

## **Reflecting on Your Journey: Discerning Your Call**

You may be interested in planting a new church. This may be a new interest or it may be something with which you have struggled for some time. Since church planting is very unique among the ministries to which God calls individuals, it is wise to intentionally reflect upon what God's call is upon your life and how God has gifted you.

Many begin the journey of church planting but few continue. Why? Because most individuals do not do significant foundational work in order to understand themselves, their community/culture and the mission to which God calls them. We believe you will benefit greatly from a time spent in developing a growing clarity about yourself, your community/culture in which you will be planting a church and the mission of church planting.

So we encourage you to spend at least 40 days reflecting on your journey. You may feel this is unnecessary. You may want to skip this and get on with the work. But don't do it. This is significant foundational work.

Some time ago, I wanted to remove overgrown junipers from in front of our home. I did not have an axe so I borrowed one from a member of the church. After "hacking" away at the first bush for over 10 minutes, I was tired. And the juniper was still firmly standing! Earlier I had seen that the axe was dull, with some sections of the cutting surface completely broken out. Instead of taking time to sharpen the blade, I decided the project was not difficult and that I could take out the junipers without the additional preparatory work. Wrong! So I took the next 15 minutes filing away at the cutting surface, attempting to recreate a sharp edge. Then I went back to work. This time, in just over 10 minutes I was able to remove all four of the bushes. Taking time to sharpen the axe beforehand was critical foundational work and made the work much easier.

So think of this as some of the preparatory work you need to do in order to be effective in your work. The elements are simple: scripture readings for discernment, a journal to keep, questions for reflection and recording, and some other assignments for Monday through Saturday each week for six weeks. At the end of this reflection period, you then should discuss what you have learned with your region Executive Minister and/or the Region person who oversees New Church Planting. Whether you continue on to plant a new church or not, we believe you will benefit from this time of reflection on your journey.

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## Instructions:

You will get the most benefit out of this experience if you do not rush through these moments of reflection. Set aside unhurried time each day—approximately 25 to 30 minutes—to read, to pray, to reflect and to write. You should have a tablet or booklet in which to record some of your reflections and insights. At the end of this period of reflecting on your journey, you will be better able to discern the factors which God has used to shape you as well as discern what might be your next steps in ministry.

1. Read the scripture passage (and any suggested readings), meditate upon it, and write out your reflections on the passage.
2. Use the questions to examine what issues this may have for you and your ministry. Write out important insights and reflections from the questions.
3. Listen to the voices inside you whether they are from God's Spirit or from self. What images, memories and thoughts come to mind from your life as you focus on the scriptures and the questions. Write out your insights.
4. Pray.
5. Enjoy this journey.

We would encourage you to identify one person or a clergy group with whom you can discuss or call upon at any time to discuss these things. This person or group should be "safe", confidential, supportive as you discuss these things. While you are working through the material day by day, it is in "community" that we often do our best or most significant growing. May God's presence guide you during these coming days.

## **Week One**

Monday: II Timothy 1:3-7

- Each of us is shaped by our family of origin. Your birth order, the role you had in the family, the level of trust and distrust, the way conflict was handled in your home—all of these have shaped you, given you an understanding of this world and your place in it. Were you encouraged or discouraged to take initiative or to reach your potential? Were you told to "play it safe" or "go for it"? What were important "traditions" in your family (such as every ate the evening meal together)? What are some of your warm memories of home? What were some of the most difficult experiences of home? Have you identified the elements that have shaped you? What are the most significant ones that currently come to mind?
- What gifts did your family demonstrate that you exercise as well? Do you have talents in music and art, or in serving, or in leading others? What other characteristics from your family of origin can you identify?
- With whom did you relate closely when you were growing up? What made you feel close to that person? Describe one outstanding characteristic of that person that you would like to have as well?
- In what way do you relate to this scripture passage?

Tuesday: I Samuel 17:12-15

- What is your “standing” in your family of origin? What role(s) did you play because of this “standing”? What does this mean in terms of your self understanding now?
- What expectations did your parents have of you at home? What expectations did your parents have for you in life? How have your parents’ expectations affected how you have heard and responded to God’s call for your life?
- If you were one of Jesse’s children, what role would you have? \_\_\_ Out on the “battlefield” with Saul \_\_\_ Keeping the family business going back home \_\_\_ Doing the “grunt” work that nobody wants and nobody sees \_\_\_ Serving as a messenger service. \_\_\_ Other. Why?
- Meditate on this quote from *A Work of Heart* by Reggie McNeal (page 92): “How the spiritual leader responds to culture shapes the individual heart and the heart of the movement. The three-act drama of knowing where you come from, where you stand, and where you want to go is not just a private exercise. Those who surround the leader learn how to interpret their own lives through the leader’s choices.”

