



# Sending Church

Stories of  
Momentum and  
Multiplication

*by*  
**Dan Smith**

**Sending Church**  
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*Sending Church: Stories of Momentum and Multiplication*

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*Of course, this book is dedicated to Shannon Karnessa—my bride. I am so blessed to have you by my side. You're an amazing wife, baby mama, friend, ministry partner and kisser. Thank you. I love you.*



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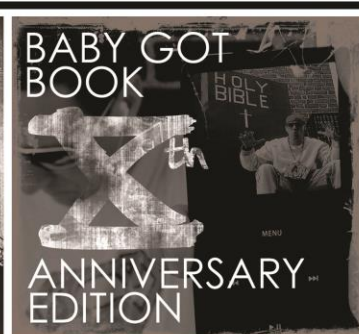
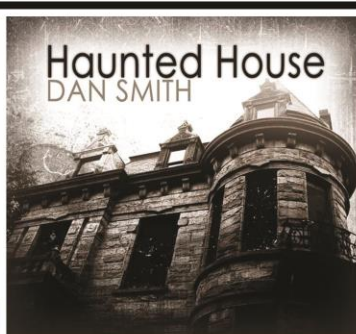
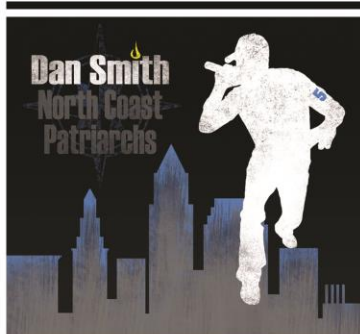
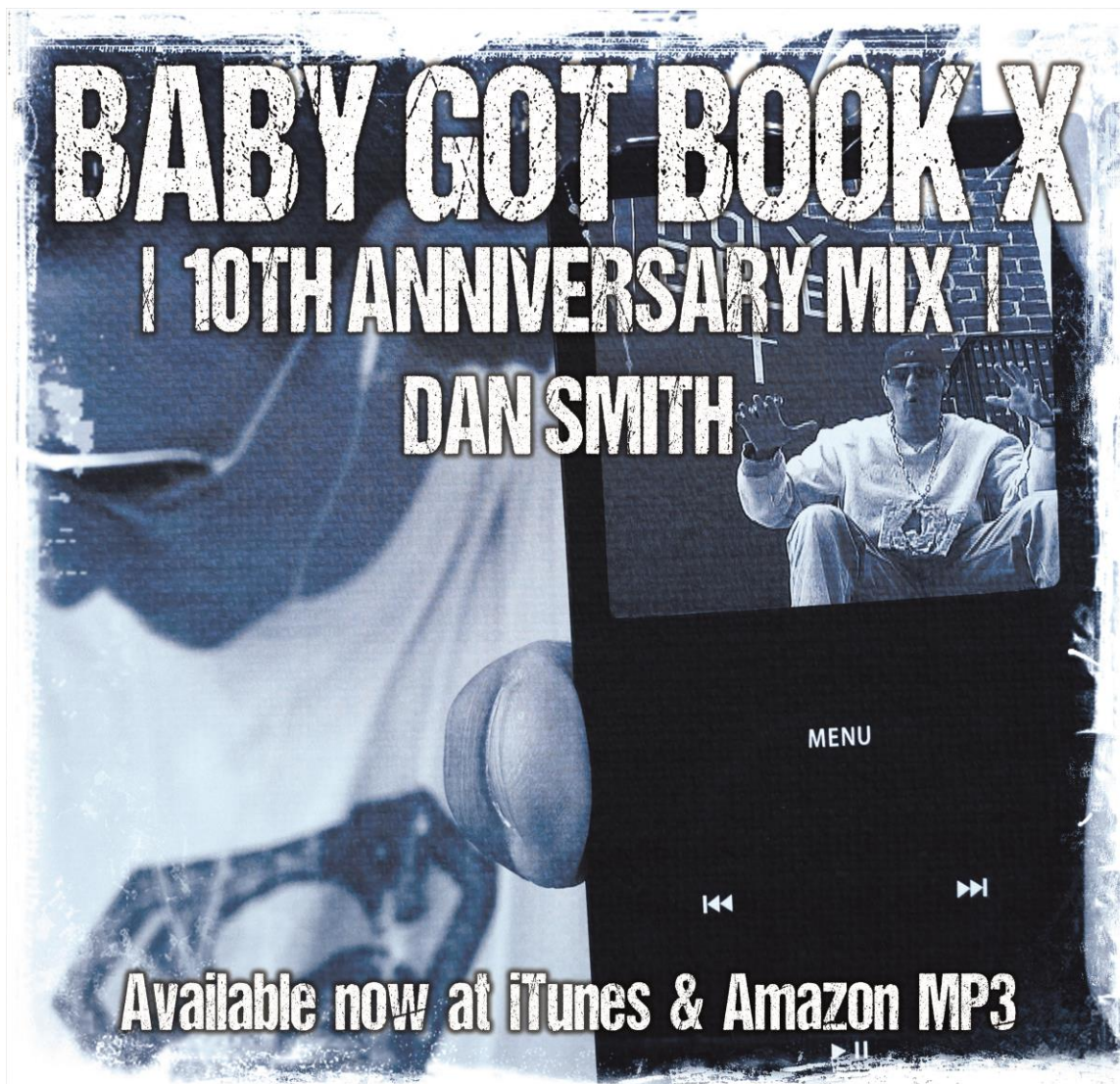
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# Introduction

## The Parking Lot Epiphany

*What the FLIP am I doing?! This was my not-so-godly thought as I walked across the parking lot of the bar. Am I the dumbest leader of all time? Did I just break the record previously held by “me”?*

I had just sat down with one of our small group (“Mo Group”) coaches, a single mom named Tracy, who wanted to meet with me. Back in 2010, Momentum Christian Church’s offices were above a tavern. Very fitting for “a church for people who don’t like church.” With second-hand smoke seeping up through the vents, she explained that she was leaving the church.

