



HOW TO  
Launch  
a New  
Church Site

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Ten Questions Every Leader  
(and Church Member)  
Must Answer

**Jess Rainer**  
THOM S. RAINER, SERIES EDITOR

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*How to Launch a New Church Site: Ten Questions Every Leader (and Church Member) Must Answer*

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*To Rachel.*

*My beautiful wife. My best friend.*

*There is no one else I would want to share my life with.*

*I'm forever on Team Rachel.*

*I love you.*

*To Canon, Harper, and Collins.*

*I love you.*

*I'm proud of you.*

*I'm so thankful to be your dad.*



# Contents

INTRODUCTION: We Need More Churches	1
1: Are You Sure You Want to Do This?	11
2: What Will Your Church Site Look Like?	23
3: Do You Have Vision?	37
4: Who Will Be on the Team?	51
5: How Much Is This Going to Cost?	61
6: What's Under the Hood?	71
7: Where Are the People?	81
8: What's the Plan?	91
9: Ready to Launch?	105
10: Ready for Change?	115
CONCLUSION: A New Church Site Is Only the Beginning	123
Notes	129
About the Author	133





## Introduction

# We Need More Churches

“HEY, JESS, do you have a minute?”

That question always gives me pause, because as a pastor, I know that whoever is asking needs more than a minute. But something was different about the question that day.

Three months before we were to launch a new church site, I was sitting at the large community table in a local coffee shop. Whenever I’m out for coffee, I try to pay attention to the people around me. I look for opportunities to engage in conversation. But on this particular day, I was focused on writing a sermon. I had my earphones on and my head down.

When I first sat down, I had noticed Jason, another regular at the coffee shop, seated at the other end of the table. Jason worked in IT, and we’d had many conversations in the past. Focused as I was on my work, I wasn’t aware that he had gotten up and walked

down to my end of the table. Seeing that I had my headphones on, he tapped me on the shoulder.

“Hey, Jess, do you have a minute?”

Taking off my headphones, I replied, “Sure. What’s going on, Jason?”

What I hadn’t noticed was that another gentleman had sat down across from Jason at the end of the table. I would soon find out that the two men had been in a deep, spiritual conversation.

“Jess, I know you’re a pastor. I’ve been talking with Shane, and I think you can help him. Will you talk with him?”

“Absolutely.” I put away my headphones, closed my book, and shut down my laptop.

When I joined Jason and Shane at their end of the table, Shane told me about his life’s pain, uncertainty, and confusion. He didn’t have much resilience left. Life had thrown him a series of curveballs that had brought him low.

Realizing that Shane’s heart was in a place where the Holy Spirit was working, I listened carefully and expressed compassion for all the challenging events he had endured.

“Shane, do you know Jesus?” I asked.

“Well, I know *of* Jesus,” Shane replied. “What do you mean?”

I spent the next thirty minutes sharing the gospel message of Jesus with Shane. Over rapidly cooling cups of coffee, we stopped everything so Shane could begin a new relationship with Jesus.

God used a young pastor that morning to bring a new believer into the Kingdom. But God can use anyone at any time for his purpose. Most often, he works through the local church. That’s his plan for reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus. Thus, we need more churches. We need more church members like Jason. We need more stories like Shane’s.

## **Churches Are Losing Ground**

Here's a sobering reality about churches: They are losing ground in many communities at an increasing rate. There are several ways to evaluate the data.

**Scenario 1:** The church is growing, but at a slower rate than the surrounding community. On the surface, this doesn't seem so bad. At least the church is growing. But it still means the church is losing ground.

**Scenario 2:** The church is at equilibrium while the community is growing. This scenario is dangerous. Church leaders and members may feel that everything is fine. Most likely, the church is stable, maintaining status quo. But what's really happening is a slow death. Over time, members will begin to age out or will leave the church. The church will soon find itself in scenario 3.

**Scenario 3:** The church is declining. It doesn't matter what is happening in the rest of the community; the church is losing ground.