Wednesday: Genesis 39:1-6

- Joseph was dramatically removed from life as he knew it (his culture) and inserted into a dramatically different culture. This was a major upheaval in his life. In living out the values of his home, he was able to adapt and thrive. In planting a new church, you will be most effective in planting in the culture you know best. And yet, you may be led to plant a church in a totally different culture (such as from suburban to center city). How comfortable are you operating outside of the culture in which you were raised? In what way would this affect whether you do your best work or not? How can you be confident and “other-centered” when you are working in a situation different from your “home culture”?
- How do you connect to a new cultural setting? How comfortable are you with those who are outside of the faith?
- You may be led to plant a church in your “home” culture. Even then, you are not the same person you were “back then.” You have had educational and other experiences which have affected you and changed you. How can you maintain your “true” self and still relate in an effective way to your “home” culture?

Thursday: Jeremiah 1:4-10

- Experiences from early childhood shape many of our responses in life, responses that we repeat even though they may not be appropriate for the situations we face. What are your perceptions of “self” that affect your self-understanding that were formed in your early years?
- Jeremiah was afraid of the task before him. He saw himself as a child in comparison to the task. In many instances, we respond out of emotions that were ingrained in us when we were little children even before we could rationally examine them. Later experiences in life may trigger these emotions, causing us at times to

react like a little child. Identify experiences where you were fearful. What were the triggers that caused you to be fearful? How did you respond to these fearful situations? Are there common responses? How did you grow through these experiences?

- Reflect upon these quotes from *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (p. 46-47): “It might seem at first glance that our feelings are obvious; more thoughtful reflection reminds us of times we have been all too oblivious to what we really felt about something, or awoke to these feelings late in the game.” He goes on to relate how our awareness of our emotions is an important practical step toward controlling or changing them (to be appropriate for the circumstances). (p. 55) “Emotions that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react, even though we have no idea they are at work.... once that reaction is brought into awareness...he can evaluate things anew...change his outlook and mood.”

Friday: John 1:43-46

- Reflect upon the situations and circumstances at the times you influenced people toward faith in Jesus. What were the results? How did you follow up? Where are they in their faith now? What could/should you have done differently to help make them fully committed followers of Jesus?
- How do you build and maintain relationships with people who are “lost” (that is, the people who are currently “missing” from among those identified as God’s people)? How effective are you in helping people outside the church take steps toward discipleship within the church—helping both the “seeker” and the “believers” to welcome each other?
- Church planting is the most effective evangelism strategy that the church has to reach “the lost.” What is the desire of your heart: to reach and include “the lost”? To have the prestige and honor that comes with serving a big church? To care for those who are needy? To be recognized and praised as an important person? To give people a hand “up and out” of their oppressive situations? To have a better life for yourself and your family? To gather people into a community where they are cared for and loved? What is the desire of your heart?

Saturday: Luke 10:17-24

- When you responded to God’s call, what did you understand about that call and the form that your life’s work would take?
- What has God anointed in your ministry to this point? In what ways have you been fruitful? What do you do in ministry where you feel most alive? What gives you great excitement and joy in ministry? What personal needs are met in your life by the ministry you do?
- How has your understanding of God’s call on your life changed over time? What is happening in your life at this time that leads you to consider church planting? How would church planting be the next “logical” step that follows what God is doing in your life?
- Meditate on this quote from *A Work of Heart* by Reggie McNeal (p. 106): “By reflecting on what it is you answered the call to do, you are forced to take a

backward look across your life and ministry. It also raises the issue of your call's future development. You may currently be experiencing a period of call transition. Previous ministry models may no longer adequately allow you to give expression to your call....The reverse scenario creates a leadership dilemma. Not coming to a clear understanding of what you have been called to do leaves you vulnerable to competing agendas and imposing personalities in your ministry world. A lack of direction will eventually dissipate your leadership vitality."

## **WEEK TWO**

Monday: I Samuel 16:1-13

- What is the major conviction or belief that you have about your life and existence? For example, do you feel loved? Worthwhile? Accepted? Do you feel you have to prove yourself to somebody? What do you think you have to prove?
- What do you think were the thoughts and responses of Jesse to Samuel's "rejection" of the older sons? What could have been Jesse's response to David's anointing? In what ways would the older brothers respond to David's anointing? What changed for David?
- How was your life transformed when you knew and understood God's anointing of your life? What steps did you take to follow up this anointing? What doubts do you have about this anointing?