When someone leaves the church, it’s *usually* really bad news.

The complaining person might verbally stab me with, “Your sermons just aren’t deep enough for me.”

*OK. So you’ve been applying everything I’ve said, and it’s just not enough for you, huh?*

Or the issue might be, “I’ve been angry with you since 2007, but I’ve never told you. Your offenses haven’t been huge, but they’ve festered over time, and I can’t take it anymore.”

*Awesome. I love it when I’m the enemy and don’t even know it. XOXO.*

Or, “My wife and I feel like there’s too much emphasis on ‘the lost’ at Momentum. We’re just gonna stay home, lock the doors and read the Bible until Jesus returns.”

*Go get ‘em, Slugger.*

In this case, Tracy was leaving because I had asked her to go. Luckily it wasn’t because I had to “open up a can” of 1 Corinthians 5:13 or Titus 3:10 on her. She was in very good standing with Momentum.

She explained, “A few Sundays ago when [Momentum’s Church Planting Apprentice] Kevin Rush preached, I felt like God was telling me to pray about joining his upcoming church plant. Then you got up and said that part of his responsibility as an apprentice is to take some of us from Momentum with him.”

Yeppers. That was part of Kevin’s job: to take some of our people. To help him out, I got up right after his sermon and said to everyone, “I’m challenging you to ask God if He is permanently calling *you* to go with Kevin. If you think God is nudging you, contact Kevin to chat. Please understand that we’re not kicking you out. But *if* you are willing to lay your life down on the tracks to plant this new church, you have our blessing to go.”

I had already given this speech *many* times since we launched publically in September 2006. In fact, Tracy had heard the spiel on several occasions. Apparently, the last one was different for her though.

She continued, “Before that sermon, I had never even met Kevin or had a simple conversation with him. I took your advice though, and I contacted him.” Tracy went on to explain that she and Kevin met to chat, talked for a long time, and then Tracy set up a

meeting with me. Now she was convinced that God was calling her to go, but she was nervous to leave Momentum, the church she loved.

When she dropped this news on me, it was bittersweet. I was bummed and excited all at the same time. I gave her a fist bump and told her I was proud of her for obeying God's Spirit.

"This is awesome, Tracy! At the turn of the year, when you and the Rush family—and maybe several others—leave Momentum to start the new church, we'll all be cheering for you!"

We prayed, and then we walked down the stairs to the parking lot. As we parted ways, the question hit me: *What the FLIP am I doing?!*

Momentum was still a "baby church." We had fought and scraped for every single soul. No simple task in a predominately Catholic, cold-weather, Rust Belt city! Tracy was one of only three people who was willing and qualified to coach some of our small group leaders. She was one of the few people who showed up to everything consistently. One of the *very* few who tithed—giving 10 percent or more of her income to God!

*Lord in Heaven, why did I just fist bump her and agree to send her away?*

My fear was rooted in the fact that we had already sent out a big group to help start Velocity Christian Church on the east side. Back then, I repeatedly gave the "challenge to go" talk, and 50 people left. Tracy was the first one to approach me in this new *second* wave of sending.

*What if another 50 go?! Man, I'm a freaking bonehead!* Momentum's imaginary attendance-o-meter was gonna get stuck in reverse!

In that short walk across the gravel parking lot, I think God placed some cool thoughts in my head to calm my spirit and check my ego. I thought, *If we keep sending people away to start new churches and eventually die because we accidentally donate a vital organ, so be it. We may only exist for a total of seven years. But if we help start seven churches in those seven years, Momentum will have served its purpose on earth.*

I also had the thought that God isn't overly concerned with preserving Momentum's manmade logo. If this logo and the name "Momentum" disappear because the people of this church leave to start new churches, things will be okay. God is not up in Heaven waving a Momentum banner! He's not concerned about the non-profit 501(c)3 incorporated with the state of Ohio. He's concerned with expanding His Kingdom on earth. Therefore, my ego can't be tied to the survival of this stupid logo. If Momentum disappears, it could be because we accomplished our mission.

"The Parking Lot Epiphany" was gigundous for me. That revelation has often been like apologetics research that I fall back on whenever I have moments of doubt. When valuable individuals like Tracy leave—or some other difficult situation occurs due to church multiplication—I remember the parking lot. Those thoughts talk me down from the ledge, and my spirit is renewed with reckless faith and stubborn tenacity.

*I'll preach this church down to "zero," if that's what you want me to do, Jesus.*

God knows I'm more than capable of doing that!

In January 2011, 20 Mo peeps permanently left to start CityEdge Christian Church in Lakewood, Ohio. It was one of the hardest, proudest moments of our church's young history.

Sometimes I ask myself, *Now, why did we do that?*

Then it's like I hear a voice that consoles me, saying, "Remember the parking lot, Dan. Remember the parking lot ..."

*I know. We do it because God has called His church to be a sending church.*



# Chapter 1

## The Spinoff

Have you ever found out your favorite TV show was launching a spinoff? From my experience, excitement is not the typical reaction. The normal human response is fear.

“Oh no.”

If the original show is heading into its series finale, I think, *C'mon. Don't drag it out by launching a spinoff. Just walk away, Brett Favre. End this thing gracefully, and we'll all move on.*

When *Friends* ended, did you watch *Joey*? Man, that was painful. The producers knew they had to expand Joey's character beyond the airheaded, sandwich-loving womanizer, but it still didn't work. Chandler's former role in Joey's life was a gaping black hole. The new cast didn't have much chemistry. Whatever plot they were developing was forgettable. In the end, we didn't care. I, for one, bailed soon after the pilot.

