

IX 9Marks



Church Planting is For: wimps

How God Uses **Messed-up**
People to Plant Ordinary Churches
That Do **Extraordinary Things**

Mike McKinley

FOREWORD BY DARRIN PATRICK

For Karen,
God's gift to me on this journey

Church Planting Is for Wimps

Copyright © 2010 by Michael McKinley

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Faceout Studio, www.faceoutstudio.com

First printing, 2010

Printed in the United States of America

Italics in biblical quotes indicate emphasis added.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-1497-5

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-1498-2

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-1499-9

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2464-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McKinley, Mike, 1975–

Church planting is for wimps : how God uses messed-up people to plant ordinary churches that do extraordinary things / Mike McKinley

p. cm. (A 9Marks book)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 13: 978-1-4335-1497-5 (tpb)

ISBN 10: 1-4335-1497-4 (tpb)

ISBN 10: (invalid) 1-4335-2464-6 (ebk)

1. Church development, New. I. Title.

BV652.24.M37 2010

254'.1092—dc22

2009031789

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Foreword	7
Acknowledgments	9
Introduction: Justify Your Existence	11
1 Church Planting—Slightly Preferable to Unemployment	15
2 So, How Exactly Does One Plant a Church?	27
3 One Thing Is Necessary	39
4 Cleaning Out the Sheaves	55
5 God Always Gets His Way	73
6 How to Ruin Everything	85
7 No Offense, but You're Doing Everything Wrong	95
8 Redefine <i>Extraordinary</i>	105
Appendix 1	115
Church Planting Memo Prepared by Mark Dever for the Elders at CHBC	
Appendix 2	123
Men's Discipleship Training Syllabus: Grace Community Church (Ashburn, Virginia)	

Introduction: Justify Your Existence

The history of my life will say to the world what it says to me—There is a loving God, who directs all things for the best.

Hans Christian Andersen

One online e-zine has a regular feature called “Justify Your Existence.” The gist of the feature is this: they take a band that you probably haven’t heard, and they put to them the supreme challenge. They ask the band to convince the readers that it’s worthwhile to grant them a hearing.

Well, I am aware at the outset that I bear the same burden. You haven’t heard of me. There’s no obvious reason you’d want to read anything I have to say. I don’t pastor a large church. Despite what my mom thinks, I am probably not destined to be a famous preacher or conference speaker. I don’t have a particularly brilliant methodological insight that will transform your life or ministry. But maybe that’s all okay. I am not writing this book to help you build a giant church or to advocate a technique that guarantees wild success.

12 Introduction

What's in This for You

Instead I want to share with you my story of planting a church (well, kind of planting a church . . . we'll get to that later). It's not a particularly original way to present this material, but I think it is appropriate, because Christians are people in the middle of God's story. The small victories and slow progress of the gospel in our lives and churches are actually spectacular evidence of God's grace and exactly the things that make up part of his wonderful story of redemption.

So I hope that my story overlaps with your story in a way that's encouraging and helps your ministry. I have learned that God uses messed-up people like me and you to plant churches that look utterly unremarkable to the world. The marvelous thing is that, in his kindness, God does amazing things through those churches. My hope is that my testimony to God's everyday amazing grace will

- inspire some people to become church planters,
- encourage others who are in the middle of the church planting journey,
- spur pastors of existing congregations to invest heavily in church planting,
- and give all church members a better sense of how they might love and pray for church planting teams, especially if God sends them on one.

It would be my joy if, by the time you are done reading this book, you're thinking, *If God can use this moron, surely he can use me as well!*

To that end, I'll make a deal with you: I'll be transparent about my failures and struggles, which are legion, if you promise to be amazed by God's kindness. Do we have a deal?

The Quick Bio

First, what do you need to know about me? I was raised outside of Philadelphia, so I have anger issues. You would too if you were an Eagles fan. My parents were brought to Christ through a painful family experience when I was about nine or ten years old, and they began dragging my brother and me to a large evangelical church in our town. One Sunday God showed mercy to me by giving me ears to hear the gospel, and I turned from my sin and trusted in Christ.

Even though I was serious about my faith growing up, I had what people today kindly refer to as “issues.” My grades were good, and I didn’t get into trouble with girls or drugs, but my soul was a mess. I was proud and judgmental, pretty much convinced that everything and everyone else was idiotic. I was a jerk, and I didn’t know it. Had someone told me, I wouldn’t have listened. Let’s face it, as long as teenagers in the church are not getting into trouble with girls or drugs, no one is going to bother them. So I was left to grow more proud and more angry at other people.