Tuesday: Acts 9:1-19

- The blinding light, the voice from heaven, the visit by Ananias were all gracious gifts to Saul (Paul) to bring him to the point of following Jesus. What are the gracious gifts that God has used in your life to help you on your spiritual journey?
- Your early encounter with God in your call to ministry may seem so far away that it has no real impact on your ministry. How long has it been since you have had an intimate conversation with Jesus? Our spiritual growth, while using many means (Bible reading/study, prayer, fasting, etc.), is often uneven and may even experience "desert" times. We may remain Biblically and doctrinally sound but "dry." How has your faith changed/grown during such times?
- Meditate on this quote from Charles Spurgeon from one of his sermons: "We too often flog the Church when the whip should be laid on our own shoulders. We should always remember that we are part of the Church, and that our own lack of revival is in some measure the cause of the lack of revival in the church at large." In what ways are you contributing to the lack of faith and faithfulness in the church? What is God trying to do in your life? Where is the sticking point? What will it take to get you "turned around" again by the Spirit?

Wednesday: Philippians 3:7-14

- Perhaps the most difficult work a person in ministry must do is the work of establishing and maintaining one's own spiritual life. What is it that God says you must "leave behind" in order to have that life? (Note: Paul had to leave even

“good things” that were valuable to his people and his culture.) What is it to which God is calling you to “press on” in order to have that life?

- What are you doing to cultivate your spiritual life? What have been the new areas of growth/experience? What lessons do you seem to need to learn again and again?
- In what surprising ways has God come to you? What have you learned from others recently? What have you learned recently from someone who is vastly different from you in culture and society?
- How have you been able to encourage others to join you in your quest for spirituality? How did others hear your words? How did you apply your coaching to yourself?

Thursday: Proverbs 22:17-21

- Who has been a spiritual guide for you? How would you describe this person(s)? What are the outstanding characteristics of this person(s)? What was there about this person(s) that made it possible that you learned and grew spiritually under their direction?
- Who do you turn to now for spiritual direction? What are they offering you that enables and empowers your ministry? If you were to relocate in ministry, how would you continue the connects with this spiritual mentor? How do you recognize and acknowledge the important role this spiritual director is providing for you?
- Who do you know who has planted a new church successfully? Prepare a list of questions to ask a church planter. Over the next four weeks, talk with several planters if possible. Ask them about their target audience, the vision for the church, the strategy, and how they have gathered their initial core group as well as continuing to gather new disciples. Ask them about their spiritual vitality and the importance of spiritual vitality in planting a new church. Record what you learn for future reference.

Friday: Mark 2:1-12

- Tom Bandy challenges every believer to be clear about God’s work of grace in their lives. What is there about your experience of Jesus that the world cannot live without? What does your experience of Jesus communicate about God’s grace and healing power?
- How has Jesus’ touch healed you in the past? Where do you need Jesus’ healing touch in your life at this present time?
- How do you make yourself available to others so that Jesus can meet them right where they are? Where do you see yourself in this gospel story? Are you a disciple, hanging on Jesus’ every word but ignoring the needy ones around us? Are you a religious leader, questioning what is going on and getting in the way of Jesus’ healing/saving work? Are you a friend, doing everything possible to help those in need to get to Jesus?

Saturday: Matthew 25:31-46

- Grace is demonstrated through many little acts, especially to those who are ignored, overlooked, unseen, despised, hurt, broken, or derailed. All of us have “blind spots” in our lives that cause us to “not see” such people. When did some of “the least of these” come to your attention? What did you do about it?
- How do you create space in your life for others? In what ways do you insist that people come into your life on your terms? When was there a time when you came into someone’s life on their terms? What did that feel like? How did this change the way you create space in your life for others?
- Church planting is a demonstration of hospitality. Hospitality is more than simply have the ability to be a friendly person and it is more than having the ability to entertain others. Hospitality is the expression/experience of grace that creates a welcoming space in which the host and the guest enter into a mutual sharing where the gifts of self and respect are freely exchanged. Do you have the gift of hospitality? If not, who would you enlist to be part of the church planting team who can provide leadership in this area? Although a new church should have a specific target audience who will automatically feel at home, in what ways would you make a new church open to welcome and help those who are “different” feel at home? How would your church receive and include those who are differently-abled”? How could your church welcome those suffering from AIDS? What could your church do to receive people of other cultural or ethnic backgrounds so that they could feel “at home”?

