SENDING CAPACITY, not SEATING CAPACITY

Why a Church Gains the Most When It Sends Its Best

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Sending Capacity, Not Seating Capacity
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Special Thanks

To our good friends at Exponential: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to write this eBook and for leading the church to embrace a culture of multiplication. Your ministry to churches and church planters has impacted us and countless other churches.

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Jesus pointed to sending, not gathering, as the key to reaching the world with the gospel. Bringing in large groups of people to hear a message is good; training up disciples and sending them out is better.

But kingdom multiplication comes at a cost. To see ministry multiply, J.D. Greear says, pastors and church leaders must take their hands off of their desires for ministry, and empower and encourage their people to go out into the world. Even when it comes at great personal cost.

Empowering ministry grows out of gospel culture. In *Gaining By Losing*, J.D. Greear unpacks ten plumb lines that you can use to establish gospel culture in your church and reorient your church ministries around kingdom priorities. The good news? We don’t need to choose between gathering and sending. Effective churches can, and must, do both.

J.D. Greear is pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. The Summit Church has been ranked by Outreach Magazine as one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States for the last several years in a row. J.D. has a PhD in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
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What’s Your Motivation?
Introduction

A few months ago, I (J.D.) found myself sitting at a table listening to our four church-planting residents give a report on their teams. These four men had spent the last nine months on our staff with no other assignment than to prepare to plant a church. Some had formerly held key positions on our staff; others came straight in. But to each we had given a “hunting license” on our church—permission to recruit whomever they could get to go with them. Now they sat before me reporting their success. One would plant in Washington, D.C.; another in Wilmington, North Carolina; and two would plant in our city. One was taking 15 members, another 23, another 20, and the last … 50.

As they shared their lists of leaders who would be leaving with them, I couldn’t help but note all the names I recognized—key volunteers, small group leaders, musicians, big givers (not that I know who gives what, but, well, big givers)—even elders and personal friends.

I felt my hands clench and a small lump form in my throat. I was excited for these men, but in that moment I also felt another emotion—panic. Was I really excited about this? Sending looked great on paper, but these were real people who would leave significant gaps when they left. Suddenly, I wondered if this was such a good idea.

As I sat there listening to these planters, I forced myself to put my hands under the table and opened them to God—in surrender. Opened to symbolize taking my hands off one of the most precious things on earth to me—my church. Opened in belief that God builds His Kingdom not as we hold on, but as we let go.

I (Mike) usually find myself on the other side of the table. As the church-planting pastor, I’m the guy who gets paid to recruit people to leave. I’m the only pastor whose job is to decrease our bottom line. But I have a guy on my team whom I’ve worked with for three years. He came to our church as a seminary student and now he’s one of the best leaders. A couple months ago, he came to tell me that he felt like he was getting closer to planting. I had known this day was coming—I knew it when I hired him—but now I faced the prospect of sending out one of my guys, somebody from my team. Suddenly, I wanted someone else to be the sending pastor so I could convince him to stay.

Over the last several years, our church has been on a journey to become a multiplying church. That journey began with a single conviction: that the key to reaching the world is found in sending. Every church is called to reach its community, however the real mission of the church isn’t merely gathering converts, but rather making and sending disciples. Sending is God’s strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Of course, sending comes with a cost. To see the church multiply around the world, we must release the very fruit that God has given us. And that’s scary. You’re probably wondering if it’s even possible. Sending out your best people, your best leaders—is that even sustainable? After all, what good does it do to plant churches if it kills yours?

Ironically, what we’ve found is exactly the opposite. Not only is sending possible; it actually helps, not hurts, the sending church. Over the last 10 years, our church has planted 23 churches domestically and 90 internationally. Altogether, we have sent out 555 people
from our congregation. And at the end of the day, we can tell you that we have gained far more than we have lost.

But that doesn’t mean it has been easy. We’ve had to navigate a lot of tensions along the way (many of them we’re still navigating). Evidently, what we’ve experienced is kind of unusual, so our good friends at Exponential asked us to share some of the lessons we’ve learned thus far. In each of the chapters that follow, we unpack a tension we’ve faced in building a culture of multiplication in our church and share how we’ve navigated that tension.

