

FAMILY MATTERS AND CHURCH PLANTING

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Robert W. Pochek

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There are few issues that are more critical to successful church planting than understanding the significance of the church planter's family in the church planting process. Unfortunately, the church planter's family life is often neglected in church planting literature. In fact, an examination of the more popular recent works on church planting one finds little more than a passing mention of the significance of the family life of the church planter.¹ Yet, the relationship of family life and church leadership should not come as a surprise to anyone. Such a relationship is entirely consistent with the connection the Scripture makes between the church leader's family life and his leadership ability in the church. Further, the impact of family life on church leaders has consistently been observed in field experience, causing one church planting professional to indicate that the success of a church plant is very often connected to the family life of the church planter.²

Because the New Testament places high significance on the church leader's family and because, based on interviews with several church planting supervisors³, a disproportionately large number of church plants fail due to issues within the church planting family, current church planters and their supervisors must give greater priority to the role of the church planter's family

¹For example, see Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 80. Aubrey Malphrus, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 111-114. Ralph Moore, *Starting a New Church: The Church Planter's Guide to Success* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 47, 223. Dave Smith, "Faith and Family," in *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, ed. Tom Jones (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 2004), 150-55.

²Email correspondence with Gary Irby, Church Planting Director, Puget Sound Baptist Association, Feb 7, 2007.

³Email and personal interviews conducted by the author during February and March, 2007.

during the entire process of assessment, training and deployment to the field. Because the church planter is the first formal leader of the church plant, this paper will examine the biblical texts that address the family life expectations of church leaders. In addition, several major causes of stress for the church planting family will be assessed, specifically marital stress and a number of factors that contribute to it. It will also be beneficial to examine the benefits of planting a new church for the church planting family, although less time will be spent on this issue, since the purpose of this paper is to prepare church planters for the challenges they will likely face. The paper will culminate with practical suggestions concerning family life for church planters and those who support them.

A final word is in order by way of introduction. This paper is not simply the product of academic research and interviews with those responsible for church planting; it is not simply ivory tower pontifications. Rather, the academic research is supported by my six years of experience in leading a church plant. During the last six years my family and I have learned many lessons “the hard way.” My desire is to help church planters and their families be prepared for the challenges that await them and, by being prepared, avoid some of the mistakes that I have made.

A Biblical Perspective on the Family Life of the Church Leader

Many church planters will serve as the first formal leader in a newly planted church.⁴ As such, he is subject to the requirements and guidelines furnished in the New Testament for

⁴According to Tom Cheney, J. David Putnam, and Van Sanders (*Seven Steps for Planting Churches*, (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2003), 3) the two most common types of church planters are sequential planters and founding pastors. Sequential planters seek to raise up indigenous leaders to serve in pastoral capacities. As such, the New Testament guidelines for church leaders discussed in this section will not apply to sequential planters the way it does to those who are planting churches as the founding pastor. Nevertheless, the observations and reflections regarding the challenges faced by the church planter’s family in the rest of the paper are applicable to sequential planters and founding pastors alike.

those in church leadership.⁵ There are two passages in the New Testament that specifically address the requirements for church leadership: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The passages read as follows:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 ESV

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, appoint elders in every town as I directed you – if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1:5-9 ESV

There is much to be considered and examined in the above passages. However, for the purposes of this paper, only the sections that specifically address the expectations for the family life of the church leader will be examined. Table one is useful in seeing the parallel family life expectations found in both passages.

Before examining the portions of these texts that address family life expectations in detail, it is important to make two general observations. The first observation is that the New Testament makes a strong connection between the fitness of an individual for leadership in the church based, in part, upon his leadership in the home. Understanding such a connection is vital considering that a large portion of church plants that fail, do so as a result of the stress within the

⁵It is not the intention of this paper to promote one particular style of church government over another, or even to investigate those matters in any detail.

family life of the church planter.⁶

Table 1. Family life expectations for the church leader

1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1:5-9
Above reproach	Above reproach
The husband of one wife	The husband of one wife
He must manage his own household well	God's steward
Keeping his children submissive	Children are believers, not open to the charge of debauchery and insubordination
	Above reproach

A second general observation that can be made is that both passages indicate that a crucial aspect of the church leader's integrity is his family life. Though there is some debate about whether the phrase "above reproach" is specifically tied to family life expectations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the family life of the church leader was uppermost in the Apostle Paul's mind. Such a conclusion is based on that fact that, in both texts, the requirements for church leaders are introduced by the phrase "above reproach" and are immediately followed by expectations related to family life.⁷ The Titus passage, in fact, brackets the family life expectations by using "above reproach" as an introductory and concluding statement. The teaching of both texts is consistent in indicating that one is not fit to be a church leader if he is not honoring the Lord in his family life.