### **WEEK THREE**

Monday: Hebrews 11:32-40

- Who are your role models for ministry? What are the characteristics of their lives that make them role models for you?
- You are a unique person—which means that you can never replicate the life or ministry of another. Each person is called to minister according to God’s call and gifting—not in imitation of another. What is your giftedness from God? How can you develop and use that giftedness to its full potential? What are the areas for which you must take responsibility for further growth? What are the next steps? (Remember: no “saint” ever developed instantly!)
- Do a study of one of the great heroes of the faith—perhaps from a Christian biography (suggestions are: Jon Hus, John Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa). How do you identify with that person? How does that person’s life challenge you to faithful service? How did that person deal with set-backs and failures?

Tuesday: Romans 10:1-17

- Paul carried a burden for his own people, the Jews. He wanted them to hear and believe Good News of Jesus. Who are the people God has laid upon your heart to serve? To reach? Where do these people live? What do they do for a living? For pleasure? What music do they listen to? What inspires them? What challenges them? What are their pains and worries? What are their hopes for the

future? What barriers do they have to overcome in order to hear and believe the Good News?

- “The Lord richly blesses those who call on him”. (verse 12) If God would bless the people whom you are called to reach, what would that blessing look like? How would their lives be transformed by the Good News? How would their community be transformed? Church planting is a very effective strategy for transforming both persons and communities.
- How are you praying for the people God has put into your heart to reach with Good News? How would you begin to get to know them? How would you develop relationships with them? Remember: while Paul carried a burden to reach his own people, God sent him to the Gentiles. In your praying, be open to God who might be calling you to serve someone other than “your own people.”

Wednesday: Acts 16:13-15

- Paul had a specific plan to find and work with “receptive” people. What were the “clues” Paul used to identify “receptive” people?
- If you believe God is calling you to plant a new church in an area that you do not know, how will you find “receptive” people? What will you do to build relationships with them? How will you communicate your vision so that it will be understood and “owned” by these people?
- While many people are turned off by religious institutions and institutionalized religious life, there seems to be a deep longing and hungering for spirituality. How do you discover the deep spiritual yearnings of people? How do you walk with them as a fellow pilgrim so that they can open their hearts to God in genuine faith?

Thursday: Luke 10:5-9

- In the early church, those who carried the Gospel relied upon the hospitality of others. Not only does a planter need to provide hospitality but to receive hospitality as well. When you are on the receiving “end” of another’s graciousness, how do you feel? Is it more difficult for you to receive than to give? Why? What are the implications of this for how you begin your ministry?
- A person of peace is a receptive person. How will you know when you are welcomed by a receptive person? How will you know when you have stayed beyond your “welcome”?
- God goes before us opening the doors and homes and hearts of people who are already receptive to the gospel. The summary of our initial Gospel message to them is the same as it was for the early disciples: “The Kingdom of God is near you.” What does “The Kingdom of God is near you” mean to you? What will it mean to the people God is calling you to reach? How can this be expressed in language that people can hear and understand today?

Friday: Acts 14:8-18

- People often “worship” God’s “instruments” who are doing wonderful things. Such “worship” can be seductive, drawing ministers into the dangerous waters of self-aggrandizement and unwise sense self-importance. While we all need to

- receive recognition and praise, we cannot allow it to control us. What did Paul do in this situation?
- How have you responded to other's appreciation of you and your ministry? In what ways do you acknowledge "the source" of your life and ministry?
  - Spend some time today thanking God who has been so kind to you and who has provided for you.

Saturday: Acts 17:16-34

- What do the people value whom God is calling you to reach? What are their spiritual practices and beliefs? How does this affect their everyday lives?
- If you were to hold a conversation with these people about spiritual things, where would you begin? What would spark their interest? What would turn them off? What are the "sticking points" where they would stop listening or stop showing interest?
- How would you build bridges between what they understand and the Good News? How do you raise interest/curiosity in spiritually needy people?
- How do you respond when people reject your message? How do you interpret that rejection? How do you respond when people are indifferent to your message? How do you interpret indifference? What is the meaning of "success" or "failure" for you in such instances? How important is it for you to "succeed"? (If success is important to you or if you have difficulty dealing with rejection, you are probably not ready to plant a new church.)