I believe two significant factors contribute to churches losing ground:

**Factor 1:** More and more people are identifying as Nones—that is, with no religion. From 2007 to 2014, there was an increase of 19.2 million US adults who no longer identify with any religion. In 2015, about 23 percent of the US population did not identify with

any religion—and the numbers have been on the rise ever since.<sup>1</sup> Younger generations aren't carrying on the faith of the family. Several areas of the United States have seen the impact of this for years. With the rise of the Nones, cultural Christianity continues to die. But this isn't necessarily a bad thing.

**Factor 2:** Churches have lost their intentionality with outreach and evangelism. There is no shortage of evangelism statistics. There is also no shortage of reasons why churches are less evangelistic than fifty years ago.<sup>2</sup> The point remains: Churches are sharing the gospel less and less.

Here's the bottom line: We need more churches that are dedicated to sharing the hope of Jesus. We need more churches that focus on evangelism and the gospel. We need more churches that are burdened for their neighbors' souls. Churches are losing ground, but they don't have to.

## **A New Church Site Will Change Your Focus**

If you've read any books or articles about starting a new church site, you've probably come across a quote from C. Peter Wagner. In his book *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, Wagner writes, "The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches."<sup>3</sup>

I believe Wagner's quote *can* be true—if evangelism is the focus of the new church. But it's easy to start a new church site without being evangelistic. A new church can be a magnet for transfer growth. We'll address the issue of transfer growth later; but in the

meantime, there's one thing we can say with certainty: Starting a new church site will change your focus.

Most people in the pews aren't thinking about starting a new church site. It's just not on their radar. More likely, they're sitting comfortably and aren't looking to disrupt the status quo. Sadly, the desire to be comfortable is leading to the decline of many, many churches.

Starting a new church site forces people to look beyond the walls of the existing church. Instead of asking inwardly focused questions such as "How do we increase our Sunday morning attendance?" or "How do we increase giving?" we start asking forward-looking questions such as "How do we reach this generation for Christ?" and "How are people in our congregation being equipped to share the gospel?" When the focus shifts outward, so does the impact of the church. When that happens, growth will occur in two ways.

First, growth will occur at the new church site. This type of growth is not surprising. After all, everything that goes into starting a new church site focuses on a single goal: reaching the community. Why, then, do new church sites often fail? They stop focusing outwardly. It's amazing how quickly a new church's congregation can become comfortable and stop growing. There's a solution to that problem, which we'll get to later. But typically, in the beginning at least, growth will occur with a new church site.

Second, growth will occur at the existing (or sending) church site. I know, it seems counterintuitive. If we send out people to open a new church site, won't that decrease the attendance at the existing church site? Temporarily, yes. But overall, it shouldn't. That's because it takes an outward focus to effectively start a new church site, and that same outward focus will continue to draw

new people to the originating church site. The existing church will likely be growing in the months leading up to the launch of the new church site, and that growth should continue after the launch as well.

Here's an example of how this works: First Church averages one hundred people at their Sunday morning worship service. As a reflection of their outward focus, they decide to start a new church site. Over the next year, as the congregation shares Jesus with their community in preparation for the new church site, attendance at First Church grows to 150 people. After planning and preparation, First Church launches East Church by sending twenty-five people out to the new location. First Church now averages 125 people, and East Church averages twenty-five, for a total of 150.

During that first year, East Church continues their outward focus and grows from twenty-five to fifty. First Church continues to reach their community as well and grows from 125 to 150. Now, First Church is averaging 150, and East Church is averaging fifty for a total of two hundred people.

The total church attendance went from one hundred to two hundred people in two years. Both church sites end up growing.

### **Any Church Can Fail**

Please hear me clearly: Church growth isn't guaranteed just because you launched a new church site. Any church can fail. But new church sites often fail for the same reason existing churches fail: They lose their outward focus and stop evangelizing. Any church that focuses only internally will die a slow death. New church sites that focus internally will die a quick death.

What's the solution? Reach your surrounding community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The odds of church growth increase dramatically when church leaders and committed church members team up to do something dramatic for God's Kingdom, such as starting a new church site. Establishing and maintaining an outward focus can change a church's trajectory for generations. If any church can fail, why not fail while trying to reach the next generation for Christ? Overall, churches are losing ground. But that doesn't have to include *your* church. We need more churches to start new sites. We need more churches to change their focus.