As I grew older, church fit me less and less. Instead I found an outlet for my anger in punk rock music. Punk rock music sees the stupidity of the world pretty clearly without trying to give meaningful answers, and it gave me a vocabulary for my dissatisfaction. I appreciated its honesty, so I adopted its look and attitude. Besides, I looked good with tattoos. And still do.

Suddenly I didn’t feel like I fit in with most Christians. I didn’t want to be a Republican. I didn’t want to spend my whole life pursuing a big house and a car. And I didn’t want to wear khakis. Though I loved Jesus, I decided that I didn’t need to be like everyone else in order to follow him.

My college years took me to Washington DC. I thought I went there for an education, but God had two transforming experiences in store, neither of which had anything to do with

14 Introduction

my classes. First, I met my wife-to-be, Karen. Like me, she loved Jesus and punk rock, and still does. I knew right away that I would marry her, and as this story unfolds, you'll discover why she's the real hero of our saga.

The other transformative encounter was becoming a member at Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC), pastored by Mark Dever. Even though a vast majority of the church were over seventy years old, they warmly welcomed the green-haired guy in the kilt and combat boots. CHBC quickly became my spiritual home. My soul flourished under Mark's preaching, pastoral care, and friendship. And God used Mark's work of revitalizing the church to spark my own love for the church.

After college, Karen and I were married and moved back to Philly so she could continue her education and before I would attend seminary full-time. To support us, I worked as a full-time cubicle jockey selling insurance for cell phones. And we started cranking out kids, which also brought its full-time demands. (To jump ahead in the story line, we now have four children—Kendall, Knox, Phineas, and Ebenezer. Just thinking about them makes me smile.)

When seminary wrapped up, the congregation at Capitol Hill Baptist asked me to come back to Washington to join the church staff as a planter. So we had another baby, Karen shaved her head as a graduation gift for me, and we moved back to DC. We spent a little over a year on staff at Capitol Hill Baptist and then planted a church called Guilford Baptist Church with seven other people thirty miles away in Sterling, Virginia. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that the seven of us went to reform a church called Guilford Fellowship that already had twelve members, but I'll explain all this as we go.

That, gentle reader, is how this all began.

Church Planting— Slightly Preferable to Unemployment

Slums may well be breeding grounds of crime, but middle-class suburbs are incubators of apathy and delirium.

Cyril Connolly

By the spring of 2003 I was tired. Really tired. I was working forty hours a week as a manager for an insurance company. This involved talking to unhappy customers who cared a little too much about replacing their cell phones as well as supervising entry-level employees who were either impregnating or hitting one another. I was also taking a full load of classes at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, driving back and forth from work to school a couple of times each day.

Every morning I was in the office by 6:30. Every evening, at the close of the workday, my wife Karen would meet me in the parking lot of my office building to hand over the baby. She then went to work as a nurse at the local hospital's emergency room,

16 Church Planting Is for Wimps

while I headed home to study. Add in renovations and repairs on a hundred-year-old house, and not much time was left for sleep.

Want to Be a Guinea Pig?

So when my former pastor from Capitol Hill Baptist, Mark Dever, called one morning and asked me to meet him that day on the seminary campus, I felt reluctant. I was happy to meet with Mark, but doing so meant staying late at work. It also meant skipping my fifteen-minute afternoon nap, which was often the only thing lying between me and the abyss. But Mark has boundary issues and a way of getting what he wants, so later that day I chugged a jumbo-sized cup of gas station coffee and slumped down on a bench outside the seminary library, waiting for him to arrive.

When he did, we started with a few moments of chitchat, but he turned to business pretty quickly. Capitol Hill Baptist was growing out of its meeting space, he said, and the cost of making significant renovations to their old building was exorbitant. The elders of the church had decided to implement a strategy to plant churches in the surrounding suburbs. Mark was here to float a trial balloon: would I be interested in returning to DC after seminary to be CHBC's guinea pig church planter?

I would eventually say yes, of course. Mark is a made man in the Reformed Mafia. He has a giant Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals logo tattooed on his back. He has J. I. Packer's home phone number in his contact list under "Jim P." You don't say no to a guy like this.

But even if it wasn't Mark who was asking, the last seven years in the cell phone insurance biz left me willing to take a job as an assistant manager at Wendy's, the fast-food hamburger chain. In fact, I had tried, and they turned me down, but that's a tale for a different book. Since many of my seminary friends had spent three years and thousands of dollars on classes but were

struggling to find a full-time ministry opportunity, I wasn't about to forfeit an opportunity like this. So I told him that I would talk to Karen, who I didn't think would be excited about moving, and get back to him.

