiologist may point to celebrated exceptions here and there, perhaps in a southern suburb of outer Myitkyina, or some place where a freak with fifteen fingers was also born in 1967. But we don't build broad movements for Christ on exceptions.

To start a church that will multiply in the normal way in a *pioneer* field with no experienced pastors nor organized churches, take the following steps (change them where local circumstances require it):

1) Witness first to male heads of households. We often told them Bible stories they could pass on immediately, even before being saved, to their own family and friends. We went with them to show them how. But why *male* heads of families? We worked in a macho culture (right where the word Macho came from, where men carried sharpened machetes and used them readily). Female leadership, right or wrong, limited the outreach of brand new works. Later, when a church was established with male pastor and elders, women could take a higher profile. Be sensitive to your community's norms, especially in the first impressions you give of the church.

2) Baptize all repentant believers without delay (entire families when possible). At first I acted as though a big buzzard were perched on my shoulder just waiting to pounce on our converts that fell away; I delayed baptism to make sure they were "safe." But I soon saw that the very reason many fell away was my distrust. That's the funny thing about God's grace; He wants us to let it slop over on the unworthy.

3) Provide a style of worship that new elders-in-training can lead and teach to others. Don't invite the *public* until local leaders can lead the services. Celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly as the center of worship, especially until local men are mature enough to preach in an edifying, humble way.

4) Organize a provisional board of elders as soon as mature men are converted. Show them how to win and pastor their own people right away. Remember, this is for pioneer fields with no experienced pastors nor well organized churches. We, like Paul, must use the best men God gives us as the churches multiply, or the new disciples have no leadership at all (Acts 14:23).

5) Enroll these new elders in pastoral training on the job. Don't remove them from their people for training. Meet with them every two or three weeks (more often if possible until they are mobilized).

6) Provide a list of activities planned for the congregation, starting with the commands of Christ and His Apostles. Let everyone know where he is going and what he needs to learn for each activity. Use this as a checklist to monitor the progress of the elders you train, in both their studies and pastoral work, as they mobilize their own people in ministry.

Decide How You Can Best Use your Ministry Gifts with the People.

Define your own ministry. What spiritual gifts has the Holy Spirit given you? Before I turned over leadership to the Honduran nationals, my own job was: *To help the Honduran churches train their own leaders.* I could say it in one sentence. My ministry now is: "To train missionaries to reproduce churches in pioneer fields." What is your ministry? Be concise. If you don't know, ask for help. You may work in a field for a year or two before you can pin it down. If you have been working hard in the same church for several years and still cannot briefly define your ministry, you probably have taken on too much. Trim your job down so that you can't help but do it well; then God may open new doors.

Since my preparation came primarily from books and classrooms, I failed to use my gift of teaching in proper harmony with other spiritual gifts. Like most recent seminary graduates, I used my superior knowledge of God's Word to "pull rank" on those who knew less. My teaching stifled their use of the gifts of servant leadership, evangelism and other gift-based ministries. I had to do some painful repenting before I could work in harmony with a ministry team in which the Holy Spirit harmonized the use of several spiritual gifts.

2. MOBILIZE YOUR DISCIPLES IMMEDIATELY TO EDIFY THOSE THEY ARE DISCIPLING.

To build up the church as a living, reproducing body, Paul instructs pastors and teachers to train the members of the church for the ministry, to edify the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

Build Edifying Relationships with the Leaders you Disciple.

Like most new missionaries, I took myself too seriously. I worried about what my disciples were up to. It took me years to learn to sit back with my coconut milk, laugh at my own goofs and trust the Holy Spirit to do His work in my students. How can we enable the leaders we train to edify each other and their people through personal, loving relationships?

Paul left his pastoral disciple Timothy behind to work with the elders in newly planted churches with these instructions: "The things you have heard from me...these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). How dynamic and reproductive this loving "Paul-Timothy" relationship between teacher and student! If you have not yet tried to teach the way Jesus and His Apostles did, you are in for a blessing. If it frightens you, start with just one or two potential leaders. Train them on the job; take responsibility for their effective ministry. Personal discipling does not mean "one-on-one" (Jesus taught twelve), nor is it just to deal with personal needs (Jesus spent most of His time personally discipling the top level leaders of the Church, the very Apostles).