Attempting to launch a spinoff like *Joey* actually isn't terribly risky. After all, it's really more of a sequel. “Sequel spinoffs” pose no threat to the original series. Whether good or bad, *Girl Meets World* probably won't tarnish the glory of *Boy Meets World* (for those who are fans).

But *wowsers*—there's probably nothing scarier to producers, actors and fans than the old “sidequel.” This is the TV spinoff created to exist within the same chronological timeframe as the original show. In this case the two shows, both old and new, attempt to run parallel to each other. The predecessor hopes to give the new show a healthy push-start by donating a character or two, then going on with its business. Of course, this often involves the awkwardly abrupt “goodbye episode.”

“Wow. I can't believe you're taking that job in Wyoming.”

“Whoa. You and your ska band got a record deal?”

“What? You're leaving home to find your long lost step-twin?”

My reaction to the announcement of a sidequel is rarely positive. “What?! *The Office* is spinning off a new show? Wait—who's leaving? If they spin off Jim Halpert, the parent show's ratings are gonna plummet! The cast is perfect the way it is!”

That's a lie. I've never liked Ryan and Kelly. I would've been happy for them to leave together.

“If Jim goes, I swear I won't watch *The Office* anymore! I'll go on a hunger strike! I don't want *new* main characters! I WANT JIMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!”

I head-butted the wall until I found out Jim wasn't leaving.

A TV spinoff is scary and difficult to accomplish successfully, but I freely admit the concept is solid. Simply put, it works like this:

1. A decision is made to take advantage of whatever momentum the original show has enjoyed.

2. The established show takes a gigantic risk by sending away a character or two to launch a new show.
3. Everyone works extremely hard, praying they end up with two fruitful shows.

Here's the kicker: For a legit TV spinoff to be successful, many characters have to step up to play new or bigger roles. Minor characters may have to play essential roles. Everyone has to take on more responsibility and ownership than he or she did when there was only one cast. Equally important is that new characters need to emerge within both narratives.

This model happens over and over in Scripture: Characters are asked—or “called”—to step up and play bigger roles, while new characters emerge. My favorite example is in Acts 13:1–3.

*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

First, think about these five guys who were leading and teaching in the Antioch church. Luke, the author of Acts, may have listed them in the order of their importance:

- 1. Barnabas** Barney was the “son of encouragement” who took Saul of Tarsus under his wing when everyone else was afraid of Saul and refused to accept him into the clique.
- 2. Simeon called Niger** Niger is Latin for “black,” so he was probably a man of dark complexion. *The New Living Translation* translates the reference to him: “Simeon called ‘the black man.’”
- 3. Lucius of Cyrene** Cyrene was the capital of Libya, so Lucius was a Gentile (non-Jew).
- 4. Manaen** This dude was a childhood friend of King Herod! This means he was a man with a wealthy background, political connects and potential knowledge about the thoughts and actions of King Herod.
- 5. Saul of Tarsus** Saul, or Paul, was a preacher/lawyer with a brilliant, razor-sharp intellect. Saul had previously been a Jewish religious leader, a persecutor of Christians and, technically, a murderer. He was a straight-up terrorist in the eyes of the first-century church. Now Paul is a part of the church in Antioch. He's a tenacious leader and a godly force to be reckoned with.

Amazingly these five gifted and diverse leaders were all in the same church. Talk about a “Dream Team”! We all love Dream Teams, but God seems to be in the business of breaking up Dream Teams and calling each player to step up and take on a bigger role. In

this case, God showed up and said, “Church, it’s time for a spinoff.” The Holy Spirit set aside Paul and Barnabas to be church planters. The *first* guy on the list and the *last* guy on the list were sent.

Acts 13 is a very familiar story to Momentum because the Holy Spirit has been up to the same shenanigans here in Cleveland. Over and over, He’s called us to be a church that sends away beloved characters to launch something that will reach a new crowd. Of course the Spirit’s work here is much more important than a TV series, and we’d never want Momentum to be a Sunday-centric “show” filled with actors. That said, the same themes of momentum, risk, sacrifices, pain, fear, hard work and multiplication are also found in the story of an Acts 13 kind of church. Momentum Christian Church is well aware of those themes. We’ve experienced them repeatedly. We were also born out of them.

## Chapter 2

### The Story of Momentum

I grew up in a hard-working, blue-collar family in Toledo, Ohio. My stepfather chrome-plated auto parts, and my mom worked at a print shop. We never went to church. *Never*. Not for Christmas, Easter, a wedding, a funeral. *Never*.

Anytime school was out, I went to my grandparents' house in rural Delta, Ohio, outside of Toledo. My grandpa ("E-pa") took me to Sunday school. I really appreciate that he tried to teach me about God, but I often thought church was pretty boring. The older I got, the more I just wanted to get home to play football or video games.

When I was in eighth grade, my best friend Jason Petz, who lived near my grandparents, invited me to a Christian camp called Lake James Christian Assembly in Angola, Indiana. That week changed my life forever. For the first time, this young, fighting, cussing, girl-chasing, porn-addicted rapper understood God's forgiveness. I decided to follow and obey Jesus. I was Dan Smith: poster child for amazing grace.

Within a year of becoming a Christian, I felt like God was calling me into vocational ministry (my family *loved* that decision; we didn't fight about it *at all*). I couldn't imagine myself as a lead minister in a traditional church, but I knew one thing: Whatever I ended up doing, it had to focus on reaching as many unchurched "Dan Smiths" as possible. I vividly remembered what it felt like to be lost.

After high school, I enrolled at Kentucky Christian University (KCU). For two years, I was a member of a singing ensemble/outreach group called Destiny, where I met and started dating my future wife Shannon. Our group traveled 10 weekends per semester and did eight concerts a week in the summer, setting up full stage, lighting and sound in every location. I didn't learn much about church planting at KCU, but Destiny certainly prepared me to be part of the portable church world.