Planting for Hipsters

I had already received a few other offers to plant churches, but I had turned them down. I had never thought of myself as a church planter. Seminarians often talk about church planting as if it requires an indelible mark on the soul. "Are you a church planter?" they ask in hushed tones. The truly gifted men can recall thoughts of planting from their time in their mother's womb. I, on the other hand, had checked my soul twice but never found any indelible marks, at least not of that kind.

Still, several organizations had approached me about planting churches in the trendy part of the city where all of the wealthy young professionals live and drink. The idea, I think, was that I would be the tattooed pastor in the punk rock band T-shirt with a church full of twenty-somethings, all of whom wore plastic black eyeglasses. We would meet in a warehouse on Tuesday nights, followed by a trip to the local brew-house. Good theology. Loud music. Maybe a trendy church name taken from a Greek or Latin word that will sound cool for five or six years.

Can you see the picture? Let's face it—it would have been a lot of fun. I could have met cool people and done some good ministry.

But it seemed like a really bad way to build a church.

Don't get me wrong—I can see how such a scenario presents an effective way to draw a crowd. People favor people who favor them. They favor goods and services tailored to their tastes and how they want to perceive themselves. Niche marketing works. So plant a church that gives off an intelligent, slightly rebellious,

18 Church Planting Is for Wimps

funny, hipster vibe, and you will attract pre-wealthy twenty-somethings, since that's how they want to feel about themselves. If you do it artfully, you may attract lots of them. Hopefully you'll be able to help those twenty-somethings you've attracted: lead them to Christ, teach them a lot about Jesus, equip people to care for the city. I'm not knocking it. That would be great! But . . .

I don't think you would have a very *healthy* church. The Bible seems to assume that a church will express diversity in age. As just one example, think of Paul's instructions to his protégé Titus:

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. (Titus 2:1–6)

Here Paul has instructions for the old men (be temperate and worthy of respect) and the young men (be self-controlled). He even has things for the old women to teach the young women about how to be godly wives and mothers! It's hard to see how that happens if everyone in the church is the same age, right? Are the twenty-seven-year-olds supposed to teach the twenty-two-year olds how to be godly at that stage of their life? I don't know about you, but I was pretty pathetic when I was twenty-seven (full disclosure: I'm still pretty pathetic).

In fact, if you look at what the Bible says on this subject, you'll see that one of the glories of the gospel is that it reconciles people that could never be reconciled without it. In Ephesians 2, Paul describes the glorious display of God's wisdom in the church

as different kinds of people come together (specifically, Jews and Gentiles). In John 13:35, Jesus tells us that the world will know we are his disciples because of our love for each other. But if we only hang out with people who are the same age, who like the same kind of music, and who share our taste and politics and preferences, how are we any different from the world? Doesn't every non-Christian you've ever known hang out with people who are just like him or her (Matt. 5:47)?

Love in the church should be at least partly inexplicable to the world. The elderly ladies at Capitol Hill Baptist who, in 1995, invited the guy with the stupid hair and safety pins in his face to their homes for lunch after church—*they* were displaying the riches of God's wisdom to the watching world. When a church looks diverse on the outside, it's often because the gospel is central. That's why you want to see churches filled with political liberals and conservatives, people wearing jeans and three-piece suits, men and women with white and brown and black skin, Christians old and young, friends tattooed and tattoo-deficient, and so on. Churches that aim at just one demographic ultimately work against that show of God's wisdom.

Don't Say "Homogeneous Unit Principle"; Say "Contextualize"

Not many books or church leaders these days speak anymore about the homogeneous unit principle—appealing to one homogeneous group of people. Somewhere in the 1980s or 1990s church growth writers stopped using the phrase because they had heard enough complaining about it being biblically problematic. Still, they needed some way to target particular groups, so they began to speak in terms of "contextualization"—adapting yourself to a context. I don't want to totally knock the good people-sensitivities involved with contextualizing, but the evan-

20 Church Planting Is for Wimps

gical fascination with the topic makes me wonder if it's just an updated version of the homogeneous unit principle: Pick your social demographic and appeal . . . I mean, contextualize to them.

When we start churches intentionally designed to appeal to a certain kind of person, we fail to heed the biblical mandate to become all things to *all people* (1 Cor. 9:22). It seems like many churches want to embrace the first phrase without the second. We want to become all things to some people. The problem is, becoming all things to some people—say, by rocking the tattoos and turning up the music—often keeps us from reaching all kinds of people. After all, wooing one demographic (for example, urban young people) often means alienating others (such as older people or foreigners).