⁶Email correspondence with Gary Irby, Feb 7, 2007.

⁷A close connection is made between "above reproach" and observable marital standards in R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 77, 295. Contra Gordon Fee, (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 1988), 80) who understands the phrase "above reproach" to be a summarization of the character qualifications list and not a reference to family life qualifications alone.

In these two passages, the family life expectations for a church leader fall into three major areas: marriage, children, and the overall management of the household. Each of these areas has significant ramifications for the church leader as well as the church he leads. Only a brief comment will be made about each here, as all three will be addressed in connection with the experiences of those actually serving in the field with church planters.

Marriage

Marriage is described in Scripture as a picture of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32). Thus, it is imperative that church leaders demonstrate godly marriages. Literally, the church leader must be a one-woman man, which extends far beyond the simple question of whether one has been divorced as it calls the church leader to a marriage of covenant loyalty.⁸ There is something fundamental that is declared by marriage in general, and particularly the marriage of those in church leadership. Piper argues that “God created man male and female, and ordained marriage so that the eternal covenant relationship between Christ and his church would be imaged forth in the marriage union.”⁹ In other words, marriage has been created by God to speak a word about Christ and the Church. For the church leader, his preaching and teaching about Christ and the word that his own marriage speaks must be consistent and not contradictory to each other.

Children

Spiritually speaking – and often a practical reality in a church plant – the first flock that the church planter serves is his own family. In both texts above, one area of eligibility for church leaders is children who are submissive to their parents’ authority and who have come to faith. As the parent of two teenagers, it is a bit disconcerting to think that my ability to lead the

⁸Knute Larson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 183.

⁹John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 10th anniversary ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1996), 181

church is somehow connected to the willingness of my children to submit to my authority. Fortunately, the text does not require perfect obedience from the children of church leaders, but a general disposition of submission as a result of regular spiritual nurture. The point of the text is clear: a church leader is not fit to lead and care for the spiritual welfare of others if they have neglected the spiritual welfare of those in their own household.¹⁰

Management of Household

The final area that is repeated in both texts is the ability of the church leader to manage his household. The home is used as a template for indicating the kind of management that would be necessary in the church. This management includes marital and parental aspects, but would also extend to the overall “governance” of the home.¹¹ Such governance would extend from the mundane of maintenance and upkeep to the more challenging task of coordinating schedules and demonstrating faithfulness with finances. While this analogy positively ties together the management of the home and the church, we should also recognize a common ministry challenge that particularly affects church planters: blurring the lines between the home and church. It is to that challenge, among others, that we now turn.

Major Causes of Stress for the Church Planting Family

Stress in a church planter’s family may result from a number of often overlapping, circumstances. It is not within the scope of this paper to attempt to describe every possible cause of stress in the church planting family. Rather, attention will be focused on five key areas in that are consistently indicated by church planters and those who work with them: Marital Stress, Time Management, Finances, Isolation/Loneliness/Aloneness, and Vague Boundaries. It is important to note that these five areas are not intended to be mutually exclusive. For example, financial stress impacts the marital relationship; vague boundaries impacts time management.

¹⁰Hughes and Chappell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 296.

¹¹Phillip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 254-257.

Recognizing there is some overlap between them, these five areas will be examined below to show how each presents tremendous challenges to successfully planting a healthy, growing church.

Marital Stress

A tremendous number of stress factors are experienced in the church planting family including financial (in)stability, the time demands of starting a new work, the sense of isolation that comes with being on a new field of service, the lack of ministry activities for the church planter's own children, the church growth expectations of a mother church or denomination, and the like. The cumulative effect upon the marriage is described by one writer as having all the earmarks of a legal separation in that the church planter is often absent physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.¹² All of these stressors seem to conspire against the church planter's marriage being a relationship of safety and refuge.