In Honduras I usually taught one to three students, in a way they could imitate and pass on to others immediately. I helped each one have an effective ministry. I taught and modeled what he would pass on to his own people and his own pastoral trainees in the daughter or granddaughter churches. These taught other elders who taught still others as Paul instructed Timothy. The chain grew to over a hundred pastors in training, all elders of churches. As soon as a new church was born, the outside worker enrolled a local leader, normally an elder highly respected by his people, and began passing on to him the same doctrine and materials as he was receiving himself. This new "Timothy" taught the rest of the new elders in his young church. It kept multiplying as long as each discipler did everything in a way his students could imitate immediately. I stopped teaching and preaching in the professional way in which I was used to (they admired it, but could not imitate it). I stopped using electronic equipment including movies, and anything else that was not available to all our workers. That's hard on a gadget-oriented westerner used to gadgets conditioned to using the very latest technology for the glory of Christ.

Once we developed loving, Paul-Timothy discipling relationships we seldom had to discuss church planting. The Holy Spirit channeled the Word of God through these relationships to mobilize the Timothies and church reproduction took care of itself. At first I failed to trust the Holy Spirit and pushed the men myself. I dictated rules and prerequisites to keep the doctrine and the church pure and to make sure the men did their job. It stifled the work; one bitter failure followed another. I prayed, "Lord, I don't want a big ministry of my own; just let me help the Hondurans have a good ministry." God answered this prayer. I also learned through disappointments to let the people themselves decide on their own leaders, using I Tim. 3:1-7.

We learned not to plant the churches first then train the leaders for them; nor did we train the leaders first then tell them to raise up their churches. We married the two efforts in one ministry. My American culture pushed me at first to compartmentalize our organization, isolating its ministries. But I learned to let the Holy Spirit integrate diverse ministries and gifts in the united body (I Cor. 12:4-26).

I also began with education objectives that focused on educating the man. But according to Ephesians 4:11-16, our education should seek only to edify the *church* in love. I had to discipline myself to keep my student's people in view as I taught, and not focus only on my student and the teaching content.

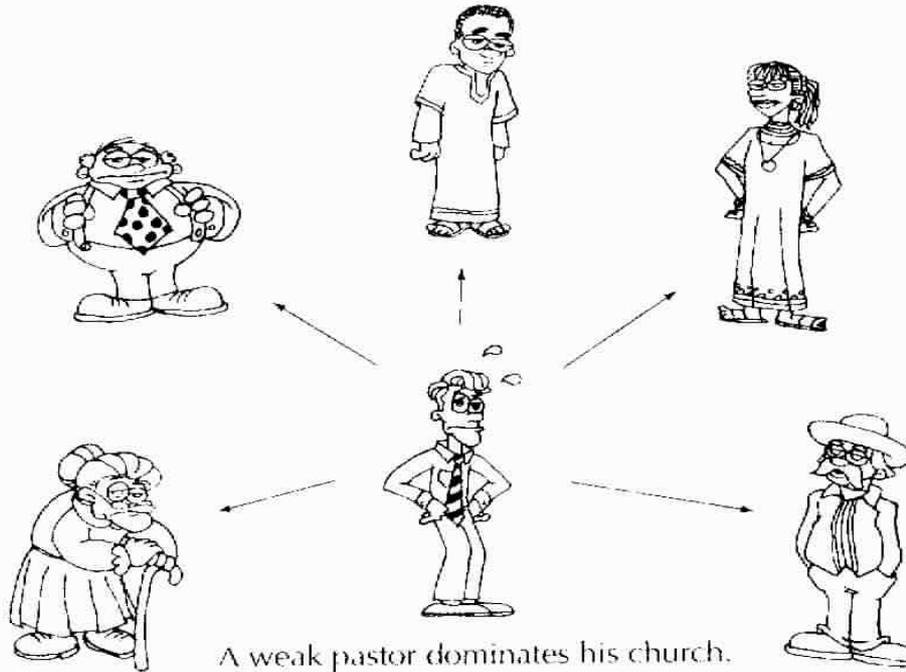
Before I learned to imitate the way Christ and His Apostles disciplined, I was satisfied if my student answered test questions correctly and preached good sermons in the classroom. I neither saw nor cared what he did in his church with what he was learning. I slowly learned to see beyond my student to his ministry with his people. I responded to the needs of his church by listening at the beginning of each session to the reports of my students. Then I often set aside what I had prepared, and instead taught what each student's people needed at that time.

It was hard at first to let the developing churches' needs and opportunities dictate the order of a functional curriculum. In time much of my discipling, like the teaching of the Epistles, became *problem solving*. Yes, if we start reproductive churches we will have problems. The Apostles did, too. To avoid problems, don't have children and don't have churches.