## **WEEK FOUR**

Monday: Philippians 2:1-13

- What did Paul desire to see in the church at Philippi? What is so important about the exhortation that he gives in verses 1-4? Where have you had a "one another" experience of sharing in deep Christian community? What was it like? What specific experiences did you have in that faith community that would illustrate this passage? Who were the people who led in the practices of humility and looking out for the interests of others?
- How would you go about creating a church that would embody such community? Paul correctly identifies Jesus as the prime example of humility and looking out for the interests of others. He came "to serve and to give himself." At what times have you served and given of yourself? How comfortable were you with putting the needs of others before your own needs?
- Paul illustrates the spirit of the actions needed in the Philippians church in the wonderful Christ hymn that starts in verse 6. Jesus exemplified servanthood, even being obedient to death. In what ways have you practiced servanthood in your ministry to this point? What irritates you when you practice servanthood? What is Jesus trying to teach you—about your relationships with others and your relationship with God—in these irritating experiences?

Tuesday: I Timothy 1:12-20

- What does the grace of God mean to you? Spend time right now identifying 30 separate items that are God’s gift to you (you did nothing to earn or deserve them). Reflect on this list and on God’s grace. Then offer prayers of thanks.
- Reflect on your foundational experience of God. In what ways can that help others know something about God’s grace and mercy? What have you done that you have not received credit for and which has brought God honor and glory?
- How do you see God’s purpose for you life right now? In what ways is God moving and providing direction in your current ministry? Are you trapped, going nowhere, or at a dead end in your current ministry? How does this relate to your current desire to plant a new church?

Wednesday: Acts 13:1-5

- There are three critical elements in planting a new church. The first is *VISION*. Who else is praying with you to discern God’s vision for this new church? How are you going to form the prayer support for your new church and your ministry?
- The second element is *A SUPPORT CONGREGATION*. The church at Antioch was doing what had never been done before—intentional church planting. Antioch was the support congregation for the new churches Paul and Barnabas planted. What church is going to be the support congregation for your new church? What vision do you have to share with a potential support congregation to help them understand and identify with the need for a new church? Which other potential “partner” congregations should you approach to share in the work of starting this new church?
- The third element is *A TEAM*. Paul never worked alone. He needed the strengths of others in the missionary effort—even persons who played supportive roles like John Mark. What are your strengths and weaknesses which can be complemented by others in a team? Who do you need to recruit in order to form this team? How do you operate when there are strong voices that are different from yours? How can you change your mode of operating away from insisting upon your way all the time? Are you able to articulate your position and values while at the same time respecting and learning from the position and values of others?

Thursday: Isaiah 55:6-13

- What brings you great joy and satisfaction in ministry? What in your ministry has been fruitful? Recall a time when you experienced God’s blessing when the Spirit moved in a powerful way to transform lives or a situation. Spent time in praise and thanksgiving for the moments when God’s Spirit has been at work.
- How has God blessed you by using others today? How has God used you to be a blessing to others? In what ways has God brought refreshing and vitality? Who has become a new friend—a new blessing to you recently? Spend time in praise and thanksgiving for the blessings you have received (that you didn’t seek to earn), for new friends, for kindness and courtesies expressed in everyday activities from unexpected sources.

Friday: II Timothy 4:1-8

- There are many demands upon your time and energy in ministry. How do you choose between the “urgent” and the “important”? How do you “keep your head” when all around you are “loosing” theirs? What are the things you must do in order to form a core group to start a new church? What are the things you must do in order for the new church to grow...and continue growing?
- Identify the things that people will “want to hear” of the target group God is calling you to reach. How will this hinder your ministry of making fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ?
- A crucial concept that Stephen Covey made popular is “Begin with the end in mind.” That is so true. What are the practices of ministry that you need to implement at the beginning in order to reach the goal you desire? What will it take for you to say like Paul, “I have finished the race”?

Saturday: Romans 8:31-39

- Paul was stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and flogged. What kept him going? What “drove” him? What was the core belief, the essential understanding of life and God that kept him going? Look at the passage again. The core belief of Paul is found in every one of his letters. Read at least two more of Paul’s letters to churches (not the Pastoral Epistles) looking for his core belief.
- In what ways have you experience the Love of God? How have these experiences affected your confidence? How have you seen the Love of God at work in the lives of others? Review the recent Christian biographies that you have read. (If you have not read a biography of Ann and Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, George Lisle, Lott Cary or Joanna P. Moore, this might be a time to do so.) In what ways were their experiences similar to Paul’s? In what ways were their experiences different?
- What are you facing now? Why is it so difficult for you to believe that “God works for the good of those who love him”? What attitude or pattern of action do you need to change in order to show that you really believe that God loves you in this circumstance? Which of your actions show you do not believe God loves you? How does this show that you really do not love God?