Gary Irby, Church Planting Director for the Puget Sound Baptist Association in the Seattle area, indicates that stress in the church planting family is the most common factor in failed church plants.¹³ Irby points to internal and external factors that have a significant role on marital stress including finances, conflict in the family or the church, and loneliness. There is, in Irby's observations, interrelatedness between stress in the church and stress in the family.

David Jackson, Missionary for Church Multiplication for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, reports similar findings on the East Coast. Jackson notes that a number of church planting organizations are now recognizing "the wife may be the key to her husband's effectiveness (after the Holy Spirit, of course)" and are encouraging her to undergo a similar type of church planter assessment process as her husband.¹⁴ Such an approach is long overdue

¹²Smith, "Faith and Family," 151.

¹³Gary Irby, email interview with author, February 7, 2007.

¹⁴David Jackson, email interview with author, February 16, 2007. The Church Planter Assessment is the process used by the Southern Baptist Convention to evaluate prospective church planters. The Assessment involves a self-assessment, a behavioral interview, and a

considering the emphasis the Scripture places on the significance of the family in the life of a church leader and the estimation that over half of failed church plants in the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware are connected to family or family-finance related issues.¹⁵

James Herron, a New Work Strategist with the Illinois Baptist State Association (IBSA), regularly conducts thorough interviews with both the church planter and his wife to ensure that both feel a sense of call from God to plant a new church.¹⁶ Herron reports that IBSA requires church planters and their wives to attend a time of intensive “Basic Training” together. This requirement helps prepare the planter and his wife for the coming challenges of planting a new work. Involving the church planter’s spouse at the beginning of the assessment process is not limited to Baptist life. Dave Olson, Director of Church Planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) concurs that assessing the wife is important, reporting that the ECC requires the candidate and his wife to go through an intensive four day assessment.¹⁷ Yet, Olson still estimates that about forty percent of the failed church plants in the ECC system are related to stress in the church planter’s family.¹⁸

It is difficult to conceive of a successful church planting scenario in which both the husband and wife do not have a clear calling from God to the task. Malphurs contends,

“Wives of church planters shouldn’t be in opposition to the ministry. They either need to be for it or at least open to it. If the wife is opposed to it, then the potential church planter should not pursue this ministry until or unless she changes her mind.”¹⁹

customized development plan. More information is available online at http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/site/c.iiJTKZPEJpH/b.895299/k.94BA/Church_Planter_Assessment.htm; accessed May 2, 2007.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶James Herron, New Work Strategist, Illinois Baptist State Association, personal interview with the author, March 22, 2007.

¹⁷Dave Olson, Director of Church Planting, Evangelical Covenant Church, email interview with author, March 23, 2007.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Malphrus, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 112.

While Malphurs' point is well taken, it is interesting that he spends so little time developing such a significant issue. If Malphurs is correct, the issue of a planter's relationship with his wife is not a matter of concern only at the beginning of the new work, but is an ongoing matter as that work grows. Yet, in his well regarded "comprehensive guide" to church planting, exceeding four hundred pages in length, Malphurs devotes only a brief four pages to the family life of the church planter.²⁰ And while he includes a short section on the advantages and disadvantages of church planting for the family, the amount of space he devotes to the issue is not consistent with the vital role of the family for church planters.²¹

Time Management

Even with his wife fully in agreement that starting a new work is the result of God's call on their lives, stress is still a reality. In a 2001 study examining sources of both stress and satisfaction among ministry families, one of the highest stressors for ministry spouses was consistently in the area of time. The lack of leisure time as a family and the lack of quality time were the most often reported sources of family stress.²² A more recent study by Ed Stetzer of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) demonstrates that what is true of ministry families in general is true of church planters when it comes to the relationship of family time and ministry.²³ Stetzer found that church planters who devoted an average of ten to fifteen hours per week to family time saw the greatest growth rates in the new church over the first four years.

²⁰Ibid., 111-14.

²¹Ibid., 113-14.

²²G. Wade Rowatt, "Stress and Satisfaction in Ministry Families," *Review and Expositor* 98 (2001): 530.