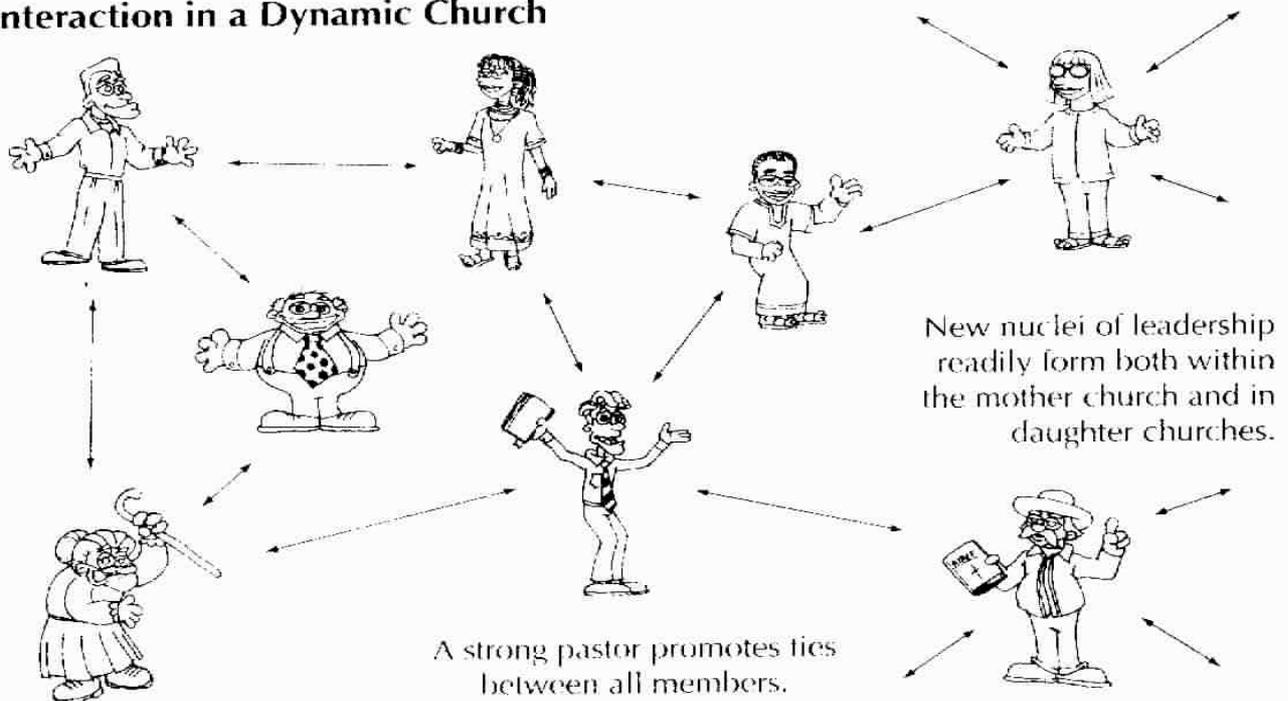
Build Edifying Teaching Relationships between Elders and Disciples.

The pastor or leading elder sets the example for all the leaders. They in turn enable all the members of an infant congregation to minister to each other in love. A weak pastor dominates his congregation. He tries to do everything, or delegates it in a demanding way. He herds rather than leads (both Jesus and Peter prohibit herding in a demanding way: Matt. 20:25-28; I Peter 5: 1-4). Where do you suppose pastors on the mission field pick up the bad practice of herding others? It's not all cultural; they learned it from us missionaries. I furnished the only model the new pastors had in our pioneer field. Because of my superior education and resources, I made the decisions for my less educated colleagues. At the same time, like most new missionaries, I felt insecure and overprotected the first churches. A strong missionary, like a strong pastor, does not fear to give authority and responsibility to others. He does not force gifted, willing workers into existing slots in his organization, but rather builds ministries around them.

A Passive, Pastor-centered Church



Interaction in a Dynamic Church



Teach your converts from the beginning to edify one another in love. Building a network of strong relationships provides for the large number of ministries required in the local church in order for it to grow and reproduce daughter churches.

3. TEACH AND PRACTICE OBEDIENCE TO JESUS' COMMANDS IN LOVE, ABOVE AND BEFORE ALL ELSE

Jesus, after affirming His deity and total authority on earth commissioned His Church to make disciples who obey all His commands (Matt. 28:18-20). So His commands take priority over all other institutional rules. This obedience is always in love. If we obey God for any other reason, it becomes sheer legalism; God hates that.

Start Right Out with Loving Obedience to Jesus' Basic Commands.