By telling some of our story, we hope to encourage your church to become a sending church. By the way, if you find this eBook helpful, check out J.D.’s forthcoming book, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* in which J.D. unpacks 10 principles that will help you lead your church to become a sending church, from reaching your own community to reaching the nations.
One
Our Journey to Sending

On a Sunday morning in February 1961, Sam James preached his first sermon as founding pastor of Grace Baptist Mission. Ironically, Sam James was never supposed to be there. Instead, he was supposed to be trekking through the jungles of Vietnam.

Eight years had passed since James first set eyes on the shores of Vietnam as a U.S. Navy navigator, and even then James felt an undeniable draw to the country. Finally, after years of waiting, he and his wife received their appointment to serve as missionaries to the people of Vietnam. But in January, their son had been born with a small physical defect that required surgery.

So on this fateful Sunday morning, Sam James found himself planting a church in Durham, North Carolina.

His text that morning was Isaiah 54:2-3 (ESV):

Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

It was a promise that James had claimed for his own life, and it was his prayer for this small fledgling church—that Grace Baptist Mission would become a church that would reach the nations. James didn’t get to stick around long enough to see that prayer fulfilled. Less than a year later, he and his family left the church plant (by then Homestead Heights Baptist Church) for Vietnam. Granted, leaving a church in less than 12 months after it starts is not usually a recipe for success for planting a church. But even if James had stayed, he could never have predicted how God would answer that personal prayer.

In fact, nobody could have. Fast-forward 30 years and James’ vision for the church had become a distant memory. Homestead Heights Baptist Church had plateaued, and those that remained were divided. Some saw the purpose of the church as reaching the lost; others saw it as meeting the needs of its members. The first group wanted to make changes; the second preferred to maintain the status quo. Finally, in 1998 after a series of ups and downs, the church called Dr. Keith Eitel, then head of the missions department at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, to become interim pastor. Under Dr. Eitel’s leadership, the church offered its first mission trips in decades. As people were exposed to God’s heart for the nations, God renewed their vision for reaching their own community.

In 2002, after much deliberation, that church called me (J.D.) to be their pastor. At the time, I was serving as the church’s college pastor. To say I was young and inexperienced is a bit of an understatement. In fact, The Summit was my first full-time job (no, really). But I had previously served as a missionary to Southeast Asia and believed the reason God brought me home to the States was to pastor a church that would send people to the nations. In many ways, I guess I embodied the vision God had awakened in the church. A few months later, Homestead Heights Baptist Church relaunched with a renewed vision and a new name—The Summit Church.

Two moments in that first year confirmed the direction God was leading our church. The first came the following Easter after we relaunched. With attendance around 300, I (J.D.) tossed out an audacious goal of seeing 1,000 people in worship on Easter Sunday. The
church prayed. They doubted. They prayed some more. They came together in a way they never had before. Easter Sunday came and after services, one of the ushers walked up and handed me a number scribbled on a piece of paper: 1,100. In the weeks that followed attendance dropped below 400, but it didn’t matter. The seed had been planted. People began to believe that as they reached out to the community, God would grow the church.

The second moment of confirmation came later. In the months following Easter, the church began to reach college students in a significant way. One Sunday after services, an usher came up to me carrying an offering bucket. On top of the bucket sat a bacon, egg and cheese biscuit with a small note from a student scribbled on it: “Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give unto the Lord.” I knew two things in that moment:

1. First, our church would always be poor.
2. Second, we would have a pool of missionaries to send to the nations.

Twelve years later, our church has grown considerably. We have experienced an incredible move of God. But another number gets us even more excited. Every week, more than 5,500 people gather to worship at a church we helped plant. In fact, we’re rapidly approaching the day when more people will worship at a Summit plant than The Summit Church.

By God’s grace, we’re just getting started. A few years ago, God gave us a vision to plant 1,000 churches. Some would say that’s impossible. All we know is that we serve a God who is able to do exceedingly more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20)—a God who took a birth defect and used it start a church.
Two
Is This Normal?

Now, I know what you’re probably thinking: *Well, sending sounds great for you. I mean, look at your story. It’s like God hard-wired this into your church.*

True, but I want you to consider another possibility for a second. What if our experience is actually normal? Not how we got here, but the result. What if our story is actually just one example of something God intended for every church?