It seems to me that Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 wasn't saying that he would mimic the people he was trying to reach, you know, with a ripped tunic and Doc Martens sandals. He was trying instead to remove unnecessary offense whenever possible. He wasn't telling them to sport goatees—he was telling them not to flaunt their Christian freedom in everyone's faces. He was encouraging the church to be sensitive to surrounding cultures, yes, but by being sacrificial in its love, willing to give up things it might not have preferred to give up. To this day, I enjoy punk rock. I *could* flaunt the tats and plant a punk rock church that took its musical cues from Stiff Little Fingers and its attitude from the Clash. But how would this show love for the elderly women in my neighborhood, the same kind of elderly women who welcomed me to Capitol Hill Baptist? It seems like we should intentionally plant churches that will, as much as possible, welcome and engage people who are different and diverse with respect to age, gender, personality, and nationality.

But this hardly ever happens! According to one study, only 5 percent of Protestant congregations in America are multiracial

churches (defined as a church with an ethnic mix where no more than 80 percent of the congregation is of one dominant group).¹ Let that sink in for a second. If you are planting a church in a rural county where 99 percent of the population belongs to one ethnic group, I can understand why your church is mono-ethnic. But if we're starting churches in cities and growing suburbs, locations with great diversity, shouldn't our churches reflect that diversity? It could be that our efforts to "engage the culture" have pigeon-holed us into reaching only one culture group.

Perhaps you're thinking, *But young people simply won't go to churches where the music is not tailored to them.* That may be partly true, but it's only true insofar as they've been in churches with no biblical vision for reaching *all people*. But what if pastors everywhere decided to stop capitulating to consumeristic demands? What if pastors taught church members to lay down their rights for the sake of people who are different? Pastor, are you afraid that if you try doing this, you might lose some of your market share?

So then, what should characterize a church plant that wants to reach people from all kinds of backgrounds? Well, it obviously needs to show intentional love to people from different cultures. People from other cultures will know pretty quickly whether they are welcomed or merely tolerated as a curiosity. In our church we try to be intentional about having members from other cultures involved in leading our corporate gatherings, whether through prayer, Bible reading, singing, or preaching. In addition 40 percent of our elder board is comprised of non-white non-Americans (and that's not including the lawyers, who should perhaps be their own ethnic group).

Also, the way that we order our gatherings can impact the

¹Michael Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). For what it's worth, as of 2009 our congregation in Sterling is roughly 70 percent one dominant group.

22 Church Planting Is for Wimps

way international believers feel. Many of the brothers and sisters in our congregation from other cultures were attracted by how similar our services are to the ones in their home countries. The music is different, sure. The way people dress is different, of course. Our services may be quieter or louder than what they're accustomed to. But Christians gathered in churches in Thailand, in South Africa, in Niger, in Guatemala all do the same things: they pray, sing, read the Bible, and listen to the Word being preached. The more we focus on doing those things, the more "at home" international brothers and sisters feel. The more we import movies and drama and pop culture into the church, the more specific and targeted our gatherings feel, and the less comfortable these brothers and sisters feel.

Now, I am not saying there can be no diversity in trendy churches. You can point to large homogeneous-unit-pursuing churches that are wonderfully diverse. That makes sense, because when the gospel is clearly taught, there should be that cross-cultural unity. But I do think that their diversity has occurred despite their pursuit of the homogeneous unit principle. Thank God, the gospel can triumph over all kinds of pastoral stupidity, including mine. Still, as we think about planting churches, we need to look for ways to cultivate diversity rather than pursuing homogeneity.

Dying to Self with Porsches and McMansions

Anyhow, sorry for the interruption. The preacher emerged. Let's get back to our story. Capitol Hill Baptist was inviting me to plant the kind of church I wanted to plant, but there was one thing about their offer that I didn't like: they wanted me to plant a church in the Washington DC suburbs of Northern Virginia, which in many ways is wealthy and sterile like the suburbs of Philadelphia where I grew up. Growing up in the land of Range Rovers and Saabs had turned me into a punk rocker. What might

living there permanently do to me? To make matters worse, the county where they wanted to plant, Loudoun County, has the highest median household income of any county in America—over \$107,000 per year. Fairfax County, next door, is in second place.

This wasn't where I had envisioned myself working. Maybe I wanted to go somewhere that looked more like me. I don't like the suburbs—I'm a city guy at heart. And Karen was raised nine thousand feet up in the Rocky Mountains. The suburbs struck us as combining the worst of the city (crowded and ugly) with the worst of the mountains (nothing going on, no arts and culture, little diversity). We had always told ourselves that we would go anyplace the Lord called us, even China, just not to the ranch house in the suburbs. We wanted to serve in a place where people were needy, where there was community rather than endless McMansions. So Loudoun County, with its malls and shopping centers, didn't fit our passions. In fact, a Ferrari/Porsche/Lamborghini dealership sits just across the street from where I'm sitting right now. No joke.