After college, I did an internship at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, and then I was hired by Brett Andrews as the associate minister at New Life Christian Church, a young church plant in the Northern Virginia 'burbs of Washington, D.C. New Life is sprinkled with Secret Service, FBI and CIA agents, so it leads all churches in the number of "people who have to kill you if they tell you what they do for a living." New Life was a perfect fit for me because they were reaching broken people and starting new churches in other parts of the country.

To any potential church planters reading this, I can't emphasize enough how important my eight years at New Life (what people in that area might call "two terms") were for me. I played backup quarterback there for a *long* time. At New Life, I had opportunities galore to lead, try, fail and learn from my mistakes within a healthy culture. I also "held the clipboard" in a lot of situations while I watched the starting quarterback, Brett Andrews, lead the team. I was Steve Young behind Joe Montana, patiently waiting season after season until God gave me the nod to plant. I knew that if I went somewhere else, I could have jumped into a lead role sooner. I'm sure some (dumb) church would have hired me. But nothing prepared me for church planting like playing the "backup" role behind a good church planter for several years.

Here's my advice. Someone around you is probably trying to expedite your growth process by telling you that your situation, skill set, experience or timeline is different. My counsel is, "Slow your roll, until you have apprenticed under, or have been on staff with, a solid church planter." If people are saying you're especially valuable based on your church heritage, ethnicity, skills or family name, that's all the *more* reason the stakes are higher, and you need to be prepped properly.

I learned a ton from Brett. In many, many ways, Momentum is part of his legacy. Momentum is a spinoff from New Life. At times when I was at New Life, I griped about things I didn't like about it. Eventually, I decided to stop complaining and to start taking notes on what I would do differently if I were the play caller. Looking back, that decision made me more teachable and gave me tons of great ideas, which eventually became part of the launch plan for Momentum.

One evening, Shannon and I were taking a walk—back when we had just one stroller. We looked at each other and said, "It's time, isn't it?" We both knew it. We had been at New Life for seven years. We didn't have any gripes or frustrations. We just sensed God was calling us to start searching for our target area, which would end up being the unfamiliar city of Cleveland.

We started talking to a network of four churches about supporting our plant with \$200,000 collectively. This was the first I had ever heard of a "church-planting network." The concept was pretty innovative. In the end, three of those leaders gave us the thumbs up, but one leader was unsure. Wisely, the network wanted total unity in their decision, so in January 2005 we got shot down.

*Oh boy.*

At the end of April, we were moving to Cleveland ... with *two* babies! We had raised a chunk of funds through our friends and family, but not enough to execute the plan we'd put on paper. That night, I lay in bed next to my sleeping bride and prayed, *God, is this church plant in Cleveland my idea or Your idea? Am I just charging forward like a bull in a china shop, or are You calling us to do this? If You want us to go without any major financial partners, we'll do it. I'll work for UPS until we raise the money if I have to. If You want us to move to Cleveland and trust You to provide, I need You to make it really clear to us.*

Within a week of that prayer, the comedy hip-hop video, "Baby Got Book," I had written and produced when I was at New Life went viral.<sup>1</sup> On Feb. 1, 2005—the day my beautiful daughter Azlan was born—the song blew up all over the interwebs. My friend Jason Maric, who edited the video, called me while we were in the hospital to tell me. He and I quickly produced a DVD, which included "Baby Got Book" and several other comedy videos I had written for New Life. All of the proceeds from the DVD went toward starting Momentum.

Over the next year, my website, [whiteboyDJ.com](http://whiteboyDJ.com), got 26 million hits. The audio version of the song was on my first comedy album, which I eventually put on iTunes. It made *tens* of dollars. (Back then, viral internet songs didn't make you rich.) The physical DVD (remember those?), on the other hand, made a healthy chunk of cash. It was like the equivalent of one church financially supporting us.

*God, we hear you loud and clear. We're going to Cleveland.*

## Cleveland Rocks!

Our moving truck arrived in Cleveland on May 1, 2005. My Associate Minister Matt Caton and I got to work fast—meeting people, building the launch team and fundraising.

Seven months later, Southeast Christian Church in Louisville read my launch plan and was shocked by the need for new churches in Cleveland. They told us, “We want to support Momentum with \$3,000 a month for the next three years.” *What?! Did they just make a commitment for \$108,000?* Yep. God is so good. A few days later, the church-planting organization Northeast Ohio Association of Helpers (NOAH) informed me they’d give us \$75,000. I remember arriving home that night as Shannon was giving Zion and Azlan a bath. Filled with awe, I kneeled down next to her and said, “NOAH’s giving us 75 grand. We’re gonna launch Momentum, *and* we’ll get paid to do it. We can afford to pay our mortgage.”

Next on my list was to find a network of local congregations who were planting churches in Cleveland. I knew that if I couldn’t find one, Momentum would start one. God’s timing was perfect. Greg Nettle from RiverTree Christian Church in Massillon, Ohio, had just started something called Kingdom Synergy Partnership (KSP), which was partnering with Stadia to start new churches in Ohio, especially Greater Cleveland. After Greg and I met and swapped stories, RiverTree gave us \$50,000. It was seriously that fast. Greg’s a baller. He also asked if Momentum would be the first official KSP plant. I said, “Definitely! The more people who ‘own’ this, the better.”

Meanwhile, 15 total adults and nine small children were parachuting into Cleveland from Indiana, Illinois and Virginia. Nine of those adults (Nicole Gates, Jason Maric, Stan and Heidi Munson, Jason and Leah Peterson, Mary Sutter and Dave and Jessica Thorne) came to join our launch team as volunteers. Most of them were from New Life or had some connection to it. They were characters stepping up to play bigger roles than they’d ever played. Unpaid church planters. None of what has happened at Momentum would have transpired if it weren’t for the faith and guts of those 15 adults. Watching them grow has been incredible. Their story of faith will be retold anytime someone asks their kids why they were born in Virginia but raised in Ohio. Make no mistake about it: Momentum is a spinoff of New Life Christian Church.