My (Mike) two-year-old daughter loves vegetables. I mean, she *loves* vegetables. One of her favorite snacks is veggie straws, which are basically processed vegetables disguised as French fries in an attempt to trick poor, unsuspecting children. But that’s lightweight for her. She prefers green beans to chicken nuggets. She eats broccoli for breakfast. The other day, I caught her drinking the juice from a pickle jar. I almost threw up.

To some, her behavior might be normal, but to this Texas boy, it’s downright strange. I grew up in a family of meat-eaters, and this sudden rise of vegetarianism in the ranks has me concerned. But I’m not calling for an intervention (yet). Why? Because I know her behavior is probably an exception. In a few years she’ll outgrow it, and we’ll be fighting to get her to eat her Brussels sprouts like any other normal kid.

When it comes to sending, churches actually have to make a similar evaluation: Will this be normal, or will it be an exception?

Our journey into church planting started slowly. Like most churches, missions for us primarily meant short-term trips. Over time, we grew to support and even send a few missionaries and church planters. But despite taking these steps, one thing remained true: Mission was still exceptional. Every time we sent out a missionary, the experience and impact were extraordinary. Every time we helped plant a church, we experienced something unique.

Most churches unintentionally view missions this way. Multiplication is the exception, not the rule. Mission work is reserved for the elite, the “Green Beret” Christians. After all, normal people don’t move halfway across the world to reach people with the gospel. And planting a church feels a lot like a building campaign in that you’re excited by the result but really glad when it’s over.

The New Testament presents a much different picture. Multiplication is not unnatural and traumatic, but rather normal and common. Throughout Scripture, planting is as normal as preaching. In fact, if you want a summary of the book of Acts, it goes something like this: The gospel is preached, disciples are made, churches are planted, *Repeat.* That’s it. In other words, missions is woven into the very fabric of the church.¹ Sending is simply one of the things the church does, on par with discipleship or worship.

When our church transitioned to multisite, one of the best pieces of advice we received was, “You have to decide, are you going to be a church that does multisite, or are you going to be a multisite church?” The same is true for sending. If you want to cultivate a culture of multiplication, you have to decide: *Are we going to be a church that sends, or are we going to be a sending church?*

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¹ Tim Keller, Center Church, 356.
At the end of the day, that decision is far more important than any program you’ll create. The late Peter Drucker famously said, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” You don’t need a church-planting strategy as much as you need a church-planting culture.

You can create a church-planting strategy, but if sending is absent, church planting will always remain infrequent and abnormal. On the other hand, if you cultivate a sending culture in your church, church planting will be the natural fruit.
Three
But What About Here?

My second year as pastor, I (J.D.) had the chance to go on a short-term trip to the small city in Southeast Asia where I had served for two years as a church planter. When I lived there, I was the only Christian in the entire city. I spent many hours walking its streets, praying for God to use me to bring the gospel to that place. Its people were my people. Its problems were my problems. As our bus entered the city limits, all of these old emotions flooded my heart: This was my city. God had made me responsible for it. If people were going to hear the gospel, they were going to hear it from me. As I felt all those emotions again, a question popped into my head: Why don’t you feel that way about your current city?

The truth was that I had a limited vision for my city. If anything, I saw the city like a virus sees a host. Our goal was to draw enough people out of it to make our church great. I thought more about what the city could do for our church than what our church could do for the city.

The apostles viewed ministry much differently. A few weeks after my trip to Southeast Asia, I was reading the book of Acts and was struck by the story of Philip in Samaria. The writer of Acts records that as a result of Philip’s ministry, there was “much joy” in the city (Acts 8:8, ESV). In a sermon, I asked our church if there was “much joy” in our city as a result of our ministry. The answer was “no.”

That realization set us on a path to not just grow our church, but to reach and bless our city. It significantly broadened the scope of our ministry. Twelve years later, in many ways we feel like we’re still just getting started. We could double our efforts tomorrow to bless our city and still only impact a fraction of the 1.5 million in Raleigh-Durham who don’t know Christ.

Given all those needs, sending doesn’t always make sense. After all, we have limited resources. Every dollar we send out is one less dollar we can spend here. And it’s not just about reaching people outside the church; it’s also about caring for the body. I (Mike) remember a time I recently visited one of our small groups. Just a few weeks before, we announced we were sending out their campus pastor to plant a new church in Baltimore. This pastor had personally cared for many of the people in this group. I could see the question on their faces before they even asked it: How often is this going to happen? It wasn’t that they weren’t happy to send him, but they couldn’t help but wonder whether this would be a regular thing.