²³Ed Stetzer, "An Analysis of the Church Planting Process and Other Selected Factors on the Attendance of SBC Church Plants," [on-line]; accessed March 23, 2007; available from <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/atf/cf/%7B087EF6B4-D6E5-4BBF-BED1-7983D360F394%7D/stetzer%20study.pdf>, 11; Internet.

Interestingly, those spending too much or too little time with the family saw a significantly smaller rate of growth.²⁴

Finances

Financial concerns are almost always regarded as a major cause of stress for church planting families.²⁵ This stress is often increased by the assumption of many in the North American church that additional employment is not an option for the church planter, an assumption refuted by J. D. Payne.²⁶ Occasionally the church planter secures some type of outside employment to meet the financial needs of the family and the new church, which eases the financial burden, but diminishes his ability to focus completely on the new church.²⁷ To avoid splitting time between outside employment and the church, some church planters may look to their spouse for additional income. Yet, it is fascinating to consider that the employment of the church planter's spouse, while helping provide financially, seems to have a negative effect on the growth of the church. The aforementioned NAMB study indicates that when the church planter's spouse was employed outside the home, the new work experienced significantly less growth overall than those in which the church planter's spouse was not employed outside the home.²⁸

Regardless of the method for financial support taken by the church planter, part of the biblical admonition to "manage one's household" includes demonstrating financial

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Southern Baptists typically provide modest support to church planters, though typically not enough to provide the total income for the family. Other groups, such as the Evangelical Covenant Church provide more resources over a specific period of time, which alleviates some of the financial burden to families.

²⁶J.D. Payne, "Money the Most Critical Issue in Church Planting?" (paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, D.C., November 15-17, 2006), 33.

²⁷The core group in our church plant, Lighthouse Community Church, began the church with a commitment to providing as close to a full-time salary as possible. Their commitment and faithfulness to giving benefited both my family life and our corporate church life.

²⁸Stetzer, "An Analysis of the Church Planting Process," 8.

responsibility. Thus, providing for the family must be a priority for church planters. Providing financially also carries with it the responsibility to avoid excessive debt that is difficult, if not impossible, to repay with a church planter's income.

Isolation / Loneliness / Aloneness

Church planting can be lonely work for the planter and for his family. A church planter often relocates in order to start the new work. The lack of nearby family and friends can add stress to an already challenging situation, which is why Jackson regards isolation / aloneness to be a greater challenge even than finances.²⁹

In addition to the lack of nearby family and friends, not all church planters are well received by existing churches and pastors. When a church planting family moves into a community to begin a new work, existing congregations can often feel threatened and may put out the "unwelcome mat." The result is that those who best understand ministry life (i.e., fellow pastors) isolate their co-laborers and their families and exacerbate an already lonely situation. Irby notes that even in Seattle, which he estimates to have a population of less than 4% evangelical Christians, some of the church planters he works with face objections from (the few) existing churches.³⁰

Another area in which isolation / aloneness can add stress to the family is the area of temptation to sexual misconduct. According to a 1993 study, sexual misconduct is an all-too-common occurrence among pastors of established churches.³¹ In church planting situations, whereby the lack of structured accountability is commonplace, that potential for compromise is significant. Stress, overwork, over-commitment, and isolation can be a potent combination, faced by ministers and church planters alike on a regular basis.

²⁹Jackson, email with author, February 16, 2007.

³⁰Irby, email with author, February 7, 2007.

³¹Jeff Seat, James Trent, and Jwa Kim, "The Prevalence and Contributing Factors of Sexual Misconduct among Southern Baptist Pastors in Six Southern States," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 47 (1993): 363-70.

Vague Boundaries

Over the past twenty years, Cameron Lee has done extensive work examining the effect of stress upon minister's families. Although his work is not specifically targeted to church planters, his findings have considerable value for those planting new congregations, although the uniqueness of each situation would have to be taken into account.³² Lee notes that, "as with other careers, the effects of work-related stress for ministers is not confined to the domain of the workplace, but has a more global impact that may extend to other relational areas. What makes this of particular importance for clergy is that the typical social environment of the ministry is already characterized by a vagueness of boundaries between work and family life."³³ As Lee notes, "on the negative side, this [vagueness of boundaries] may mean a higher spillover of career stress into the family life."³⁴

Such a vagueness of boundaries can be particularly difficult for church planters to overcome. For example, church planters often utilize their home as a first office, and sometimes as a place for church meetings. Thus, with the "physical" line between church and home blurred, it becomes easier for there to be a carry over of stress from one area into the other.

