

1/12. Identify leaders

So, we're back to the beginning. This time, though, the identify leaders section appears here in animate, rather than equip. Is, that you ask, simply because we've run out of time on the course and because we blew an entire session on finding the right venue? Well, partly. But it kind of belongs here. Your ability to lead others in the journey of church planting is a journey of character and the heart, as well as a journey of understanding and skills.

The heart

So we'll start by looking at the heart here. Our goal is not to shift resources around the church of Jesus. Our goal is to build people up into Christ, and to see those who did not know Christ becoming his ambassadors. This requires a fundamental mind shift: it is one that goes against all human instinct and in the opposite direction to our culture. Throughout human history people have been largely selfish, both individually and as a society. Sometimes the individual is at the centre, sometimes the building of a social structure becomes the dominant force in our behaviour.

To grow people into leadership that has to change. Which means that we have to change. I once went on a commercial leadership course, sponsored by my employer. They taught servant leadership as effective – but there was no essential reason to serve others. The commercial bottom line was that we were being invited to serve our shareholders, and to gain higher pay while doing it.

But we are being invited to serve Christ. We are invited to see Jesus, and not ourselves as the most precious thing in our lives. And we are invited to see Christ in his body, the church. As we do that, as we serve Jesus in his church, we will release others to do the same. Our goal is to infect the earth with obedience to Christ – to resist beyond all the ideologies of the planet, the tyranny taught by Satan in the Garden of Eden: "You will become like God."

This is something that we cannot do by human power. We can only become truly obedient to Christ through His Holy Spirit. So there lies the central character challenge of passing on leadership. We are passing on servanthood. We are passing on joyful slavery to Jesus. The character issue is that, of course, we have to model that. We can talk about an enabling culture, and that's important. But enabling costs us little. Serving costs us quite a bit: time, money, and of course, ego. This sounds fine, but applying it can be really tough. Samuel Chand writes in *Leadership Pain: The Classroom For Growth* "You'll grow only to the threshold of your pain." Gulp. None of us plan for pain when we step into Christian leadership. Often we don't talk about it as we enable others. We count our emotional and relational struggles as distractions or obstacles to our leadership growth: we often hide them or bury them. And yet they are a vital part of what it means to grow the servants of Jesus.

We live in an age with a very low pain threshold. We feel every slight, every cutting word very deeply. As the church becomes less and less demanding of its members, increasing numbers reel away from it in pain. In our bid to overthrow the culture of the self and promote the glory of Christ,



we start with our own attitudes to pain, disappointment, loss, and rejection. We pray for the Holy Spirit to shape us into the likeness of Christ in this pain and to pass on to others a heart that is not just ‘tough’ but Jesus centred, and says “For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” (Romans 15:3)

At the same time, though, perhaps oddly, and perhaps not, we model joy. Joy was a feature of Jesus’ life, and his apostles. Sometimes we look at the pain, insecurity, emotional stress and hardship of Jesus’ life and ask ‘how could they have had joy?’ The answer is, that they saw something higher, something greater, and tasted something far sweeter than anything the world had to offer. “16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” 2 Corinthians 4:15-17

Planting churches can seem overwhelming. We feel every success and every failure keenly, we take on responsibility, we struggle – and sometimes it seems too much. When we raise up servants for God’s church, we also raise up children of grace, and not law. We can’t pass on a frenetic commitment to activity as the answer for every problem. So while we take on the yoke of Christ, we also allow him to make it easy, to rest in his grace and love, to check ourselves when we are driving others as well as ourselves too hard, and to find our joy again. So often people look for joy and rest in the next holiday – while we want to model hard work and a servant heart, we also want to model a reliance on Jesus and his power.

Psalm 127

1 Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.
2 In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Now we’ll turn to the ways that we can actually raise up and release leaders.

Replanting

You might remember step 1. There we wrote about what we meant when we talked about leaders – they were the key governing elders of church plants. In this step, step 12, it might sound as though we are talking about the same thing. And in some ways we are. But in other, significant ways, we’re not.

Gathering teams: ‘sexual reproduction’.

In the early phases of our church planting, we were gathering people around a leader, or teams that came out of a single church. This has great strengths because it’s easier to build a common culture. But it’s tough to replicate this through generations – it creates a painful ‘rip’ effect. For this reason, we want to plant out of the network but with teams gathered out of different congregations. This is

the pattern that our friends over at CCM use, and they explained the issues with pain and loss caused by the process of splitting single congregations. That means that we are looking around the network not just for those leading elders, but for a group of key gifts – evangelists, prophets, pastors, worship leaders, and the other key gifts of the Spirit for the new teams. That changes the way that we train and identify leaders, and it encourages us to bring ‘leaders’ – gifted servants who can help grow teams into churches, more quickly than we otherwise would, if we relied only on the model than we see in step 1.

Growing leaders and teaching styles

People learn differently. Some people learn largely by doing, for others some kind of study is important. Some people like to learn in groups, others on their own. Think carefully about those who think have potential to join new church plant teams. What are their learning styles? What would work for them? The REAP course, for example, will work well for some, but not for all. Jesus had an apprenticeship programme, as did Paul, as did Elijah. But people’s schedules will differ. Look for what will grow your emerging leaders, adapt your coaching style and look for the resources you need.