When it comes to multiplication, one of the greatest tensions churches face is balancing needs here with needs there. At the end of the day, sending is about resource allocation, and we must choose to spend resources here or send them there. For many of our churches, this is the greatest tension we wrestle with when it comes to multiplication. We want to send, but if we’re honest, we’re worried about the impact on our church.

What I (Mike) want to suggest is that churches can be faithful to both here and there. The answer lies not in solving this tension, but in embracing it.
You're Never Ready

One of the most common objections to sending is: We're not ready. What makes this objection hard to overcome is that usually you have good reasons why you're not ready: We don't have enough people. We don't have the resources. How many times have you heard or said: When we just get __________, then we'll be ready.

On one hand, I understand that objection. It probably would not have been wise for our church to send out 113 people if we only had 150. However, I don’t think churches, regardless of their excuses, can wait to get involved in sending. When Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1:8 to reach Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, He wasn’t giving them “subsequent” assignments, as if they were to wait until they had reached Jerusalem entirely before they moved to the next. Rather, He gave them a scope—from the beginning, their ministry was to extend to the nations. What we’ve found is that if we put our focus on what we don’t have, we’ll never be ready. There will always be something we need, always something that can fill in the blank.

Many scholars point out how Acts 8:1 is a fulfillment of Acts 1:8. Despite Jesus’ instructions, the disciples had not left Jerusalem, so God sends persecution against the Jerusalem church, scattering the disciples throughout Judea and Samaria. Evidently, God thought they were ready even if they didn’t. Of course, this was the church at Jerusalem. If any church was ready to take on God’s mission, it was the very first church, right? Not by most of our standards. Just two chapters earlier, the disciples were arguing because some of the Jewish disciples weren’t sharing their food with Greek widows. Widows! Not what we would call a church that’s ready for sending.

This Is Your Mission Field

One of the things we say at our church is, “Some of you are called to go, but some of you are called to stay.” The question, in other words, isn’t whether or not you’re called, but to where you are called. We believe every disciple of Jesus will have, as part of his or her DNA, some kind of ministry to the nations. Some of our people will go as missionaries to a new city; others will support, pray for and even visit them. But not everyone is called to move; some of our people are called to stay right here.

In other words, we want our people to feel the weight of the nations, but not to the neglect of where God has put them right now. If God hasn’t called them to go, they are called to stay. Where they are is not an accident. God has put them in a specific place with specific relationships to leverage their gifts for the sake of God’s mission.

The Role of the Sender

I (J.D.) shared earlier that I spent the first two years of my ministry among a Muslim unreached people group. The day I was returning home, one of my Muslim friends, with whom I had shared the gospel many times, came over to tell me about a dream he had that night. He said, “In my dream, I was standing on earth when suddenly before my feet was the ‘straight and narrow way’ leading to Heaven. As I looked up along this pathway to Heaven, you were on it!” (He seemed so surprised by this I was a little offended).
He continued, “Yet when you arrived at Heaven’s gates, the way inside was blocked by huge, brass doors ... But then, as I watched, someone from inside knew you, and they called your name. The doors then swung open wide for you, and you went in. Then my heart broke because I really wanted to go with you. The doors opened again and you came back out, walked back down the path a little ways, and stretched your hand out to me down here on earth. And you pulled me up to Heaven with you.”

He then looked at me and said, “What do you think my dream means?”

Now, understand that I was raised in a traditional, Baptist home. We didn’t do dreams. But in that moment, I knew instinctively what to say: “Brother, you are so in luck. Dream interpretation is my spiritual gift!”

I explained the gospel to him (again) for over an hour, but (sadly) it was still too much for him to believe at that point. But what he said next I will never, ever forget: “[J.D.,] I know what my dream means. God sent you here to help me find the way of salvation ... But, my friend, you are going back home, and you are the only Christian I have ever known. Who will now show me the way?”

