

Planting Churches, Renewing Cities

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The vision of City Life Church is to *renew cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus*. The primary way we accomplish this is by starting and nurturing churches. Although we're thirteen years old, CL originally started in my living room with nine people asking two big questions: Where is the city broken? What would it look like for the gospel to address the brokenness of the city? We partnered with Acts 29 a diverse, global church planting network. Today Acts 29 churches around the world are focusing on church planting. So a) *Why should we care about church planting?* 2) What are our challenges?

Why Care about Church Planting?

Two reasons. **First, the church is Jesus' life work.** Before he was arrested, Jesus prayed a lengthy prayer in John 17 saying, *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do (4)*. What work? Verse 6: *I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world (6)*. So his work was manifesting the name of God. To manifest means to make visible. Jesus is claiming to make God visible. The great mystery of the universe is unveiled in Jesus. I remember a skeptic saying to me, I'd believe in God if I saw him. If you want to see God, look at Jesus. He

says, *I reveal God*. He doesn't say I reveal a great way to live. I reveal God. That means we don't have the liberty of reducing him to something else, moral philosopher. Jesus is *utterly divine* or certifiably insane. So if you want to see God, read the Gospels over and over look at Jesus. Now notice *who* Jesus reveals God to: *the people you gave me out of the world. A specific group*. Includes the original disciples but he expands the group when he prays, *I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me* (20). So his God revealing work is for all who believe in him, past, present, future church. Now, there are plenty of people who believe Jesus claims but don't trust him. When he says **believe**, he doesn't mean merely to agree with Jesus claims *but to trust him even when it's hard*. It's not just believing in the surgeon in the consultation, but also when he rolls you into the operating room and turns on the anesthesia. That's belief. So the work Jesus accomplished was to reveal God to those who *believe in him: the church*. So, you can't really say (with integrity) "I'm into Jesus but not the church" because Jesus gave his life to planting and establishing the church. He believes it so passionately, deeply he calls it, his body, his bride. Second reason we should care about church planting is that **Jesus didn't just give his life to the church but for the church**. He opens his prayer, *Father, the hour has come* (1). What hour? The hour of his sacrificial death for sinners (7:6, 30; 12:23). So when Jesus says

my work is complete, he's not only referring to *revealing* God to the church, but *reconciling* the church to God. Our spiritual and moral debt is so high the payment is *death*. So in shocking act of mercy Jesus volunteers to pay our eternal debt in his death and give us eternal life in his resurrection. But you've got to believe, trust.

What's so appealing about **eternal life**? *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (3). It's not just living forever (quantity); it's knowing Jesus Christ *now* (quality): intimately knowing the divine Son of God qualitatively and quantitatively. When a couple gets married they pledge themselves to one another forever, *til death do us part*.

Quantity. But they don't get married just to have a roommate for life. They're looking for quality of relationship; so they promise *to love and to cherish*. We want someone to know, to commit ourselves to, to love. See, eternal life isn't just getting to "eternity"; it's eternity getting to us. It's being so close to Jesus you're united with him: to know and enjoy his love, forever. Virtually every human being is looking for a relationship like this. Someone they can *trust* with their fears, *love* with all their heart, and be loved back totally and completely. Which brings us to *church planting*. How do people discover eternal life, find *the one to love and cherish*? Jesus prays, *As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world* (18). The *church* has been sent *to introduce others to the Person they've*

been looking for their whole lives! So while the church is Jesus life work, it's also your work. To invite others into the community who've been healed by the Surgeon. Ben was a coworker of someone in our church. Their company started printing our materials, so I met him in the shop and got to know him. One day he visited a Sunday gathering, but ran out in the middle of the sermon. I've blown it. When I met with him for lunch that week I asked why he ran out. He said, The weight of God's love lifted a burden so immense I couldn't handle it, tears. Church: *people need Jesus.*

Challenges to Church Planting

Now how did his followers go about planting churches? St. Paul went to major urban centers, prayed, worked, witnessed, and made disciples, and as he did he connected new Christians to one another, to Christ, and qualified leaders; [he appointed elders in every city](#) (Titus 1:5). Now as we think about doing this in Austin, we face several challenges. **First, transience.** We've been the fastest growing metro area every year for the past nine years. In 2019 we received 169 new residents a day. While 8% are from Cali, over half are from within TX. In fact, 2013-2017 there was about 62k migrated to Austin from within TX but 50k left! Every year the city turns over a significant part of its population. And we feel it, especially as a downtown church. We've probably had five churches

in 13 years. One saving grace is the strong committed core. If we're going to renew the city by planting more churches, we need more people to partner with us, stay in Austin, commit to being a gospel-centered, city-renewing church. The second challenge is **leadership**. Paul appointed godly, qualified elder(s) in every city to lead the church. We've had three elder teams in 13 years. Our current one is amazing but we could use a couple more. Some of you went through an elder development program, then COVID hit. If you'd like to be assessed as an elder, let us know. We also need more deacons, CG leaders, church planters. We need more men and women to lead. Third **evangelism**. Our city desperately needs churches unashamed to share the gospel, remember that person everyone is looking for? We need city groups so compelled by love of Christ they persuade others (Easter). [Diagram] Flanking evangelism, we also need growing justice/mercy ministry on one side and culture-making on the other side. We exist to renew the city socially (justice/mercy), spiritually (evangelism), and culturally (arts/vocation). As we emerge from COVID, we need city groups to recommit to local renewal. But the tip of the spear is evangelism: eternal life in Christ. Which, in fact, leads to social, spiritual, and cultural renewal. Contrary to some impressions, Christianity contributed to the overturn of slavery, the establishment of the university, the creation of hospitals, significant advances in science, curbing human

trafficking and fostering and adoption (Holland: Dominion). Not in spite of their faith but because of their faith. The fourth challenge opportunity is **prayer**. It's no coincidence that Jesus' life work ends in a lengthy prayer, interceding for the church. It's what he is doing now, making constant intercession at the right hand of the Father (Heb 7:25). Prayer precedes outpourings of spiritual power and renewal. Be on the lookout for opportunities to pray. Now the encouraging news is that we're making headway on these challenges. I'd like to bring up two leaders to share some reflections with you. First, Ivan Valdez who is just starting his church planting residency. Next, Zach Wallace who is finishing up his Pastoral Residency to join a plant. Today is his last Sunday with us.

Conclusion: Jesus gave his life to the church and for the church. Who are we to keep eternal life to ourselves? Let's get on with renewing cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus *as his church!*