You may not think of yourself as a leader, but leadership takes many forms. What's most important is to find ways to get actively involved in the mission of the church to reach people in your community. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for committed church members to support the starting of new church sites—whether that support is through prayer, by encouraging your leaders, helping out financially, or simply pitching in wherever you can. When committed members get on board with the church's mission, there's no limit to what God can do through the church.

### **You Have More Capacity than You Might Realize**

Six months before I met Shane in that coffee shop, I didn't know if I had it in me to start another church. I had been part of two church plants in the previous four years, and I was tired. I didn't know if I had any more capacity to start a third church. Most leaders who want to start a new church site ask themselves the same question: "Do I have enough in me to do this?" Even the thought of shifting the focus of your church outward may seem overwhelming.

Let me give you some encouragement. You have more capacity to start a new church site than you realize. The people in your



church have more capacity than they realize. Your leadership team has more capacity than you realize. The reason most church leaders don't believe they have the capacity to start a new church site can be summed up in one word: *assumptions*.

I would be surprised if anyone would begin exploring the possibility of starting a new church site without *some* assumptions. Most church leaders have at least an idea of what it would take. And before they even get started, they might convince themselves that it's a hill too big to climb. Here are some common assumptions:

- “It would cost too much money to start a new site.”
- “We don't have enough leaders to make it happen.”
- “There's no way the people in our church would agree to do this.”
- “The people in our church are too tired.”
- “Our community doesn't want another church.”
- “It will take too long to start a new site.”
- “We can't start a new church because we don't know how.”

If God is calling you and your church to start a new church site, you can do it. I want you to turn any negative assumptions you have into prayer requests. Write them down now. Ask God to provide the necessary resources. Ask God to raise up new leaders in the congregation. Ask God to start preparing the hearts of the people in your church. Ask God to show you the needs in your community. Ask God to give you the wisdom to take the next step—not every step at once; just the next one. Surrender your assumptions to God, and let him start shaping your heart.

Starting a new church site will *not* turn out exactly as you think. Ups and downs, quick pivots, and unexpected turns are all

a part of the process. That's a good thing. God will take you where you need to go. It might take longer than you planned. It might cost more than you budgeted for. It might not result in as many people as you wanted. But that's okay. If God is determining the next steps—instead of you—he may be changing your definition of success, as well.

Before you move on to the rest of this book, I encourage you to stop and pray. Starting a new church site is not an easy endeavor. I ask you to commit yourself fully to what *God* wants for your church and for you. I encourage you to seek absolute clarity on God's direction. Allow him to remove the obstacles to starting a new church before you even begin the process. I encourage you to be utterly dependent on God. It's the only way you can successfully launch a new church site.

Starting a new church isn't easy, but it's a worthy endeavor and a *needed* endeavor. Churches are losing ground, and it's time to start turning the tide. We need more churches—more outwardly focused, community changing churches. Let's start the process of launching new church sites because the world needs to hear about the free gift of salvation and hope that comes from knowing Jesus.



# 1

## Are You Sure You Want to Do This?

HERE'S MY ADVICE: Don't start a new church site.

"Wait a minute! You just told me we need more churches because churches are losing ground. And you told me I have the capacity to start a new church site. Why would you turn around and tell me *not* to start a new church site?"

That's a fair question. But I stand by my advice.

Don't start a new church site.

Okay, let me explain.

Starting a new church site will be one of the most challenging ministry assignments you ever undertake. When people ask me what it's like to start a new church, I typically respond, "It's the most exhausting ministry I've ever done, but also the most rewarding."

In all honesty, it will be more exhausting than rewarding during the first few years. There will be days when you just want to be done with it. You'll want to walk away. You'll want help, but help won't come. To put it simply, starting a new church site will be full of tough days. But that doesn't mean it isn't worth it.