My friend Ahmed is never far from my mind when we lay our hands on someone, commissioning them to go. I realize now that God never relinquished my call to reach the Ahmed’s of this world, even when He directed me to live in the United States. I often say to our church, “God called me to the pastorate by calling me to the mission field, and the way He is fulfilling my call to the mission field is as a pastor.” Following Jesus means being sent and being part of the sending process to unreached people in every nation on earth.

We need people to go, but we also need people to stay for the specific purpose of raising up others to send. Let me share a couple of practical ways this has worked out for us. First, we ask staff to commit to at least three years in a new role before they go. Spending at least three years in their role helps ensure that our people aren’t subjected to a constant pastor merry-go-round. Second, we challenge our church planters to use planting as an opportunity to call people into deeper discipleship. It would be easy for them to just go after the low-hanging fruit (elders and key leaders). We know that a lot of these people will end up coming, but we challenge our planters to aim first for those who are waiting to get in the game. For many of these people, being part of a church plant will be one of the most important steps they take in their discipleship, setting their life on a new trajectory of following Christ.

These two measures help our church ensure we keep leadership in place long enough to care for our people well and reproduce. Those who stay behind raise up the next generation of disciples to be sent out. In one sense, their role here is one of the main ways they make an impact over there. By making disciples here, they help us to reach the world.
Four

Width vs. Depth

The Great Commission is, in many ways, the marching orders of the church. At the core of the Great Commission is the command to make disciples. For the church, this implies two types of growth: width and depth. We are instructed to reach people from every nation. That's width. And we are instructed to make true disciples of them, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. That's depth. To be faithful to the Great Commission, a church must pursue both.

Depending on the culture of your church, however, it's easy to gravitate toward one or the other. It certainly makes decision-making a lot easier. But evaluating success by one or the other alone is not only unfaithful, it is unfruitful—because sending requires both width and depth.

Width Without Depth

Churches that grow wide (without growing deep) are not as wide as they think. When a church produces converts who aren't actually disciples, the “width” they produce is illusionary. Jesus did not command us to make converts, but to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that He had commanded. Think of the parable of the sower and the seeds (Matt. 13:1-9). Jesus warned us that there would be some who appear saved but ultimately fade in the sun or get choked out by thorns.

But there is a second way in which width without depth can be deceptive. I (J.D.) remember a few years ago when Bill Hybels shared results from Willow Creek's "Reveal" study, an in-depth evaluation they had conducted on the long-term effectiveness of their church. Hybels said one of the things that made them rethink their whole model was the realization that for all the people they had reached, they had hardly produced any seminarians, missionaries, or pastors. As a result, Willow Creek expanded their study to include other churches and models. Hybels shared their conclusion: "We've surveyed over 200 churches, and the headline is the same—[mature disciples] offer the greatest high-impact opportunity for the church and the kingdom."2

What Hybels was getting at is this: We cannot just measure the success of a church simply by its initial impact. If I launch a stick of dynamite 200 feet in the air and it goes off, does it make a substantial impact? In one sense, yes, because people from miles around will hear it; some will even come to see what happened. But five minutes later, the effect has completely dissipated. On the other hand, if you bury that same stick of dynamite deep within a mountain and set it off, the sound might not be as loud—and it might not attract as much of a crowd—but you will leave a lasting mark where there was none. Making mature disciples may not make as loud of a bang on Sunday morning, but in the long run the end result will be a greater collective impact.

Depth Without Width

Churches that grow deep (without caring about width) are not as deep as they think. Have you ever thought that it’s very possible to be faithful to God yet see very little visible fruit? Noah preached for years of God’s impending judgment, and no one listened. It took Adoniram Judson six years to make his first convert. Many great men and women of God have labored for years to apparently no avail. I don’t want to disparage their faithfulness in any way, but those people would be the first to admit that while the fruit seemed sparing, their vision for reaching people was still immense. The gospel teaches you to dream big, and to continue yearning for it even when you don’t see it.

Jesus taught His disciples to think in this way. When He called Peter, He did it by bringing in a huge haul of fish and saying, “This is how you will catch men.” When He multiplied the five loaves and two fish, He used it to feed 5,000. And remember, the Great Commission has as its scope every nation on earth. So the question for those of who are not seeing growth is: “Do you desire to see a harvest? Do you have the same urgency as Paul, who said he would count himself “accursed if it meant reaching his brothers”? If not, you may be using depth to hide from a lack of belief that God can bring a harvest. God’s arm has not grown short. His ear has not grown heavy. He is as powerful today as the day he walked out of the grave.