## **WEEK FIVE**

Monday: John 13:1-17

- Many of us go through life following this pattern: action, then reflection to gain understanding/knowledge. Jesus “knew”, then acted. Jesus knew his relationship with God (“he had come from God and was returning to God”). Jesus knew his relationship with his disciples (“he loved his own who were in the world”). Now read the passage again, looking at what Jesus did in light of what he knew. In what ways does Jesus “knowing” relate to what he “did”?
- Jesus also knew that “his time had come.” For many of us, our critical times are when we face great testing and trial. What do you do to prepare to face times of testing? How do you handle testing and trials? How is your response different from Jesus’ response?

- How do you respond to conflict? What has shaped your view of conflict? What have you learned about yourself through conflict? What have you learned about God in times of trial and conflict? Jerry B. Harvey wrote a book entitled “How Come Every Time I Get Stabbed in the Back My Fingerprints Are on the Knife?” In the essay relating to this title, he reveals that many of our conflicts as well as many of our problems with others are conflicts/problems that we have either contributed to or created. In what ways have you contributed to the trial or conflict?

Tuesday: I Corinthians 9:16-27

- Paul understands that effective ministry involves an effective “balancing act.” On the one hand, he is free—free from others expectations and demands and “rules.” On the other hand, he is a servant of all—serving others in order to enable them to experience Jesus for themselves. Where have you experienced others expectations and demands and “rules” placed upon you? In what ways did you struggle to be “free”? How did others respond when you attempted to maintain a balance in your ministry—a balance of freedom from all and service to all?
- In becoming “all things to all people” Paul intended to relate the gospel so that everyone could share in its blessings. How do church people usually interpret the meaning of “become all things to all people?” What is the danger for a minister who is attempting to follow the usual interpretation? How is that different from what Paul is actually saying here?
- In order to effectively serve where God placed Paul, he needed self-discipline. For example, he knew exactly what he could say when he was with the Jews to incite them. But in most instances, he did not do so in order to win the Jews. Throughout his ministry, he maintained the self-discipline of an athlete in order to be useful to God. In what areas of your life do you demonstrate self-discipline (exercise, healthy eating habits, balance of work and rest, care for self, spiritual nurture, continuing education, commitment to a peer support group, etc)? In what areas do you need to develop self-discipline? Talk with your spiritual director for this time about your situation, discuss the options, and develop a workable plan for one new area of self-discipline.

Wednesday: Ephesians 3:14-21

- Jim Collins in his book *Build to Last* makes the case that the first point in building any organization that lasts (including a church) is core ideology which captures what you stand for and why you exist (p. 231). If you were to plant this new church, why would it exist?
- Jim Collins goes on to state that the next point in building any organization that lasts is an “envisioned future” which often includes a BHAG (a Big Hairy Audacious Goal). For instance, one church planter in the 1950’s had a goal of establishing a multi-ethnic congregation in a growing suburb which was largely white. Twenty years later, it was the only multi-ethnic congregation in the area. That was a great BHAG for its time. The writer of Ephesians drives home an important point: “God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” In your wildest dreams and in your greatest longings, what would your

new church be like in 20 years? Take time to write out a two paragraph description of the church at that time (talk about this church's impact upon the lives of people—not numbers of people). God can do that! So how do you need to prepare so that God can do this work through you? What do you need to trust God for?

- How would your assumptions, biases, and prejudices keep you from achieving this BHAG?

Thursday: Acts 11:19-29

- The seeds of other new churches grew out of the planting of the church at Antioch. People in Antioch heard and believed the Good News, experienced the grace of God, and were made fully mature disciples in the faith. Hopefully your new church will also produce fully mature disciples. How will you plant the seeds in your new church which in turn will lead to the planting still other new churches out of your new church? In other words, how will you help this new church reproduce disciples and new churches?
- How will you help your new church understand and maintain its connection to the larger family of faith? To our American Baptist Churches? How will you help your new church participate in the Body of Christ in this world?
- There is always tension between local needs for mission and global needs for mission. Jesus makes it very clear that we do not choose “either/or” but we are to embrace “both/and.” What is there about the vision you have for your new church that embraces both the local and global mission that Jesus has given us?