I just want to paint an accurate picture before you start the process of establishing a new church site. It wouldn't be fair—to you or your church—if I didn't give you the straight scoop. Ten months down the road, I don't want you to be thinking, *No one told me it would be like this! What in the world were we thinking?*

I hope you realize that *realistic* does not mean *pessimistic*. Any worthwhile Kingdom work is bound to encounter opposition. And starting a new church site is major Kingdom work.

To be clear: I *want* you to want to start a new church site. But more important, I want you to know you are called by God to start a new church site. If this is not God's initiative, it will be a tough road.

That's putting it too lightly. If this is not God's initiative, if God is not in the process from the very beginning, it will be a dead-end street.

Here's the biggest question that you must answer before you start: "Is God calling you to start a new church site?"

If God has not called you to this, the church site will fail. You will fail. There's no way around it.

As I do my best to paint an accurate—and encouraging!—picture of what it takes to start a new church site, my prayer is that it will prepare you and inspire you for the journey.

So, one last time: *Are you sure you want to do this?*

### **What's Your Motivation?**

Discerning God's calling takes time. It's not a clear-cut process. Because of that, some leaders will use outside circumstances to

influence what they believe is their internal calling. Unfortunately, these mixed motivations will set a new church site on a difficult path. Here are some outside circumstances that can confuse an inner calling:

- *You're unhappy where you are.* Unhappiness with a current situation is what often leads people to think about starting a new church site. It's the typical "the grass is always greener" scenario.
- *You're frustrated with your local church.* Frustration can be found in a pastor, a staff member, or a layperson. Frustration with the direction or vision of the local church (or the lack thereof) isn't a sufficient reason to start a new church site.
- *You think you should be in church leadership.* This mindset isn't necessarily wrong. The motivation to lead is needed for a new church site. But if you only want to start a new church site because you think you should be the leader, then your priorities may be misaligned.
- *You've been hurt.* Hurt causes us to react in different ways. Being hurt can't be the motivation for starting a new church site.
- *You think it would be cool to start a new church.* The pendulum often swings between starting new churches and revitalizing old churches. Depending on the pendulum's current position, there may be a certain emphasis on starting something new. Church planting looks cool. Don't be fooled; it's not as cool as you think.

What is the right motivation? What is the proper calling? Ultimately that's between you, your family, and God. There are

two soul-searching questions to ask yourself. I call them soul-searching because they require some reflection. Your answers must be gut-level honest.

1. *Why are you starting a new church site?* This first question seems obvious. If you don't know why, you shouldn't be doing it. What are your motivation and calling? What makes your blood pump when you think about starting a new church site? How fueled are you to reach the unchurched and dechurched? Launching a new church site is more than just starting a new organization. It's Kingdom work. And it should motivate you.
2. *For whom are you starting the new church site?* In all my assessments and preparation as a church planter, no one ever asked me this question. But it's a good one. If we have improper motives for starting a new church site, it's hard to say we're doing it at God's initiative. If you're frustrated in your current situation, are you wanting to start a new church site to spite someone? If you're doing it because you think it sounds cool, does your motivation have more to do with impressing others? If you've been hurt by a previous church, are you starting a new site more for yourself than for God? Go into the corners of your heart and ask yourself, *For whom am I doing this?* If you come up with anything other than God, the gospel, and God's Kingdom, I suggest you pause and discern your calling.

### **Discern Your Calling**

How do you know whether God is calling you to start a new church site? Potential church planters must spend a lot of time working through their calling from God. They may spend hours,

days, and even weeks rooting out all the potential negative motivations for starting a church. It's a process. Some organizations will spend weeks evaluating a potential leader for a new church site. They are looking for clues to uncover the more honest, more profound answers. They know that leaders of a new church site must be vetted, and even challenged, in their calling. If you can be honest with yourself, you can start this process independently—but that doesn't mean you go it alone. If God is in it, he will bring trusted people around you to confirm his calling. Here are seven ways to begin discerning your calling:

1. *Pray.* Too often overlooked or neglected, prayer is the cornerstone of pursuing our calling. Prayer means talking to God, yes; but just as important are *listening* and *waiting* for his guidance and direction.
2. *Read the Bible.* God's living and active Word speaks. Read your Bible and pay attention to what God reveals.
3. *Look for other ministry opportunities.* Spend time researching ministry opportunities that match your gifts, abilities, and interests. If you are a current church leader, look for other ministry opportunities that align with your congregation before looking at starting a new church site. If you can see your church pursuing other ministries, God may not be calling you to start a new church site.
4. *Understand the push and pull of God's moving.* A mentor of mine, Dr. Brad Waggoner, once told me, "God will often push you away from where you are and pull you to where he wants you to be." Both pieces will be in play when God calls.
5. *Talk with godly people you trust.* Have other godly people join you in praying about whether God is leading you to start a new church site.