Depth + Width = Multiplication

Balanced ministry creates sending capacity. Without depth, churches will have no mature disciples to send. Without width, churches may produce disciples, but they’ll lack evangelistic experience and zeal. Only by balancing both can churches cultivate a culture of multiplication.
Five

Sending Your Best

Missiologists say that to begin advancing on lostness in North America, we need to increase the rate at which we’re planting churches fivefold.\(^3\) As you can imagine, planting that many churches will take a lot of resources. However, it may surprise you that the greatest obstacle to planting more churches is not a lack of funds; it’s a lack of qualified planters. Our own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has an aggressive strategy to plant 15,000 churches over the next 10 years in North America, and while financial resources are always tight, the greater limiting factor, according to leaders like Kevin Ezell of the North American Mission Board, is not money, but planters.

If that’s true, and our experience has shown it is, then the greatest resource your church can contribute to the mission of God is your best leaders. The challenge, of course, is that your best leaders are the ones you least want to send (in fact, as you read this chapter, you can probably think of a lot of other people you would love to send). But what the world most needs are the people who are already making the greatest impact in your church.

*How can you afford to send them?* I want to share two principles that have helped our church embrace sending out our best. These two principles have helped us fight against a mentality that plagues most leaders—the mentality that we have a limited number of leadership resources.

**Releasing leaders creates more leaders.**

Here’s the first principle: When you send out your best leaders, God raises up new leaders to take their place. The more we’ve given away leaders, the more we’ve found that God replaces them.

Do you believe that? Of course you don’t. I’m not sure I (J.D.) would either, but I’ve seen it happen again and again. For every leader we have sent out of The Summit Church, three more seem to rise up in their place. I remember sending out Andrew, a good friend and one of our best pastors. He could do anything there was to do at our church (and he had done most of it). I had any one of three jobs I would have loved for him to take at our church, but we knew he could serve the Kingdom better as a church planter. However, I wondered if I would ever replace him. Now, two years later, we miss him, but he is leading one of the fastest-growing new churches in our state, and God has given us Todd, Chuck and Bowe (just to name a few) in his place.

Releasing leaders creates more leaders for two reasons: one natural and one supernatural.

**The “natural” reason:** Leaders are attracted to places where others want to see them reach their full potential. If leaders see your church as a place primarily looking to plug cogs into your machine, they’ll stay away. I remember reading at one point how an absurd number of upper-level leaders of Fortune 500 companies all emerged under Jack Welch’s leadership at General Electric. Leaders knew that if you worked for Jack Welch, he would

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\(^3\) Dave Olsen, “The American Church in Crisis.”
would help you reach your full potential, whether that meant staying at General Electric or releasing you to take a position at another company. Welch took that approach even if it wasn’t always in the best interest of his company. However, it turned out that his outlook was in the best interests of GE because his reputation drew young talent to the iconic company.

On top of this, there is just something about sending that draws out leaders. I call it creating a leadership vacuum. You create a great spot for a leader, and it draws them out.

The “supernatural” reason: God tells us to be generous with everything He gives us, and just like He promises to multiply your money when you give it away, He multiplies your leadership resources when you send people out. It’s like the little boy who gave his five loaves and two fish. Not only did he get to see Jesus use them to feed the multitude, at the end there were 12 baskets full of leftovers (John 6:13).

Sending out your best leaders is one of the hardest things to do. But isn’t that what we teach our people to do? To put God first, even in bad financial times, and let Him provide? Why would we teach our people to do something that we as churches don’t do? God’s work done God’s way will never lack God’s supply.

At its core, multiplication is about developing leaders.

Our journey into multiplication began as a calling to plant churches, but the longer we’ve been doing it, the more we’ve realized that there is another, more fundamental task underneath planting churches, and that’s developing leaders.

You see, if our church is not developing leaders, then our church-planting efforts are really just reaping the fruit of someone else’s work. We may be equipping leaders, but we’re not raising them up from the harvest. Now I realize that everyone builds off someone else’s foundation. Rarely do we get to take someone all the way from unbeliever to church planter. But if we’re truly committed to multiplication, we can’t just fish out of the pond; we have to stock it.