Friday: Exodus 2:1-15

- Early experiences in leadership often determine leadership potential. Moses seemed to have great potential for leading the Hebrews to freedom. He was a Hebrew raised in Pharaoh's palace. He may have had a vision about how God could use him to redeem God's people. One day he killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew slave. On another occasion, he attempted to mediate a dispute between two Hebrews. Those two fighting Hebrews rejected his intervention (and perhaps resented him). Moses saw in this confrontation that any attempt he might make to lead the Hebrews to freedom at that time would be rejected. When any leader hesitates to take risk after such a rejection, the heart is stunted by lack of courage. Passion fades. Personal vision shrinks to fit life circumstances. Where have you experience rejection? How did that alter your personal vision and commitment? What “died” in your heart or passion? How did this affect how you related to other people?
- Some leaders, after early rejection, decide to be open to whatever God is working in their hearts. Moses was open to God which led to God's “ordaining” him for his liberating, nation-making mission. Identify the past pains of your life and ministry that have caused you to flee for safety or turned in anger upon others. What do you need to do to be open to God's working in your heart? How do you “fan the flame” of passion again in your life?
- How do you hear God's voice at this time in your faith pilgrimage? How is this different from past ways that God has spoken to you?

Saturday: II Corinthians 4:1-18

- Read verses 7 through 11 five times in a row. How has the power of God been revealed when you have been at your lowest point in life and ministry? What is the “treasure” that is in you? How is that “treasure” being revealed in the “clay pot” that is your life?
- Think about a moment of deep discouragement in your life. What made it such a serious concern for you at that time? What did that feel like? What were your first responses to that discouragement? What do those responses reveal about your “automatic” patterns of behavior in times of stress? How were these responses helpful and hurtful? What long term consequences came from these responses? How have your responses to moments of deep discouragement affected those who were around you? What part has God’s grace played in all of this?
- How you talk about personal experiences helps others formulate their perceptions of life and responses to life. How transparent have you been with others? With whom can you be open and vulnerable, sharing your deepest thoughts/feelings/dreams/hopes/desires? What helps you keep your dream/hopes/desires alive? How do you measure the worth of your dreams/hopes/desires? How do you get energized to work toward your dreams/hopes/desires?

## **WEEK SIX**

Monday: Psalm 119:9-16

- What is really important to you? To have a reputation as a great preacher? Be the Senior Pastor of a big and growing congregation? Have the respect of people? A sense of accomplishment? Success? Jesus clearly identifies the consequences of focusing on what is not important in Matt 16:26 when he says “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”(NIV) What do you really seek out of life? The Psalmist says “I seek you with all my heart.”(verse 10) What is the price of seeking God above all? In what ways will that cause a person to be different from others?
- “The Message” expresses verse 15 and 16 this way: “I ponder every morsel of wisdom from you; I attentively watch how you’ve done it. I relish everything you’ve told me of life, I won’t forget a word of it.” One of the secrets of life is to remember the lessons we have learned and build on them. Are there “lessons” that you seem to be having to learn again and again? Why? How do you know that you have learned what God is teaching you?
- Genuine disciples continue to learn and grow throughout life. They want to know what works and what doesn’t work for them. They are self-aware. They want to find solutions to the re-occurring problems they face. They want to be further ahead next year than they are this year...in their understanding of God, of life and of how to live a life by faith. (Insight from Larry McKain of New Church Specialties) What problems do you “conveniently” avoid? How would you know if you are further ahead spiritually this year than you were at this time last year?

What records (journal) do you keep? What have you been reading that nurtures your spirit? What books have you studied in order to learn about church planting?

Tuesday: Mark 5:25-34

- Two factors were at work in the healing of the woman who had been sick for 12 years. One factor was desperation—she had spent all she had and was getting worse. Basically her options had dried up. Approaching Jesus seemed impossible and yet the only possible source for healing. The other factor was the Spirit—God’s Spirit is always at work in this world preparing people’s hearts and lives for receiving God’s grace. In the target audience of those you want to reach through starting a new church, there are people who have great needs driving them and who have the Spirit drawing them. How will you prepare your new church to respond to these people? What if the needs were around issues of divorce or remarriage? What if the needs were around the issues of bankruptcy? What if the needs were around the issues of homelessness?
- People often come to the church in “fear and trembling.”(verse 33) If there are any barriers that the church can remove to make it easier for people to come, we should do it. What are the barriers that people sense and experience which keep them from receiving God’s grace?
- People who experience God’s grace may not, at that time, understand what has happened to them. Most of us spend a lifetime growing in our understanding of God’s grace. So it is not a person’s understanding that saves but it is God’s provision that saves. Hopefully, we will then begin the process of discipleship. What plan for discipleship do you have to help new believers grow to maturity in Christ? What is your goal? What would you describe as the characteristics of a mature disciple?