6. *Talk with your family.* Early in my ministry years, I started feeling the tug to preach. I had been serving in support roles in a church plant for several years, but I felt God was nudging me to something new. I sought out preaching opportunities. I wanted to explore this possible new direction. I still wasn't quite sure what it meant. I had never before felt the calling or the desire to become a lead pastor. For years, I had told my wife that I didn't feel called to that role. But now, after several months of exploration, I asked my wife, "Do you think God could be calling me to be a lead pastor?" She softly but truthfully answered, "Not yet." At the time, it stung a little bit. But looking back, she was 100 percent correct. I wasn't ready to become a lead pastor. Years later, when the calling came up again, and I asked my wife for her perspective again, she responded with wisdom, "If you believe without a doubt that God is calling you, then I believe God is calling you." One month later, our congregation started the process of planting a third church—with me as the lead pastor. Listen to your family. Let them speak into your life and your calling. Don't lead your family into a ministry where God doesn't want you to be. It'll be painful for everyone.
7. *Pray more.* When seeking God's direction, you can never pray too much. Without God's calling and covering, a new church site won't succeed.

## **Recognize Your Wiring**

God can use different types of people to start a new church site. It isn't one size fits all. If you've read books, blogs, or articles about starting a church, or have completed a personality assessment, it might seem as if the ideal profile is a dynamic, driven, and outspoken leader.

Some would say that an ENTJ or an ENFJ on the Myers-Briggs scale would be the best fit for starting a new church. On the DiSC personality assessment, it would equate to the “dominance” attribute. On the Enneagram, they might identify an 8 (Challenger) or a 3 (Achiever) as the best fit. What these different measures of personality type have in common is a strong “get it done” mindset.

The danger in narrowing the scope too much on who is best suited to start a new church site is that it limits who God can work through. I believe that God can use anyone to start a new church. When I was first assessed as a church planter, I didn't get the green light to become a leader. To be fair, I wasn't ready to be a lead church planter, but I was preparing to join a church planting team. Several years later, while serving in another church plant, someone told me I would *never* be a fit to be a lead church planter. Why? Because I didn't fit that person's mold exactly of what a church planter should be. A year later, I planted the church that I've now been pastoring for six years.

Though God can use anyone to start a new church site, it's safe to say that those who succeed will most likely share some common attributes and characteristics. Based on observation, I've found that successful church planters typically fall into one of two broad categories: *connectors* or *pioneers*. These two categories can encompass a variety of different personality types.

Connectors and pioneers are both primarily vision casters. They see where God is leading and ask others to join in the journey. The primary difference between the two is how they approach their calling. Pioneers focus on strategy, whereas connectors focus more on people. For example, if both were given the goal of creating a community event to share the gospel, the connectors would go person to person, describing the goal and asking people to jump

on board to figure out how to reach the goal. The pioneers would take time to figure out how to reach the goal and then find the right individuals to help achieve the goal. In a church planting scenario, connectors typically draw people to relationships, whereas the pioneers are more apt to draw people to the strategy.

As you consider starting a new church site, you must recognize your wiring. Are you a *connector*, or are you a *pioneer*? Don't try to fit a mold; instead, understand who you are and how God made you. If you understand your leadership style, you can lead more effectively.

### **Five Crucial Leadership Characteristics**

Whether you're more of a connector or a pioneer, you want to build your leadership team based on five characteristics that every effective leadership team must possess. The primary leader doesn't have to possess all five. In fact, it's rare for one person to be strong in all five areas. But as a group, your leadership team should exhibit all five characteristics. Let's briefly look at each.

