



Phil Stevenson. *The Ripple Church: Multiply Your Ministry by Parenting New Churches*. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004. pp.186. \$12.99.

Stevenson's work has filled-in a substantial gap in church planting literature. Scan the bookstores and you will find that the overwhelming majority of church planting books are designed specifically for the individual church planter. Stevenson, however, has produced an easy-to-read work that is more for the established church. Designed to motivate, encourage, and offer some practical steps, this work seeks to lead churches to become church multiplying churches or what he calls, "ripple churches." While serving as a senior pastor in the Wesleyan tradition, Stevenson led two congregations to plant seven churches. Currently, he is a senior consultant and coach with New Church Specialties.

Peppered with much illustrative material of personal stories, it is easy to see that this work was born out of Stevenson's ministerial experience. Consisting of thirteen chapters and several appendices, *The Ripple Church* is a practical resource for church leaders. Chapters one and two discuss Stevenson's journey into the ministry of church planting and the biblical roots for this ministry. Chapter three describes church planting as the most effective form of evangelism. It is here Stevenson addresses the reasons why new churches reach more people for Christ than most established churches. Chapter four addresses the numerous models of church planting. In chapter five, Stevenson addresses the barriers that prevent churches from effectively participating in church planting. Here he explains that both the pastor and the people must be willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Chapters six and seven explain the need to foresee and strategize to overcome church planting obstacles and when a church should not plant churches. In chapters eight and nine Stevenson discusses the details of leading one's church into church planting and the concept of financing this type of ministry. Healthy church planting teams and proper leadership are discussed in chapters ten and eleven. Chapter twelve addresses the various issues of consideration when working with a denomination. Finally, the author concludes the book with a chapter revealing seven examples of "ripple" churches.

There are numerous strengths to this work, more than space will allow me to address. First, Stevenson shows that the New Testament pattern for global discipling is that of planting churches that will multiply themselves throughout the world. He rightly reveals that it is unhealthy for leaders to see Kingdom growth only in terms of the numerical growth of their one congregation. Second, in light of the fact that many denominations offer the most praise to their largest congregations solely due to their size, Stevenson challenges denominational leaders to encourage, applaud, and reward church multiplication, even among smaller churches. Third, Stevenson emphasizes the vital role of the pastor in church planting. The pastor must first own the vision.

There are a couple of non-substantive concerns that I have with the book. First, the author seems to be too optimistic about the ability of denominations to adjust their structures if a church multiplication movement occurs. Referring to denominational

leaders, Stevenson wrote, “Yet they will be amazed to see how quickly the organization can adapt and change when it needs to keep pace with a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit” (148-49). Both historically and missiologically speaking, these types of movement usually occur outside the established churches. Second, Stevenson’s description of the non-competitive attitude of “the ripple church,” seems to be more of a theoretical concept than reality. He noted, “The multiplication of churches in a given area does not pose a threat to any one of them [churches]. . . . Neighboring churches are not competitors but comrades” (154). Though I agree with Stevenson’s premise, I know from experience that unfortunately many churches are turfish and competitive with other churches.

This is an excellent book addressing the need for churches to become church multiplying churches. I wholeheartedly recommend this work to church leaders considering becoming involved in church planting. This is even an excellent work to assist leaders in catching the vision for church multiplication as well. Stevenson has done an outstanding job in proving us with this text.

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