Benefits of Church Planting for the Church Planting Family

Despite the challenges faced, there are tremendous benefits of starting a new work for the church planting family. While the purpose of this paper is not to address all of them, I would be remiss if not mentioning at least a few.

Seeing "Acts" Come Alive

³²Cameron Lee, Professor of Family Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, email interview with author 8 February 2007

³³Cameron Lee, "Specifying Intrusive Demands and their Outcomes in Congregational Ministry: A Report on the Ministry Demands Inventory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38 (1999): 488.

³⁴Ibid.

C. Peter Wagner has concluded that church planting is “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven.”³⁵ And, while not all church plants grow exponentially, a well-known axiom of church planting has proven to be true: new churches tend to grow faster than existing churches. Further, Kirk Hadaway found that not only do new individual Southern Baptist churches grow faster than old ones, but that these new churches have a significant impact on the growth of the denomination as a whole, contributing a quarter of the growth of the entire denomination.³⁶ The impact on the church planting family is clear: this family is on the front lines as God is at work in the lives of people who are/were far from him.

There is little else that will have the lasting spiritual impact on the lives of the children of church planters than seeing God working in people’s lives on a consistent basis. Seeing person after person come to faith in Christ, make public professions through baptisms, and begin to grow in their faith, builds and produces a faith in the children of church planter’s that is hard to find in many established churches. In addition, because the church planting family is usually the first family in the new church, the entire family is typically involved in exercising their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Kingdom. The church planting family learns what it means to selflessly serve the church often resulting in continued ministry activity later in life.³⁷

Expectations From the New Church

The expectations from a new work are often different from those among existing congregations. That is not to say that in a new work there are no expectations or that there is no stress involved in those expectations. Olson comments that there is often stress related to the new work becoming self-supporting in a specified time frame in ECC church plants.³⁸ In Baptist life,

³⁵C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, (Ventura: Regal Books, 1900), 11.

³⁶C. Kirk Hadaway, “The Impact of New Church Development on Southern Baptist Growth,” *Review of Religious Research*, 31 (1990): 370.

³⁷Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 114.

³⁸Olson, Email with author, March 23, 2007.

there are similar expectations for a church plant to move from mission status to a constituted church.

The expectations in a church plant, however, are often quite different for both the pastor and the pastor's family than expectations from traditional churches. For example, with the traditional churches I served, my wife was often asked about her ministry role. On more than one occasion search committees inquired as to whether she could play the piano, sing in the choir, work with the youth, and the like. When we began a new church, she experienced a freedom from those types of expectations. Malphurs indicates that our experience is not all that uncommon, contending that the expectations on a church planter's wife are often non-existent.³⁹

Freedom to Innovate

Though a church planter is not free to do whatever he wants in a new work, there is significant freedom to innovate without the challenges faced with an established church.⁴⁰ This freedom often allows for change and adaptability to occur at a much faster rate than those serving established churches. Further, in a new work a church planter has few concerns about what has been done in the past, because there is not a specific tradition with the new congregation. Rather than hearing "we've never done it that way before;" church planters are more likely to hear, "we've never done it before."

A Way Forward for the Healthy Church Planting Family

It is apparent that the Scripture makes a definite connection between the church leader's life at home and his capacity to serve well with the church. Noting the challenges that are faced by church planters is not very useful apart from suggesting a way to overcome those obstacles, perhaps even prevent them in at the outset.

³⁹Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 114.

⁴⁰Whether a church planter embraces the Regulative Principle or the Normative Principle with respect to practices within the local church, in both cases his boundaries must be clearly marked by the Scriptures.

The Assessment Process

A significant research project was conducted in the mid-1980's by Charles Ridley on behalf of thirteen denominations that were concerned about selecting effective church planters.⁴¹ The result of that study was the observation of thirteen significant characteristics that successful church planters possess.⁴² Of these thirteen, the top five are considered indispensable; notably, "spousal cooperation" is listed fourth in the list of characteristics. Yet, if the field interviews conducted for this paper provide an accurate picture of what is currently taking place in the assessment process, too often spousal cooperation is assumed rather than assessed.