To plant churches in a pioneer field, aim for each community to have **a group of believers in Christ committed to obey His commands**. This definition of a church might get a D minus where you studied theology; but *the more you add to it, the harder it will be for the churches you start to reproduce*. We asked our converts to memorize the following list of Christ's basic commands:

1. Repent, believe, and receive the Holy Spirit: Mark 1:15; John 20:22
2. Be baptized (and continue in the new life it initiates): Matt 28:18-20
3. Love God and neighbor in a practical way: Matt. 22:37-40
4. Celebrate the Lord's Supper: Luke 22:17-20
5. Pray daily: Matt. 6:5-15
6. Give generously: Matt. 6:19-21, Luke 6:38
7. Make disciples: Matt. 28:18-20

Memorize them; you can neither be nor make obedient disciples, unless they are basic to your Christian experience. They are the ABC's of both discipling and church planting.

Define Evangelism Objectives in terms of Obedience.

Do not simply preach for "decisions;" make obedient disciples. Only disciples produce a church that multiplies itself spontaneously within a culture. Consider the two commands: "Repent and believe" and "Be baptized." In western culture a man stands alone before his God and "decides" for Christ. But in other cultures sincere conversion needs interaction with family and friends. Faith, repentance and immediate baptism of the entire family or group—no invitation to make a decision—is the norm (Acts 2:36-41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:13-15; 29-34; 18:8). Repentance goes deeper than a decision; it is a permanent change wrought by God's Spirit. We are born all over again. Few purely intellectual decisions in any culture lead to permanent, obedient discipleship.

We found that when we baptized repentant believers reasonably soon, without requiring a long doctrinal course first, the great majority then responded to our training in obedient discipleship. The detailed doctrine came later. Teaching heavy theology *before* one learns loving, childlike obedience is dangerous. It leaves him assuming that Christianity is having Scripturally correct doctrine and he leaves it at that. He becomes a passive learner of the Word rather than an active disciple. Balanced discipling activates mind, heart and hands. It integrates Word, Care, Task. It learns, loves, serves. Emphasizing one of the three at the expense of the others yields spiritually unbalanced believers, not disciples.

The new members of the first New Testament church in Jerusalem obeyed all of the basic commands of Christ from the very beginning. After repentance and baptism they learned the Apostle's doctrine (Word), broke bread, prayed and fellowshiped (Care), and gave and witnessed, adding new members every day (Task): Acts 2:41-47. We also must teach each new convert from the very beginning to obey all these commands in love (John 15:10). Don't wait to start obeying Christ! The first few weeks of their new life in Christ are the most impressionable; they will determine more than any other time of teaching whether or not they are (and make) Bible centered, active, loving *disciples*.

Orient your Teaching to Loving Obedience.

We taught our pastors to orient all church activity to New Testament commands. As they taught the Word of God, they accustomed their people to discern three levels of authority for all that they did as a body of disciples:

1) **NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS**. These carry all the authority of heaven. They include the commands of Jesus' inspired Apostles in the Epistles, which apply only to baptized, more mature Christians who are already members of a church. We don't vote on them nor argue about doing them. They always take precedence over any human organization's rules.

2) **APOSTOLIC PRACTICES (NOT COMMANDED)**. We cannot enforce these as laws because Christ alone has authority to make laws for His own Church, His Body. Nor can we prohibit their practice because they have apostolic precedent. Examples include: holding possessions in common, laying hands on converts, celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently in homes using one cup, baptizing the same day of conversion, Sunday worship.

3) **HUMAN CUSTOMS**. Practices not mentioned in the New Testament have only the authority of a group's voluntary agreement. If it involves discipline, the agreement is recognized in heaven (but only for that congregation; we do not judge another congregation by the customs of our own: Matt. 18:18-20).

Nearly all church divisions and quarrels originate when a power hungry person seeking followers puts mere apostolic practices or human customs (levels 2 or 3 above) at the top level as law.

4. ORGANIZE YOUR CHURCH OR PROGRAM BY BUILDING LOVING, EDIFYING ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLES AND CHURCHES

Healthy daughter churches need loving, edifying discipling relationships within themselves and with the mother church (Acts 11:19-30; 14:21-28; 15:1-2, 28-31). If your church, church planting or training organization is already formed, add this personal discipling to it; don't insist on ruthless changes.

Help Each New Church to Reproduce.

Each church should send extension workers to reproduce daughter churches, as did the Antioch church (Acts 13:1-3). The longer you wait to mobilize a church for multiplication, the harder it is to reprogram its thinking. Teach your elders the joy of sacrificing to separate their strongest tithers and leaders, in the power of the Holy Spirit as in Antioch, to extend Christ's kingdom. After prayer, perhaps fasting, a formal separation service with laying on of hands, as they did. Remember, it is not the individuals that reproduce, but *congregations* that pray and are moved by the Holy Spirit. Let each new church be a link in the chain. The individual extension worker is only an arm of his church.