Here’s the great thing about volunteers who move to your target city with you: They’re committed. Thankfully, our launch team didn’t dismantle within a year. Many people had told us that was the typical scenario. Shannon thinks we stayed together largely because of the relocation factor. I agree.

On Sept. 10, 2006 at 10 a.m.—after 16 months of Mo Group gatherings and community service—we held our first public service at Cinemark Theatre in Valley View, Ohio. Some 247 people showed up to worship with us. After the service, in a sea of people, a lady named Lisa introduced me to her young son Tristan. It was a really cool moment. I felt as if she were saying, “Tristan, this is our new minister,” without actually saying it. I was thrilled to see us connecting with so many people in our opening week.

All in all, we leveled off at about 175 people over the next few months and then started working our way back up. I won’t lie. In those early months, whenever I clicked on a statistical report to see our attendance from last Sunday, I felt like my career, manhood and life were on the line. *Was Momentum going to circle the drain and die?* Eminem’s song lyrics from “Lose Yourself” constantly played in my head: “*You only get*

*one shot/This opportunity comes once in a lifetime...*” Whew. Those days were fearful and exciting.

Back on launch Sunday, as soon as our service was over, I remember thinking, *Okay, now the real work begins. We have to shepherd these people spiritually and turn this crowd into a church.* Discipleship needed to be on the front burner.

Long before our attendance stabilized, I had similar thoughts about multiplication: It also needed to be on the front burner. We were a spinoff church, so we needed to multiply ASAP. I hoped to send some of our new crowd to help another church get started somewhere in the Cleveland area. We hadn’t heard of many churches sending out people to start churches within the same city, but that was our plan.

Game on.

### **Are Momentum and Velocity the Same Thing?**

Four KSP churches—Momentum, RiverTree, Northwest Avenue Church of Christ and Discover Christian Church—began praying for God to raise up the next church planter. Due to a prompting of the Spirit among a few of our leaders, we eventually approached a guy I had known since college, Scott Pugh. I almost beat the grease out of him the first week of my freshman year. He’d say the same about me, but he’d be way off. We’ve both grown up a lot since then. Today we’re both model citizens.

Anyway, Scott had been bringing his students from Clinton, Ohio, up to Cleveland to help Momentum serve the community. He kept saying, “I don’t think many people could do what you’re doing, but I believe you can do this, Danny.” He’s one of three people on earth who calls me that. The funny thing is that *I* believed *he* could do it, too. One day while praying for God to reveal our next church planter, the leaders of our network felt prompted to pursue Scott. We hired him, and he and his family moved to the East Side of Cleveland. They’re about 15 minutes from where we live in Garfield Heights, which borders Cleveland to the south.

Momentum was setting aside 10 percent of our internal offerings every week for church planting, but we hadn’t saved much yet. I got to thinking, *We don’t have much money to send, but we do have people.* In fall 2008—almost exactly two years after we launched—I got up in front of our church and gave my first little “sending speech.”

“We’ve got good news!” I said. “Our network has hired another church planter for the Cleveland area. His name is Scott Pugh, and we’ll let you get to know him over the next few months. I’d like to ask every person here to ask God if He is calling you to help Scott start this new church. Ask God if you’re supposed to sell your house and buy one in South Euclid. I want to be clear: We’re not telling you to leave. We are, however, giving you our blessing to go, if—and only if—you’re going to roll up your sleeves and serve like crazy.”

I thought our Momentum peeps would freak out a lot more than they did. *What?! Our favorite show is involved in a spinoff? What characters are we gonna lose? Will Momentum’s quality take a hit? Please don’t send JIM!* That’s not how it went down though. Maybe it was because we didn’t send anyone named Jim. Maybe it was because Mo Group multiplications had readied us. Maybe it was because we repeatedly shared the vision. Maybe God readied us in other ways. Whatever the case, our “fear factor” was at a healthy level.

The month I made that first announcement, Momentum was at our apex. We had 278 people on Sept. 7, 2008, which was our largest-ever Sunday. In the following weeks, our attendance began to decline rapidly though. In fact, over the next *six years* we averaged anywhere between 175 and 225 people and never got back to the 270s again. Not even close. Our upward climb halted in the month we gave our first “blessing,” but the reason for our tailspin didn’t occur to me immediately. The next January at our staff retreat I said, “Guys, we have to locate the holes in the boat. We have new people every single week, but just as many people are disappearing out the side door. We have to figure out why.” I was dumbfounded.

Meanwhile we continued to promote the Velocity plant on Sunday morning as creatively as possible. We showed a short video teaser of Scott casting vision for the new plant. We invited him to preach once or twice before they launched. We also filmed a comical argument that had Scott and I “arguing” about our “almost fight” in college, and then he spoke about the upcoming church. My favorite was a segment our staff did every once in a while called “Velocity Curiosity.” I asked James Fruits, our creative arts minister, to write a short theme song to sing before I shared short updates about the new church. That stupid jingle still gets stuck in my head every once in a while.

In March 2009 I went to the practice service for Velocity Christian Church. I went to encourage Scott, but I was floored when I recognized tons of their volunteers. I knew several of our key leaders and volunteers from Momentum were leaving—the Chormanskis, the Poelkings, the Thornes, the Augustines, Scott Justin, and Bob Uhl—but there were others whose names I didn’t even know. They hadn’t been at Momentum very long and didn’t know me enough to feel obligated to say goodbye. They heard my challenge ... and just went.