There must be an increased emphasis on assessing the church planter's spouse so that both will be better prepared for the challenges and the blessings that await them on the field.⁴³ Further, the church planter assessment process must be extended to evaluate the entire family unit, rather than focusing on the church planter. More research and reflection is needed to determine the best method to assess the family unit as a whole, but it is safe to say that the current approach of assessing the church planter primarily, with only a passing consideration of his spouse and family, is not very useful.

Practical Suggestions

⁴¹Charles Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988), 7-11.

⁴²According to Cheney, Putnam, and Sanders (*Seven Steps for Planting Churches*, 3), Ridley's observations have been adapted for use by the North American Mission Board in the behavioral interview portion of NAMB's Church Planter Assessment.

⁴³The interviews cited above with Gary Irby, David Jackson, and James Herron are not intended to be exhaustive. While the pool of interviewees is small, the diversity of locations in which they minister and the wealth of church planting experience shared by these strategists is too significant to ignore. Three different strategists, supervising dozens, if not hundreds of church plants, all concluding family stress is a key issue in failed church plants and that the church planter's spouse may be the key to the family stress is striking. Further, it is significant that these same interviewees call for greater attention to the church planting family during the assessment process.

As church planters, the following practical suggestions are offered with the hope of helping to relieve stress among church planting families.

Make Time for the Family. Noting the biblical importance of the church leader's marriage and the significant impact the church planter's wife has on the success of a church plant, a church planter must give tremendous priority to developing his marital relationship. Of all the human relationships a church planter may have, none are as important as the relationship he has with his wife. A very practical approach to developing this relationship is for the church planter to be intentional about scheduling time with his wife.

As a young church staff member my senior pastor suggested that the best thing I could do for my marriage was to say "I love you" to my wife daily, date my wife weekly, and get away for a couple days with her quarterly. While I have not always been able to accomplish all three of those goals consistently, having them as goals has helped me to accomplish them more often than not. Placing such emphasis on marriage relationships demonstrates to spouses, churches, and the larger communities the high value church planters place on these relationships.

At the same time, marriage in a mission setting is different. A church planter and his wife must realize that it is unrealistic to assume, "the marriage we've had at home will simply continue wherever we are."⁴⁴ It is imperative that the couple be honest about the challenges they are facing and seek assistance at the first signs of marital difficulty. Much like the discipline of setting aside time for the marital relationship, intentionality is required in being sensitive to the need for and seeking out assistance.

The church planter must also be intentional about making time for his children. It is easy to find work to do in a church planting situation. For that reason, it is vital to set apart time that is exclusively for the children and their activities, especially activities centered on their spiritual development. It is not acceptable for a church planter to neglect the spiritual nurture and

⁴⁴Scott Hicks, "Let's Be Honest About Missionary Marriages," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37 (2001): 421.

development of his own children in an attempt to assist in the spiritual nurture and development of other people.

Be Realistic with Expectations. Not every church plant will grow exponentially. Not every church planting family is equally gifted. Not every church planter is equally gifted. A church planter who enters the field with unrealistic expectations of what can be accomplished sets himself up for frustration, which will inevitably result in stress within the family. A church planter is wise who does not expect more of himself or of his family than their God-given capacity. It is important for the church planter to understand his wife's area of giftedness and allow her to operate within it.

Separate Home and Office. A very practical step is to separate the home from the office or meeting place of the church as soon as possible. If the tendency to blur boundaries between church life and home life is problematic for church planters, there is little that will help to practically resolve that matter than physically separating those locations. This separation greatly reduces the temptation to "work all the time."

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to provide an overview of common challenges faced by church planting families. The scriptural evidence demonstrates that the church leader's family plays a key role in demonstrating his fitness for church leadership. Such a high view of the family compels those sending church planters into the field to consider the stability, health, and fitness of the church planting family as a whole. The evidence from the field indicates that the church planting family often plays the key role in the success or failure of a church plant. Of the many possible causes for stress in the church planting family, none are as significant as the church planter's relationship with his wife.

Planting a healthy church and leading a healthy family are not mutually exclusive options for the church planter. To accomplish both requires a tremendous amount of hard work,

due diligence, and the intervention of the Holy Spirit. May God raise up church planters who are capable of planting healthy, growing churches and of modeling for those churches what it means to lead healthy, growing families.

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