Ask the new church leaders to chart their own plans. They must take the initiative (don't push your plans on them; simply teach them what the Word says about their task and let them respond). For example, we asked our pastors to draw a large map, with arrows to the villages which they planned for their church to reach directly or through their daughter or granddaughter churches. Their church workers then signed their names by those towns or neighborhoods for which they would pray and plan.

Show Each New Believer How to Witness to Friends and Relatives.

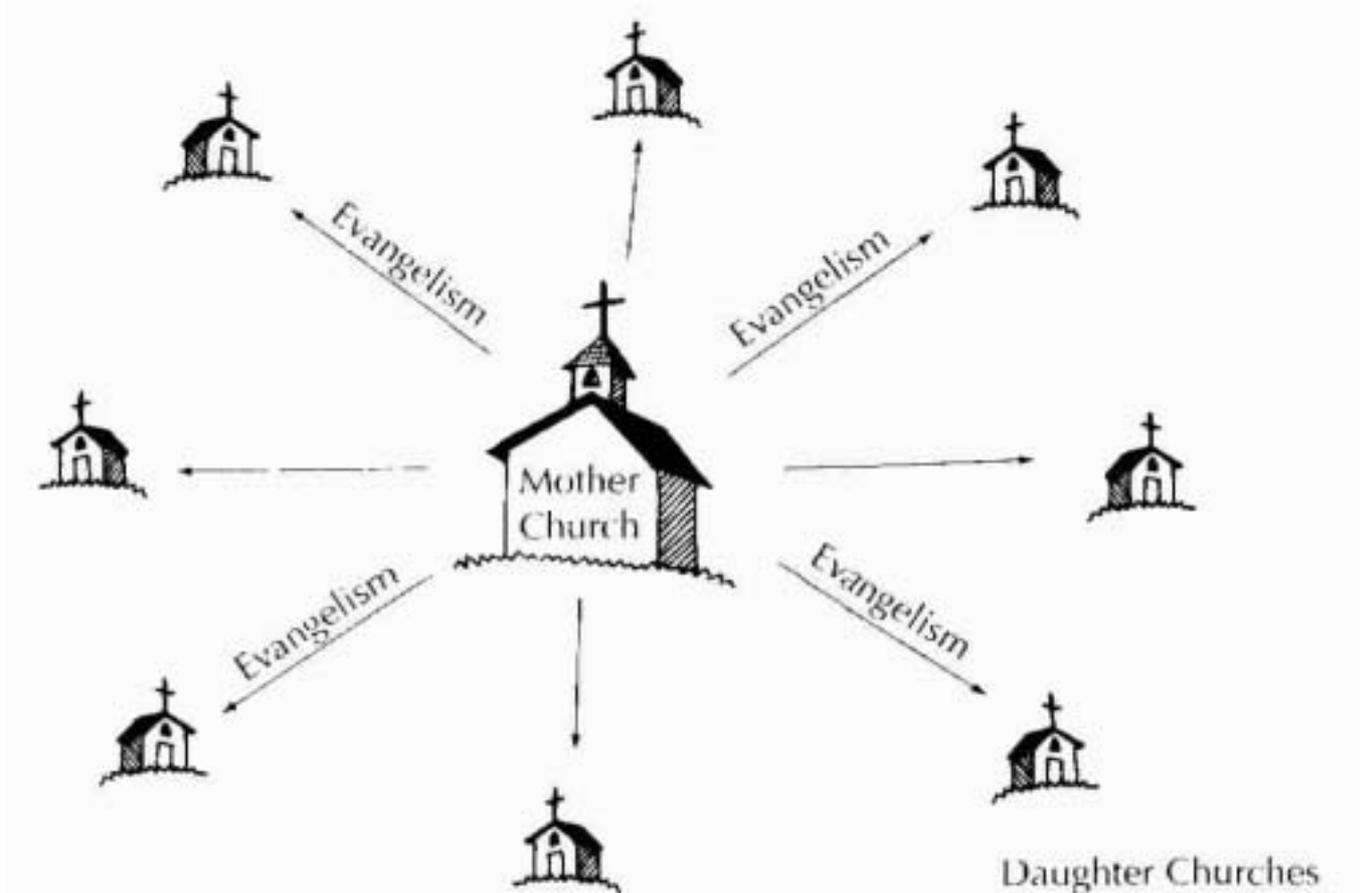
The Holy Spirit flows readily through the bonds that exist between family members and close friends (Acts 10:24, 44). Keep new converts in a loving relationship with them (don't pull them out of their circle to put them in a safe Christian environment, or those very bonds which aid the spread of the gospel become barriers).