Wednesday: Ecclesiastes 4:4-8

- Who is the “fool” of verse 5? Could this person be a fool because this person is a dreamer but does not know how to strategize to accomplish the dreams? Is this person a fool because she/he lacks the will or drive to do hard work? Is this person lazy? Is this person a fool, not realizing how much work is needed to accomplish a task (or reach a vision)? Is this person a fool who ran out of resources (money, energy) to accomplish the task? How can you avoid the problems that a fool refuses to acknowledge?
- Who is the person of labor and achievement of verse 4? Is this person a workaholic? What drives a person to work and toil? What are the reasons why people get caught up in constant work? What are the results of such labor? Why do some people value constant work? How can you avoid the problems of the workaholic?
- The writer of Ecclesiastes points to two extremes: one person does nothing because he/she has no purpose, another person constantly toils without purpose to her/his toil. Both extremes are foolish. What God desires is balance—hard work and rest, satisfaction from purposeful work that produces results and enjoyment of gifts that we do not earn. There will be all sorts of pressures on you to push you to the extremes in life...to get your life out of balance. The only ways to resist

the pressures is to develop and maintain your “internal compass” (as Larry McKain describes it). You need to know who you are and where God wants you to go and what God wants you to do. What are the warning signs that your life is out of balance? What do you need to do in order to maintain that “internal compass?”

Thursday: Hebrews 8:6-13

- Hannah Whitall Smith in “The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life” writes: God’s way of working, therefore, is to get possession of the inside of us, to take control and management of our will, and to work it for us. Then obedience is easy and a delight, and service become perfect freedom, until the Christian is forced to explain, “This happy service! How could dream earth had such liberty?” Have there been times when you felt the joy of serving God? What jobs continue to bring joy and satisfaction? Why? What jobs have degraded to the point of being drudgery? Why?
- The new covenant that God has made with people through Jesus touches the starting point of all our work—our minds and hearts. This transformed service from mere duty and “oughts” to desire. How does God need to touch your mind and heart for the work you will be doing? God can also touch the hearts and minds of those who will be joining you in the work of planting a new church. What do you need to share of yourself so that others will be open to God’s touch for the work they will be doing?
- Make a list of all the things you have to do in your current circumstances. Use two headings: “Things I have to do” and “Things I want to do.” This may reveal what you have a “heart” to do what may “drain” your spirits. Which list is longer? What does the length of the separate lists teach you about yourself? Which of the jobs that you have to do are you inadequately prepared or not equipped to do? How does that affect how you approach what you have to do? Where do you need God’s touch in your mind and heart so that you can do (and desire to do) God’s work with joy? (This exercise may need to be repeated regularly in your work of church planting.)

Friday—Revelation 22:1-6

- In these last chapters of this book, the writer gives us glimpses of eternal things. All the things we know as part of life here on earth will be gone and God’s new thing will be all that remains. There will not be any sun or moon. There won’t be any churches (see Chapter 21 remarks about the Temple). So what is the purpose of all that we do? What is going to endure? How do you understand God’s will for your life at this present moment in light of God’s ultimate end?
- There is a river—the river of the water of life. It waters the tree of life which bears fruit. And the fruit is for the healing of the nations. Where is healing needed in your life? Where is healing needed in the lives of those who surround you? Is there conflict in you? Is there conflict between people? Between groups? How can healing be applied in the circumstances you find yourself in right now?

This is the last of the forty days in this reflection experience. The forty days included Sundays where there was no assignment—a day of rest. Hopefully the entire experience enabled God’s light to shine more clearly in your life. We encourage you to remain open to God’s light. This is something that God desires of us throughout our lives in order for us to become mature persons in Christ.

You now perceive more of the influences that are at work in your life; you now understand how God has been working and preparing you for whatever the next steps of ministry might be. What are the immediate next steps? **First**, talk about what you have learned about yourself with any family members who are going to be important in supporting/relating to you in ministry. The things that you may not have been aware of may have been clear to them all along—so there may or may not be any surprises for them. Such discussions are important so that they can, in love, hold you accountable for any growth steps you take. **Then** discuss the implications for future ministry with the safe person or group you have related to during these days, and with the Executive Minister or New Church Planting leader in your Region. **Finally**, step out in faith to do what God has revealed in this discernment experience. We believe that it will be for the eternal honor and glory of Jesus.