I can’t tell you how relieved I was. Momentum’s people weren’t slipping through the cracks and getting lost. They were stepping up! Some were moving from minor roles and “extras” into major roles.

The coolest moment was when the Poelkings and Chormanskis came up to me and said, “Thank you *so much* for coming to help us!” Did you catch that? They said “us.” I had come to help “them.” They didn’t mean it in an “us-versus-them” way. They meant it in a fully committed “we have taken ownership” way. I translated their comment like this: “We have accepted your challenge. We have acknowledged God’s calling in our lives. You gave us your blessing and sent us. Now we are Velocity. Thanks for helping us and not forgetting us.”

When Velocity launched the following week, I felt like Momentum and Velocity were standing back to back in a bar fight, throwin’ haymakers at the spiritual forces of darkness in Greater Cleveland. On launch day, we cheered about their attendance and shared in their victory! I admit that I had a couple of ungodly pangs of jealousy through the process, but they were easy to battle. Velocity wasn’t our competition. They were *us*. It took a cotton-headed ninny muggin not to see it. Momentum and Velocity are the same thing, in this case.

David Thorne was one of Momentum’s launch team members and a former intern. Now he’s playing a very different role as the full-time associate minister alongside Scott Pugh at Velocity. In 2009 I asked Dave if he would note every Momentum person who joined Velocity and served. The final list he gave me included a total of 50 adults and kids from Momentum.



Get this: Momentum's attendance was declining, but I felt like I was *succeeding* as a leader.

## **On to the Next One**

As I mentioned earlier, in 2010 Momentum hired Kevin Rush as our first church-planting apprentice. Kevin was the perfect "first" for this position: sharp, humble, likeable and teachable. I worked together with Kevin to create a checklist of actions I wanted him to accomplish during his time at Momentum. One of those actions was to recruit at least one person to leave Momentum when he planted. Counting his family, Momentum sent 20 people to start CityEdge Christian Church in Lakewood on the west side of Cleveland.

I've heard leaders say the first multiplication is the hardest. I agree. It usually is. In Momentum's case, the 20 people we sent to CityEdge hurt much more than the previous 50 we had sent to Velocity. We were two years older now, so the disciples we were sending were, as a whole, more mature. They had generously given their time and money to accomplish our mission as a church. Sending them really disrupted our rhythms, systems and growth. Tracy Watson—who inspired my parking lot epiphany—and her daughter Taylor were two of the 20.

This multiplication was especially tough for James Fruits. He lost a really good volunteer leader, Dave Mariano, who led one of our two bands at the time. James had worked hard to multiply our worship team into two bands. When CityEdge people departed—including a drummer, rhythm guitar player and a lead male vocalist—we had to revert to one band again. James is a gigantic reason Momentum was able to multiply and recover, even beyond the arts. He's a beast. Without him, our story would be very different.

As we prepared to say goodbye to the CityEdge people, we hosted a commissioning service in January 2011 during their last Sunday at Mo. We tried to make it a lot less awkward than your typical "goodbye episode." In fact, it was one of my favorite worship services in the history of Momentum. After my sermon, we showed a video called "Sent" that featured a montage of interviews with people from Mo, Velocity and CityEdge. Listening to their stories made me feel like a proud father. The video ended with everyone simultaneously declaring, "This is my church." You can't *hear* it in the video, but the "C" in church was capital.<sup>2</sup>

## **Momentum Stats: "Sent" to Start Churches**

Eventually—with the help of other churches and organizations—Momentum has had a hand in supporting a few more church plants. Here's a summary, so far, of Momentum's "sent" money and people:

Velocity Christian Church (2008–2009): 50 people sent

Pathways Christian Church, Cincinnati (2009): \$25,000 sent

CityEdge Christian Church (2011): 20 people and \$10,000 sent

Revolution 216 (2011): \$25,000 sent

Toward the City (2011): five people and \$50,000 sent

Jericho Church, Ecuador (2012): \$25,000 sent

Catalyst Church (2013): 12 people and \$17,000 sent

**Total = 87 people sent to plant churches**

**Total = \$152,000 sent to plant churches**

I want to make two notes about this list of churches. First, CityEdge and Toward the City merged in 2014. Kevin Rush is the lead guy and Mark Pratt, who started Toward the City, is still on staff. CityEdge is the surviving name of the newly combined church.

Second, the most recent church our network started, Catalyst, didn't go as planned. They launched in October 2013, but were "closed" by the following spring. It was disappointing and sad for everyone involved. My heart was especially broken for the planter and his family. He's an incredible guy. Spinoffs are a risky business. Since 2008, I've warned Momentum that eventually one of these plants would "fail" or die an untimely death. Honestly, I'm surprised it didn't happen earlier. Catalyst won't be the last Cleveland plant to struggle and disappear. I feel like our Cleveland church leaders learned a lot from Catalyst's story. Scott Pugh, Kevin Rush and I certainly have. I'm already eager to apply what we've learned and take the next hill.

Now, here are some of my favorite stats, which I try to tally up at least once a year. These are some of the combined numbers of our network—what we call the "CLE Network" churches:

Combined average for weekly Sunday attendance: 785

Combined total of baptisms for all churches: 471

Combined total of people "sent" to start other churches: 98

Combined total of money "sent" to start other churches: \$226,000

I'm not sure about your context, but those are impressive numbers to a Cleveland church planter! I highly doubt that Momentum would be averaging 785 attendees and would've baptized 471, if we had decided to keep our 87 people and \$152,000. (We baptize people immediately after they've decided they want to follow Jesus, so that's a conversion number for us.) Different styles and visions reach different people. One church won't reach everyone. In fact, sometimes in life your children or grandchildren achieve goals you could never accomplish. That's the power of multiplication.