We prepared simple gospel studies (mostly Bible stories) that even illiterates could use at once to share their new faith. We accompanied them to show them how to do it, modeling it all in a way they could immediately imitate.

Build Edifying Inter-church Discipling Relationships.

At first I applied church "body life" only to local congregations. Then I learned to build inter-church discipling relationships with accountability. Elders in one church sacrificially disciplined less experienced pastors in the daughter or granddaughter churches.

Another way, in case there is no one who can travel freely, is to get the main worker from the daughter church to go every two weeks or so to the mother church.



The above "hub" strategy wears out the workers and discourages the mother church. God's power, inherent in all churches in which His Spirit dwells, enables a mother church to start a daughter church and train its new elders to help it develop *and* reproduce in granddaughter churches. Just disciple the disciples and watch it happen! The primary links in the chain of churches in Honduras were volunteer extension teachers from the mother church.

The chain was not a hierarchy to control; volunteer teachers with no organizational authority worked with volunteer students. It took sweat and guts to build these loving ties between churches, helping men to know, love and train each other for immediate pastoral ministry. In the process men were shot, put to death by machete, weakened by disease and almost drowned. It was worth it.

The modern western missionary's most common sin is controlling the national churches. I had to learn to keep out of the way and let the Spirit's power inherent in the churches produce the ministries by which the churches were edified and

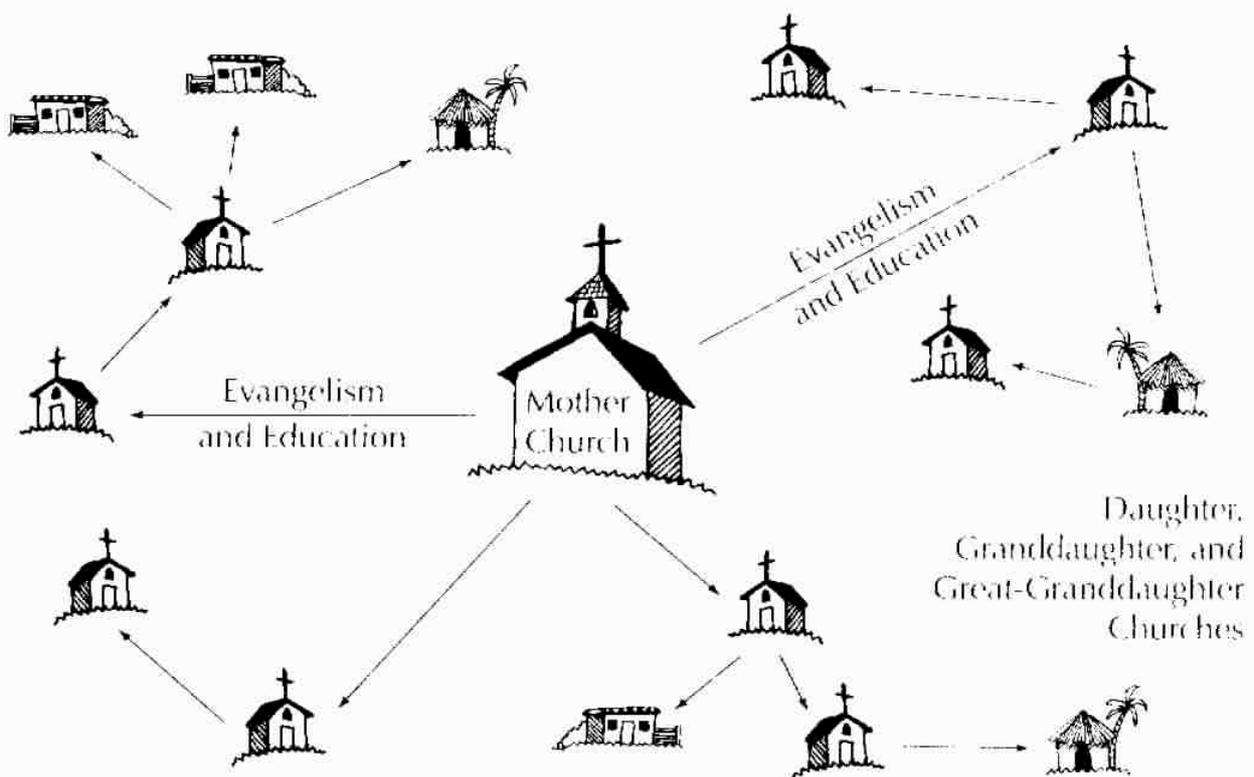
reproduced. I guided, encouraged, taught the Word and counseled, but I no longer pushed. Then we saw the chain reaction; one of the extension networks produced five generations and over twenty churches.

