



**GRACE BAPTIST
PARTNERSHIP**
HELPING CHURCHES PLANT CHURCHES

Myth Busters

***Dispelling common myths
about church planting***



Unproved or false collective beliefs are often used to justify our lack of involvement in church planting. I think it's time to discuss some of these issues and to dispel some of these myths. Why not begin with these four?

We have enough churches already

Simply put this myth would have us believe since England has a rich spiritual heritage and church buildings dot the landscape of our country surely there are enough churches already.

Granted in some areas an abundance of churches planted in days of previous blessing coupled with significant population shift in the present have created a situation where there are enough churches in that locality. In fact, if the churches are numerous because of churches splitting in days of previous discord and disharmony, there may well be too many churches in that place. But is that really all there is to it?

Regretfully the existence of a church building in a town does not necessarily indicate the presence of a Biblical church. Our concern should not be how many buildings there are in a locality but how many church bodies there are seeking to preach the gospel in truth and lead

people to a life of personal discipleship.

In other instances there may have been enough churches in a place in the past but population growth may mean the town is now underserved with new housing estates not effectively being reached by any existing church.

Tragically there are parts of the country where there has never been an abundance of churches. The fact that churches with a burden for church planting have tended to plant (for good reasons) more local to themselves has contributed to a disproportionate spread of the churches. Areas that were well served have become even better served whilst underserved areas have remained untouched.

The bottom line is we have brothers and sisters living in this country who have to drive upwards to one hour to find a Biblical church. They find the notion that we have enough churches already laughable.

We should focus on strengthening existing churches

This myth doesn't deny that we need to be involved in gospel work it just tends to view efforts to plant new churches as misguided since the men and means could be better used in strengthening churches already in existence.

I have considerable sympathy for this view. I love the Lord's people, even those in weak and struggling churches - perhaps especially those in weak and struggling churches. I have spent considerable portions of my time and have expended great amounts of energy in efforts to strengthen existing churches. However, despite my sympathy for this view at the end of the day I simply cannot accept that we are faced with an either/or situation. It must be, to my thinking, a both/and proposition.

Some men have been given evangelistic gifts from the Lord which make them imminently more suited to a church planting situation rather than ministry in an established setting. Their lack of pastoral ability would greatly inhibit their efforts to strengthen an existing church. They might very well create a church within a church which would ultimately lead to frustration for all. The ideal in my estimation is for men with evangelistic gifts and pastoral concern to be involved in church planting whilst men with pastoral skills and an evangelistic desire take the lead in strengthening the established situations.

Ultimately we must come to recognize that this is a false choice. What should the

young Christian couple do? Care for their aging parents or have children of their own? Of course, they should aim to do both. In regard to the question of strengthening existing churches or planting new ones, we should aim to do both as well.

We are not big enough to plant a church

Some churches would like to plant a church but think they are not big enough to do so. Hearing church planting experts talk about beginning with a building, 50 people, £50,000 and five fulltime workers only serves to reinforce their perception. Some of these churches have not reached that level themselves. We, they conclude, are simply not big enough.

To begin with if planting a church requires having all of the above items in place most churches are not big enough to be involved. However, beginning on this basis is actually church transplanting rather than church planting. Church planting involves divinely called and spiritually gifted men moving into an area where there is not a Biblical church and actively seeking to reach the lost with the gospel through public proclamation and personal evangelism.

These men need to be sent from their church and perhaps supported by several churches but they don't have or need a readymade congregation. That would sort of defeat the whole purpose wouldn't it? Church planting is not about redistributing Christians from existing churches to new ones but about proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers and seeing them drawn into relationship with

God and fellowship with other believers.

Churches that consider themselves too small to undertake this responsibility on their own could enter into partnership with other likeminded churches to be involved at a level appropriate to their situation. Though by no means guaranteed many churches have even found that involvement in church planting has actually strengthened them and resulted in further numerical growth in their own congregation.

Someone else will do it

Sometimes we simply shrug our shoulders and say someone else will do it. By this we generally mean one of the larger churches will do it or one of the wealthier churches or a church nearer the neglected area. Someone else will do it so we needn't be bothered.

The problem is that more often than not someone else does not do it. The larger churches have their own ministries to man. The wealthier churches have other noble objects to pursue. The churches which are closer in proximity to the needy area may not see the opportunity for a new work as clearly as those from a distance do. So no one does anything.

Occasionally, the myth proves to be true. Someone else does do it. But sadly it is someone or some group whose theology and/or methodology of ministry leaves something to be desired and whose presence in a community often ultimately serves to obscure the gospel rather than making it plain for all to see.

Sometimes churches have even abdicated their responsibility to plant churches to denominational entities or parachurch organizations. This can mean that areas of local need remain untouched because they don't figure prominently in a regional or national strategy drawn up in an office far removed from the situation on the ground. I can assure you this approach will almost always call for more churches in London and never even consider the need for new works in Longridge, Louth, or Lostwithiel.

It seems right to me for churches to once again take seriously their responsibility before God for planting new churches and strengthening existing ones without offloading the task to others.

Well, there you have it - an honest attempt to discuss and dispel some common myths about church planting. My hope is that by raising these issues readers will be compelled to go back to the Scriptures to test their thoughts, words and actions on this important matter. If that happens this writer will be more than satisfied.



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