Jesus did not build His church by recruiting the 12 brightest stars from the dean’s list of His local synagogue. Many of His disciples were blue-collar workers with little to no formal theological training. Nor were they all individuals of impeccable reputation. One of His apostles was a tax collector, one of the most despised occupations in the ancient world. And you can’t exactly say that these guys were quick studies. Throughout the gospels, the disciples bumbled around like idiots arguing over who would be the greatest, calling down judgment on people they didn’t like, turning little kids away Jesus, and generally unable to comprehend anything Jesus is saying. Peter actually became such a stumbling block at one point that Jesus called him Satan. How’d you like that distinction? “Yeah, you’re that guy who Jesus called Satan, right?”

But these were the guys that Jesus used to turn the world upside down. Peter, a.k.a. the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth, who denied knowing Jesus even to a middle-school age girl, became one of the greatest leaders in the early church. He was eventually crucified, upside down in fact, because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Christ. If that is how Jesus approached multiplying His church, shouldn’t we be following in His same pattern?
More laborers

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’” (Matt. 9:37-38, ESV).

I (Mike) have always found Jesus’ words above ironic. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples just before He sent them out (Matthew 10). So basically this was Jesus’ pre-game speech. These were the last words He gave His disciples before He sent them out to face demons, diseases, poverty, and persecution. And what did Jesus tell them? “Pray for help.”

Now I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t put that in my Top 10 of best pep talks. There are so many other things Jesus could have said to the disciples in this moment. He could have reminded them of all that He had taught them; how they had been chosen for this very task; how they were more qualified than anyone else to carry out this mission. But instead He tells them to pray for help.

So what’s going on? I think Jesus wants to instill in them a simple principle that would transform the way they approached ministry: The key to bringing in the harvest doesn’t lie in any one man, but in multiplication.

The Apostle Paul got this. God sums up Paul’s calling in Acts 9:15 – “...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” How would you like that assignment? Paul, your job is to reach the Gentiles ... and the Israelites ... oh, and while you’re at it, why don’t you throw in a few kings, just so everyone knows what’s up?

What made that mission doable for Paul? What enabled him to not be overwhelmed by its sheer enormity? Paul recognized from the very beginning that his calling was bigger than he was. Paul realized that just because Jesus called him didn’t mean he was supposed to be the only one to fulfill the mission. So he devoted his life to not just doing ministry, but to multiplying and sending out leaders.4

The same principle was true for Jesus and His disciples, and the same principle is true today. God accomplishes the Great Commission through sending, and at the heart of sending is the call to multiply leaders.

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Six  
What’s Your Motivation?

When my (J.D.) oldest daughter was a toddler, she loved helium balloons. So for her third birthday, I blew up, with my own breath, about 50 balloons. She walked into the party, picked up one of them, and said, "Daddy, what’s wrong with these balloons? They don’t float." I tried to show her how we could play games with these balloons, like “who can keep the balloon off the floor the longest,” but she wasn’t buying it. She thought my balloons were lame. She wanted balloons that floated by themselves.

There are two ways to keep a balloon afloat. If you fill it with your breath, it will float for a while, but you’ll have to keep smacking it upward to keep it off the ground. But if you fill it with helium, it will soar on its own, no smacking required.

In the same way, there are two ways we can motivate people to missions. The first way is to smack them with the need. There are 4.72 billion people in the world who don’t know Christ. Of those 4.72 billion, 2 billion have little or no access to the gospel. The United States is more evangelized, but the numbers are still sobering. Only 17.4 percent of Americans attend a local church on a given weekend. In 1900, there were 28 churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 2004, there were only 11.5

On one hand, this is a very effective way to move people to take action. It produces results quickly. And to be fair, our people need to wrestle with the numbers. Those numbers aren’t just statistics—they represent friends, coworkers and classmates. But in another way, the numbers produce within people the same result as the balloon. For a while, they float up in the air, filled with zeal. Maybe they go on a short-term mission trip or give generously to missions. But after a while, the feeling wears off, and gradually they sink back down into inactivity, until we smack them again.