We met occasionally to reaffirm our plans and decide which church would reach certain villages or communities. We divided our entire area of responsibility into nine regions and planned the steps to start a daughter church that would reproduce in each region. The pastoral students of the Honduras Extension Bible Institute have for many years been starting an average of five new churches a year, each of which has from one to three new pastors in training. After turning the leadership of this program to Hondurans, it has continued to reproduce in spite of other missionaries' pressure to revert to traditional pastoral training methods.

Pray for Reproduction Power.

Christ's Parables in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and John 15 compare the growth and reproduction of His churches to that of plants. Like all other living creatures God has created, the Church has her own seed in herself to reproduce after her own kind. Every time we eat, we eat the fruit of God's tremendous reproduction power given to plants and animals. Look around out of doors; it's everywhere—grass, trees, birds, bees, babies and flowers. All creation is shouting it! This is the way God works! Reproduction is His *style*. Pray for it! (God in His infinite wisdom acts a bit lazy when we don't ask Him to move; He limits His absolute power to our weak faith!) We ourselves don't make the church grow or reproduce, any more than pulling on a stalk of corn would make it grow. Paul plants, Apollos waters, God gives the growth. We sow, water, weed, fertilize and fence the crop, but rely on the church's own God-given potential to reproduce. An obedient, Spirit-filled church *has* to reproduce at home or abroad. It's her very nature; she is the Body of the risen, life-giving Son of God.

Each new church in a chain, like a grain of wheat, has the same potential to start the reproduction all over again. When a chain gets too long for good communication, simply reorganize the teaching relationships. Don't assume that doctrine will get watered down the longer the chain. Each Spirit-filled teacher in the chain has the same love for the Word and will rejuvenate the flow. I discovered that the strongest churches were usually one or two links removed from me, the foreign missionary. The key to maintaining the chains is loving communication in both directions. Accurate student reports from each daughter church are essential for his teacher to respond, applying the Word accurately to its life, needs and opportunities.



Pray for protection from traditions that hamper this spontaneous reproduction. We have mentioned teaching that neglects discipleship, and failure to mobilize newly repentant converts to obey beginning with baptism. Another almost universal impediment to reproduction are missionary subsidies that stifle nationals' own giving and build a dependent spirit. Don't rob poor believers of the blessing of sacrificial giving! God multiplies their mite by special celestial mathematics that will prosper them now and for eternity. Paying national pastors with outside funds nearly always stifles spontaneous reproduction and eventually leads to deep resentment when the source no longer equals the demand.

Most impediments come from rules that well-meaning men make, who in weakness of faith, fear the spontaneous and won't allow the Holy Spirit to surprise them:

"But our By-laws state clearly that our church must wait at least five years and have 100 members to start a daughter church."