Gifts from the Spirit – and gathering in teams.

One of the qualifications for an elder is that he should not be a new convert. “6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” 2 Timothy 3. But many of the gifts of the Spirit are given in a moment. So if we foster the gifts such as evangelism and prophecy we can grow the diversity of service in the church and encourage new Christians to express their gifts in service much more quickly than if we relied on a single ‘leadership-eldership’ track. In some denominations no-one can reach that level without a four year seminary degree.

That quest to build servants who have gifts from the Spirit should lead us to be open, to pray about who God is touching, and how God is equipping them for service. We also need to be wary of structuring our churches so that they are overly reliant on teaching gifts, and expressed in a way that is abstract or complex. This can lead people to think ‘I couldn’t do that’. We want people to think both ‘I could do that!’ and ‘I could do’ An act or gift of service that fits with their gifts.

Teaching gifts and simplicity

Part of our evangelical heritage is that we prize teaching and the teaching gift. That’s great – but if we’re going to grow churches that plant and replant, and which develop local leaders, we can’t only rely on training leaders to preach like Tim Keller. We have to think carefully about how people are learning, about what makes sense to them, about how long people’s concentration spans are. That will usually lead us to simplify our formal teaching, and to rely on other tracks, working with people, walking with people, using video, discussions and continually asking the question of how we can teach God’s word to the people with us and to have it taught by the kind of people who are in our churches. It’s not only good communication – it’s also good leadership development.

In other areas of church, keeping things simple can encourage us to look at our community and how it grows, rather than looking over our shoulders at Hillsong or Bethlehem Baptist. For example, while the churches in the diverse side of the network have always used live worship musicians, Oldhams Church has always used Youtube or worship videos. Our churches are communities, not institutions. If we try to grow institutions, we may succeed, but we cannot grow replicating small institutions led by local people.

The courage of giving away and the history of Israel.

Mike Breen said ““If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.” As we lead congregations, we think about those congregations, how they can grow, and often we’re prepared to struggle for those congregations. But Jesus gave us the commission to make disciples. That means that we have to expect that we will give people away, that following Christ will mean that they move on from our congregations, which, after all, belong to Jesus, not us.

It takes a lot of courage to build leaders to give away, and it takes a lot of trust that God’s ways are always right. There are always many good reasons to protect people, to make a good safe environment. Our children need friends, we still have a lot to give, this isn’t the season.....

Israel’s history is full of the accounts of how they chose to protect themselves: paying off foreign armies, hiring mercenaries, making alliances, counting the army. But the Lord always held out a different vision (see **Exodus 14: 10-14**):

“10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

13 Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”

Sometimes generosity in raising up leaders means that you have to move on and trust that the Lord knows what he’s doing. When we try to protect our congregation, we can end up stifling vision, protecting people and refusing to accept that God will call people on. One of the beauties of our network is that we can see how the Lord is calling people on and maintain relationship with them.

It starts with you.

A church can grow beyond its leader. We all fail, don’t do, say, or see what God wants us to see. What is more dangerous for the church, though, is if we don’t model the attitudes of heart that we want God to bring into our church. That means that, as church leaders, we need to give ourselves



away. Sometimes we see a challenge, and sense that God is calling us, the leader of the old plant, to step out and plant again. We know it means handing the congregation to someone else and to take the plunge of planting again. “God, why me? Isn’t it someone else’s turn? Shouldn’t it be done by someone older/younger/paid/unpaid/more British/less British?” As you pray for God to send people out, it doesn’t mean that you have to go. But it helps you to pray if you’re ready to go. We don’t know who led the church in Antioch in Acts, though we have the names of the prophets who ministered there. But we have the names of the people they sent.

The six-year rule, and why everything is temporary.

People are different, and the six-year rule isn’t written in stone. But we believe that thinking that there is a time limit to how long God will call you to lead is helpful. He may call you to stay, but thinking that you will move on has a number of benefits:

- You realise that the time given to you to raise up leaders isn’t indefinite. You can’t wait for the perfect leader to come along and for you to hand over to. It gives urgency to the task of growing leaders to hand over to.
- It helps you to think about what God is doing, constantly. You look for what God is doing in the two areas that drive our church planting – reaching new people and growing new leaders. Obviously, you can do that without a time limit, but having a time frame in mind helps.
- It can sometimes take away the burden of leading, particularly from unpaid leaders. Knowing that there is a term can help us and the leaders with us feel that there is a finish line.

Last words on the Loop and REAP topics.

This, step 12, is the last on the loop. One of the most inspiring passages in the Bible on growing leaders is Acts 20. In that passage, Paul calls the Ephesian elders to meet him. He reminds them of everything that God has done, how he has worked and how the days ahead may be marked by strife and conflict with false teaching. He reminds them of his own life and the way that he has lived. And then he kneels to pray with them. It says “36 When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.” Passing on leadership is a labour of love. It follows the great commands of God and the great command of Jesus. Our prayer is that God will grow leaders and churches into Him, and bind us together in his love as we undertake that task.