But I'm pretty sure Jesus said something somewhere about picking up your cross in order to follow him. As far as crosses go, this one was pretty minor.

And I do think that too many church planters get bogged down with a clear burden for a specific place. I mean, maybe God did give you a burden for a certain geographical area. If so, far be it from me to tell you otherwise. But I know a lot of guys who say they have a "burden" when in reality what they have is a "personal preference" or "a level of comfort" with a certain location. So they reject all kinds of gospel opportunities because it doesn't fit with their "burden." But if God gives you an opportunity to plant a church in a place that has either Christians who need a church to proclaim the gospel to them or non-Christians who

24 Church Planting Is for Wimps

need a church to proclaim the gospel to them, you should think long and hard about it, even if it's not in a location you would prefer.

So even though Karen and I didn't want to live in the suburbs, we began to pray about it. I was a little excited about the opportunity of planting through Capitol Hill Baptist, but I struggled with feelings of guilt over the fact that we would not be going to a more challenging location. After all, urban ministry, in my mind, has always seemed more hard-core. There are opportunities in the city to help needy people, to bring the gospel to bear on broken families, to bring the gospel of reconciliation where ethnic tension exists. In my mind, urban pastors are like the Navy Seals. They can hold their heads high at union meetings. But in the suburbs, you have BMWs doing the Chik-fil-A drive-through and then pulling anonymously into the garage with an electric opener. Ministry here is like joining the Coast Guard. It counts as military service, but you can't brag to your friends about it.

One day I was whining to one of my Westminster professors, Manny Ortiz, about whether I should plant a church in the suburbs. Dr. Ortiz has forgotten more about church planting than I will ever know, and he's planted many churches among the poor and needy. I figured that he would be sympathetic to my feelings. After he listened to me complain, he spoke words that seem obvious in retrospect, but which I had entirely missed. He said, "Wherever there are rich people, there are poor people mowing their lawns and painting their houses. Go and find them if you want to help poor people." I was immediately convinced that I should shut up and go where the Lord was obviously calling us.

But I wasn't sure that Karen would be interested. After all, there were plenty of reasons to stay in Philadelphia: We were glad to be living near family. We had good friends. We were plugged in at our church. We were about to have another baby. We enjoyed

the neighborhood in which we lived. And we were just finishing the process of gutting and redoing our house. We could probably have found a job at a local church that would pay the bills and give me experience in pastoral ministry. It didn't make a lot of sense to move at that time.

But as we prayed, the Lord made it clear that we should go. Karen, believe it or not, has the gift of knowing what we should do. I'm not sure where that falls on the map of spiritual gifts in Paul's letters, but there are times when God speaks to Karen (not audibly, or so she says) and just tells her what's going to happen. I can tell when God has spoken to her because she gets a settled conviction in her voice. This is a really useful gift to have (or to be married to), so I've learned to recognize and listen to it. When she came home one day and said, "I was praying, and I'm convinced that we have to go to DC," I knew what had happened. Before she was tentative and hesitant; now we were both clear. We were going to DC.

“I have learned that God uses messed-up people like me and you to plant churches that look utterly unremarkable to the world. The marvelous thing is that, in his kindness, God does amazing things through those churches.”

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

“Mike knows a lot about the ups and downs of church planting, and he writes about it with all the honesty and humor necessary for laboring in God’s grace. There’s no airbrushing of difficulties. And there are no oppressive ‘be wonderful like me’ gimmicks. If you want to think, learn, and laugh all at once, read this book. Whether you’re a church planter, on a church-planting team, or an established pastor whose church wants to be more involved in church planting, you’ll find this book a refreshing, grace-filled, hopeful, and useful excursion into the sometimes dizzying world of church planting.”

THABITI ANYABWILE, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman;
author, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*

“An engaging book that weaves together personal story, theological reflection, practical suggestion, and great humor. This is a book that will be of great benefit to pastors who are thinking of giving up on their churches.”

J. D. GREER, Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham,
North Carolina

MIKE MCKINLEY received his MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary and is the author of several articles and reviews. He served on the pastoral staff of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC, and in 2005 was called to revitalize Guilford Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia.

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY / PASTORAL RESOURCE

 **CROSSWAY**

www.crossway.org