The gospel presents an entirely different way to motivate people to missions. The apostle Paul was in anguish every day, Scripture tells us, over his lost Jewish brothers. “If I could,” he said, I would count myself “accursed and cut off from Christ” if it would mean their salvation (Rom 9:3). That passion drove Paul to endure hardship and persecution to get to where Christ was not known. It seemingly never waned, no matter what trials Paul endured.

Here’s the question: How do we get that kind of enduring passion? How do we give our people that kind of passion?

The bad news is that it won’t come simply by hearing compelling statistics or great stories of heroes of the faith.

The good news is that it will come from the gospel. Lasting motivation for mission comes when you remember all that God has done to save you. When you are overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude because you know you did nothing to deserve God’s salvation, then you will be compelled to have compassion for others. You get that they are in the exactly same state you were in when Jesus found you. It’s like giving. There is a reason God commanded us to be cheerful givers. If you want to compel me to give, don’t just tell me how much my money is needed. Don’t just show me how my money can make a difference.

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5 Dave Olson, The American Church in Crisis.
Remind me of how much Jesus has given me, and I will be motivated to give, not out of compulsion, but out of gratitude.

Here is where the tension point comes for us pastors. It's a lot easier to motivate people out of guilt than gratitude. Guilt often produces quicker results. Give me a room full of people, some great stories and compelling statistics, and I can guarantee immediate results. The gospel, by contrast, takes longer to sow into people’s hearts. But while the former produces temporary, often external, change that eventually falls to the ground, the gospel produces a buoyant reorientation of the heart.

**My Kingdom Come or Thy Kingdom Come**

In this eBook, we've set out to share some of the most important lessons we've learned on our journey to becoming a sending church. But we've saved the best for last. The truth is that our church did not start out as a sending church, and one of the main reasons is that I (J.D.) was not ready. My first few years as pastor, I was focused on growing the church, and to be totally honest, making a name for myself. I wanted a big, famous ministry. And I was pretty sure God was onboard with that idea too, because He would get a lot more souls for His Kingdom and more money for His work.

One afternoon, I was praying for massive revival in our city—the kind that would change the shape of our city for 200 years. I really felt like God was hearing me when, in the midst of my prayer, I sensed Him asking, *What if I answered this prayer? What if I sent a massive revival into Raleigh-Durham beyond all that you’ve asked or imagine, one that people would be talking about for generations … But what if I did it through another church? What if that church grows and yours stays the same?*

I’d love to tell you that my answer was, “Yes, oh Lord, you must increase, and I must decrease.” But the answer that honestly surfaced from my heart was “No.” I wanted to see the city reached, yes, but only if it meant my church succeeded and my name was made great. Somewhere “thy Kingdom come” had become mixed up with “my kingdom come.”

As we said at the beginning, what makes sending so hard is that it requires us as pastors to release the very fruit that God has given us. In John 12:24 Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” In the same way, God grows His Kingdom as we release what He has given us; die to our desires for it; and then send it out for His purposes.

Only the gospel can produce that kind of motivation in your heart. If you set out to send for any other reason, at some point your heart will return to the ground. But if you gaze into the glorious goodness of God’s grace, you can’t help but open your hands and release what He has given.

If you want to hear more about how this works and practical principles that have helped us cultivate a sending culture in our church, I’d love for you to check out my upcoming book, *Gaining by Losing*. Whether or not you’re a church leader, I hope the book will help you see that the greatest potential for gospel ministry lies in the people of the church.
About the Authors

J.D. Greear is the lead pastor of The Summit Church, in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. With more than 8,500 in weekly attendance, the Summit Church has been ranked by Outreach magazine as one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States. J.D. has also led The Summit to further the Kingdom of God by pursuing a bold vision to plant 1,000 new churches by the year 2050.

J.D. has a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of Jesus, Continued…: Why the Spirit Inside You Is Better Than Jesus Beside You (2014), Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved (2013), and the forthcoming book Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send (2015).

J.D. and his beautiful wife Veronica live in Raleigh and are raising four ridiculously cute kids: Kharis, Alethia, Ryah and Adon.

Mike McDaniel is the church planting pastor at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, and the director of The Summit Network. Over the last five years, Summit planted 17 churches in North America and in 2013 launched the The Summit Network with a vision of planting 1,000 churches in our generation.

Mike has a Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts, though he originally hails from Texas. He lives in Durham with his beautiful wife Jamie and their daughter Madelyn.
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