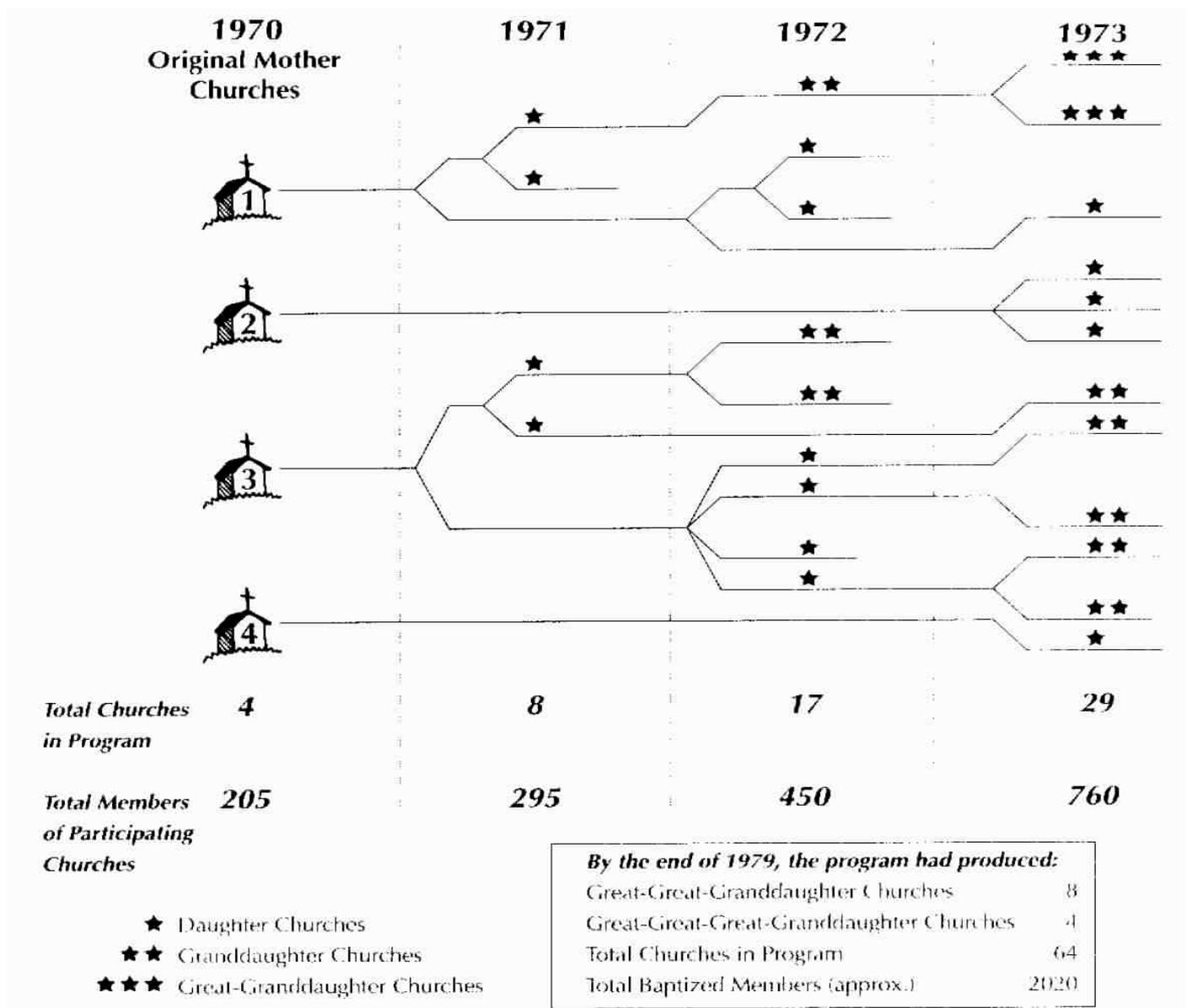
"We need a strong home base before we can send missionaries."

"We can't do it until it's gone through committee and budgeted."

- “We can’t baptize you, even though you’ve met the Bible requirements of repentance and faith, until you’ve taken our 6 month disciple’s course; baptism is the graduation ceremony.”
- “You can’t officiate Holy Communion; you’re not duly ordained.”
- “What? Jesus commands it? Well, we’ll vote on it and see.”
- “We can’t allow everything the Apostles did; times have changed.”
- “Discipling is for lay leaders; a real pastor needs seminary.”
- “You can’t train other pastors until you finish the whole program.”
- “You must get your pastoral training in a formal seminary.”
- “We more experienced pastors will run our Association of churches.”
- “You can’t obey Christ until you know the whole Word of God.”

Sooner or later all such “can’t do” laws without Biblical basis replace simple obedience to Christ and stifle reproductive discipleship. They sound spiritual but contradict what the Spirit of God did in Scripture and does today where men do not limit Him. Our weak faith fears the spontaneous; we don’t want God to surprise us.

Here’s how the reproduction worked in Honduras once it got its initial impetus between 1970 and 1973:



Study Questions

1. Traditional theological objectives focus on educating a man, while Biblical education objectives aim to edify the church. Explain the difference in the way a typical theological professor teaches, versus the way a discipler of pastors works.
2. How would you start and develop an extension chain from yourself to a great-granddaughter church in a new field? Explain the role of everyone involved: yourself, trainers in the daughter church, the congregations, elders, new converts, and pastors-in-training.
3. What is a “preaching point” and how do you avoid starting one?”
4. What are the basic commands of Christ? How will you make sure that your disciples, and those whom they disciple, obey all of them?
5. What do we build into our organization to assure reproduction?

For over a decade Dr. George Patterson has been a wonderful influence upon many of us in Youth With A Mission who are involved in Frontier Missions. In YWAM's efforts to plant churches among unreached people groups, we have found him to be an ongoing source of encouragement and wise counsel.

A significant number of our teams are using the Biblical, low- profile, inexpensive, non-institutional strategy that he outlines. These teams are making exciting progress. Throughout the 10/40 Window, new movements of multiplying churches are emerging where *no* church had ever existed before!

George Patterson is a church planter who skillfully trains pastors and missionaries by discipling them personally. He is a man whose lifestyle and integrity truly reflect our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are grateful for the permission to reprint this article from **Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader** rev.ed. by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. To order a copy of this indispensable overview of missions contact:

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We hope this article will encourage you to attempt great things for God!

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