1. *Vision.* Where is the church going? Where is God leading? A visionary communicates what the anticipated future looks like.
2. *Strategy.* How is the church going to accomplish the vision? A strategist creates a clear path forward on how to reach the vision.
3. *Execution.* Who is going to complete the strategy? An executor implements the strategy. This person is the "get things done" person.
4. *Multiplication.* Who will bring people together to reach the vision and complete the strategy? Leaders of a new church site must multiply themselves by involving

others in the church. Challenge your committed church members to rally others in the congregation to support the new initiative.

5. *Shepherding*. Who will take care of the people as they pursue the vision? A shepherd cares for, prays for, and loves the people of the church.

Why is it vital to have these five leadership characteristics on your team? Because the path forward isn't easy. A new church plant is both volatile and fragile. No two weeks will look the same in the first fifty-two weeks of starting a new church site.

Satan knows this about new churches. I firmly believe that he hates new churches because of their effectiveness in spreading the gospel. Let me paint one more part of this picture. It may be the most important thing to understand before you start a new church site.

### **Impending Spiritual Warfare**

With the first church I helped plant, our team consisted of full-time and bivocational staff. With our crisscrossing schedules, we held our weekly staff meetings on Mondays at 6 a.m.

As you might imagine, our meetings weren't laced with an abundance of energy. But one particular staff meeting was different from the others. I could see it in the eyes of my teammates; we were spiritually wounded and exhausted.

Since starting the church, our team had gone through the deaths of family members, unexplained physical ailments, and marriages that were falling apart. At the same time, the church was growing rapidly. We had more than three hundred people in attendance and had even started the process of opening a second campus. On the outside, everything looked good. On the inside,

the team was hurting. We had been fighting battles that very few people saw.

The attacks never stopped as we planted a second church and eventually a third that I served as lead pastor. The second church was full of unnecessary conflict, and my current church has gone through seasons of hardship that are clearly fueled by the enemy. I've spent more than a decade planting three churches, and the spiritual warfare has lasted just as long. Only recently have I begun to learn how to distinguish spiritual battles from the normal ups and downs of starting a new venture. Yes, we live in a fallen world where bad things sometimes just happen. But we must also be aware that Satan hates new churches, and he will do whatever he can to slow them down or stop them.

No one prepared me for the spiritual warfare that came with starting a new church site. I'm still learning, and I want you to be aware of what can happen. I also want you to know that God is victorious, and he will see you through any battles you may face. As Christ builds his church, we can be certain that "all the powers of hell will not conquer it" (Matthew 16:18).

## **Permission to Fail**

There are a lot of definitions of success when it comes to starting a new church site. In the chapters to come, you'll be able to determine what success looks like for you. For now, I want to talk about failure. It's okay not to succeed. You have permission to fail at starting a new church site.

We can put so much pressure on ourselves to reach a certain level of success with a new church site that we can miss all the incredible ministry that happens along the way. I've talked with several church leaders over the years who either left or closed down a new church site. Their tone and demeanor often reflect failure.

But I always remind them of the good work that God did along the way.

“How many adults, students, and kids heard the gospel over the life of the new site?”

“How many people did you disciple?”

“How many baptisms did you celebrate?”

“How many people did you send on missions trips through the church?”

And I always ask this question last: “How many people came to Christ through the church?”

I believe that every new church site is worth the effort if even just one person comes to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Changing someone’s eternal destiny is always worth it.

Experience has shown that most new churches will see a lot more than just one person come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact, evangelistic ministry during the first three years of a new church site will often produce more than three times the number of conversions as a similar size church fifteen years old or more.<sup>1</sup> I’ll take the first three years of ministry impact at a new church site over the previous ten years at an existing church, which is more likely to be “steeped in complacency and the status quo and . . . to resist needed change.”<sup>2</sup> Even if a new church site fails within the first two years, if its leaders and members have reached into their community, I consider that church a success.

Is God calling you to start a new church site? If so, *run* after the calling and you will see God accomplish things you wouldn’t even know to ask or think.