**'Are We *INSANE*?'**

Up until recently, Momentum has focused exclusively on sending money and people to start *new* churches. These congregations have values similar to Momentum, but they're all completely autonomous. Honestly, I've never been interested in "going multisite."

New Life was a three-campus church when we left Virginia, and I wasn't a huge fan of that model. We were wrong about many of the things we expected to be the benefits of a multisite church. For instance, we thought starting a site would be cheaper than starting a new church, but it wasn't. As a result, Momentum has been very committed to starting independent churches. I told God He'd have to be crystal clear if He ever wanted us to become a multisite church.

In early 2012, while collecting some multisite statistics for an Exponential video, I felt like God lowered my guard about starting a campus. I actually *felt* something, like an invisible force field around me was being lowered. I nervously mentioned this to Shannon who was also not a fan of the multisite dealio. Casting the vision to her would be more difficult than talking to the rest of the church combined. When I told her my story, she said, "Oh my goodness! Something similar just happened to me a few days ago, and it was about starting a multisite campus!"

Uh-oh.

In October 2013, I approached Pat Hartson from the church-planting organization NOAH who was temporarily leading Twinsburg Church of Christ. Since its founding minister retired, the church had struggled, and was unlikely to survive 2014. On a really good Sunday, about 30 or 40 people worshiped there. I asked Pat to join me in prayer. Was God calling us to merge with them and go multisite?

At this point, Momentum was running about 200 people. Jim Tomberlin, the Yoda of the multisite strategy, says a church should be 1,000 people before considering going multisite. That stat worried me, because he's a smart dude. I called Exponential's president, Dave Ferguson, about my dilemma.

"Mr. President, we're only a church of 200. Is it completely insane for us to consider this? Am I one taco short of a combo meal?"

Dave's comeback was classic. In a response filled with laughter, he retorted, "Only about as insane as sending out 87 people to plant new churches!"

Touché.

In a phone conversation, Eugene DePorter from Southeast Christian in Louisville, Kentucky, also mentioned something that has stuck with me. He believes that in hard-to-reach cities, launching sites from a successful church may be a better strategy than planting new churches. That makes sense. If God is blessing a church, why not multiply it into two or more campuses? Somehow, at only 200 people, I felt we were "blessed" enough to spin off a campus.

Eventually, Momentum and Twinsburg sensed that God was calling us to merge. Twinsburg's building would become a site of Momentum. We would close down the facilities all summer for renovations and launch in the fall.

Stadia partnered with us in this adventure, which was cool, because they have been a part of Momentum's story for so long. They've been crazy generous to Momentum and me for several years, so it was nice to make our partnership more official.

One of the most sentimental moments for me was driving to Akron to make a pitch to NOAH's board for financial support. I had made a similar drive and pitch eight-and-a-half years before this when we started Momentum. I was super-nostalgic on that drive. During my multisite pitch to NOAH, I passed out copies of the original letter I sent to NOAH back on July 19, 2005, which was soon after we landed in Cleveland. The letter

envisioned a church called “Momentum” that would reach the community in many ways, and then went on to say:

*Primarily Momentum will be a “church planting church” that will strategically seek to plant other churches in Cleveland, other parts of the U.S., and throughout the world. Investing in Momentum will not just be an investment in one church, but in many future churches.*

Wow. Our God-given vision for Momentum had come true. We were fulfilling our promise to become a “church-planting church.” When the board saw the original letter, a spirit of celebration hit the room. And, as you might expect, NOAH partnered with us for a second time so we could launch a new site.

Momentum’s original campus sent out 63 people to be on the launch team for Momentum’s Twinsburg-Macedonia (TM) campus. Some 51 were originally from Momentum, and 12 were from Twinsburg Church of Christ. Curtis Teel, a former Mo intern who had taken his talents south for a few years, came back to Cleveland to be our full-time TM campus minister. (We still call it “The Return,” and Curtis sometimes tosses chalk in the air before he preaches. Okay, not really.) Currently, our original campus is averaging about 150 people, much better than I expected, and our new campus is averaging 200. As usual, it has been amazing to meet unchurched people and hear their stories, but now it’s happening in *two* locations.

“Sending people to yourself” is different than sending them to a new church plant. But, again, I don’t think the logos matter. Momentum TM is a different type of “sidequel,” but it’s a sidequel nonetheless. No matter how you slice it, being “sent” changes a person. Their faith increases throughout the process. Sending is sending. Any type of spinoff changes your people and the entire DNA and culture of your church. And, yes, now we track *separate* statistics on how many people we’ve sent to start Momentum campuses, just in case God has more of those planned for us.

***Total = 63 people sent to start campuses***

## **Sunday, Monday, Happy Days**

Predicting the success of a spinoff isn’t easy, but Momentum hopes to launch as many churches as we possibly can. The 1970s TV show *Happy Days*—a spinoff of the series *Love, American Style*—spawned a bunch of other shows. Many of which you’ve probably never heard of.

*Blansky’s Beauties.*

Fail.

*Ralph and Potsie.*

Fail.

*Out of the Blue.*

Fail.

They stuck to it though, and were able to launch some successful spinoffs, too: *Mork and Mindy*, *Joanie Loves Chachi*, and *The Fonz and the Happy Days Gang* (an animated series). Their most successful spinoff was *Laverne and Shirley*, which also launched a couple of new shows. I'd love to see Momentum—a spinoff of New Life—help launch new churches like crazy. I'd love to see those new churches start others. None of us can control whether these new congregations sink or swim. Spinoffs are risky, but souls are at stake so they're totally worth it. There are “Dan Smiths” out there who need to hear the Good News of Jesus.

I'm certain God wants to create a movement of church spinoffs in your city, state, province or country. Within the United States, we need more sending church movements in Los Angeles, the Northwest, New York City, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, throughout New England, you name it. Are there any small-town rural churches that would like to start doing this in their surrounding counties? Please do, so I can hear your stories and steal your ideas!

God, make Momentum a *Happy Days* church with dozens of successful spinoffs! And while you're at it, please make me cool like “The Fonz.”

## Chapter 3

### The 600-Pound Squash

A while back Kevin Rush, who apprenticed with Mo and planted CityEdge, was talking to his worship-pastor friend, Nate Bebout. They were rappin' about how the local church should be a blessing and a multiplying machine. Kevin explained how, up to that point in his ministry, he had been hard-pressed to find many churches in our culture that were even attempting to be those things.

Nate told him that today's American church reminded him of a 600-pound squash. He had recently gone to a county fair and had seen one. He thought to himself, *How does one grow a 600-pound squash?* So he asked the guy who cultivated it.

The farmer explained, "First you take the best seeds and plant them in the most fertile soil. As the plant grows, you look for the largest piece of fruit. Once you identify the biggest piece, you snip off all remaining fruit and buds and bury them in the soil near the plant. The plant will absorb the nutrients from the fruit and buds...and grow larger. It's important that all of the plant's potential goes into that one piece of fruit.

"And, of course, you use Miracle Gro," the farmer said with a smile.

Eventually the squash doubles and triples in size. In the end, you need a forklift to move it because it's 600 pounds!

Nate asked if you could eat it. After all, you could probably feed an entire village with that monster. Maybe this was the answer to ending poverty everywhere.

The farmer shook his head. "Nope. The squash is all twisted and gnarled on the inside. It's very impressive to look at—and you may win a blue ribbon at the fair—but it has very little practical use."

I'm well aware that Momentum isn't a perfect, utopian church. Your church is possibly light years ahead of us in several areas. With that said, let me ask you a potentially sensitive question. How many churches become a 600-pound squash? They're impressive from the outside, great for photo ops and awards, but twisted and gnarled on the inside. They have great potential, but instead of naturally unleashing it to bear more and more fruit, they absorb it.

It's a haunting analogy.

Maybe you're getting defensive right now. "Smitty, we're no 600-pound squash! We're not a large or resourced church by any stretch of the imagination! We struggle just to get by."

But is that your dream? Do you secretly fantasize about preaching to a bigger crowd? Do you occasionally lust after some kind of breakthrough or windfall?

Sometimes I do.

The more important question is this: If your seats *were* suddenly full and the floodgates of heaven were opened upon your ministry, would you hang onto those people and resources with white knuckles? If not, what are you doing right now to prove that? Are you being faithful with the few things you have? Are you focused on absorbing or enriching?

## The Parable of the Bags of Gold

Every few years, I discover something new within Jesus' Parable of the Bags of Gold (or "Talents") in Matthew 25:14-30. These new discoveries are always funny to me, because I've studied this parable so many times. I've gotten to the point where I've thought, *Okay, what else is in there that I haven't already noticed?* But whenever I'm sure I've thoroughly mined it of all applicable lessons, I discover something fresh. I'm sure it has to do with the Holy Spirit teaching me things as my life, faith and leadership responsibilities progress.

As a disciple and church leader, here are some of my thoughts on this parable:

1. The Master (a.k.a. God) gives resources to people, "each according to his ability" (v. 15). If this bugs you, notice He was right about whom *not* to entrust with tons of gold. In fact, it was gracious for him to even let the third guy have one bag.
2. God rewards risk-taking, bias toward action, and multiplication of His resources.
3. As I wrote this chapter, I realized for the first time how the Master distributed these resources to multiple leaders, when he could have entrusted them to one. Instead of putting all of his eggs in one basket, he diversified. The Master is using a form of multiplication to teach multiplication.
4. God doesn't want us "sitting on" resources He has entrusted to us. He considers this "lazy" and "wicked." In fact, "playing it safe" seems to anger Him. We often think of sin as doing something wrong, but sometimes sin is not doing anything at all. (That'll preach, won't it?)
5. The third guy kind of blames God, doesn't he? He says, "Master ... I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground" (vv. 24-25). He never accepted responsibility for his own faithlessness. John Maxwell teaches, "It's easier to go from failure to success than it is from excuses to success."<sup>1</sup>
6. The reward for faithfulness is—wait for it ... wait for it—*more responsibility!* Yaaay! I know that doesn't sound like good news to a lot of people (including me sometimes), but this is responsibility with stuff that matters and makes an eternal impact! By the way, I love how the promise of more responsibility is fulfilled for Guy #1 before the credits have a chance to roll! I picture him being the kind of hard-charger who is excited to accept it though. He wants to make a huge splash with his life.
7. On a personal note, my primary Gary-Chapman-love-language is "words of affirmation." I long to hear the Master's encouraging words: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" I also hope I'm there when He says the same to Momentum's staff, launch teams, volunteers and "sent" disciples. If it's appropriate, I'll be applauding in the background, offering woot after woot. After all, we're all about to be invited up to the penthouse suite to party with the Boss.

## **Multiplication is No. 1**

Momentum's No. 1 core value is multiplication. Why? It's Jesus' fault. His Parable of the Bags of Gold won't let us rest. As long as His resources are in our hands, we're responsible to be good stewards and multiply them for His pleasure. Therefore, we try to "put His church to work" and multiply everything we can get our hands on: disciples, apprentices, leaders, musicians, rappers, preachers, coaches, elders, small groups, leadership huddles, worship services, campuses, church plants and church-planting networks.

At the beginning of Catalyst's podcast is a sound byte of Andy Stanley proclaiming, "Leadership is a stewardship. It's temporary, and you're accountable." As I've led Momentum, I've wrestled with Andy's quote—and the Parable of the Bags of Gold—a lot. Both are simple, powerful and true. Eventually for one reason or another, my time as Momentum's leader will be up. When the time comes, will I release one single congregation back into the Master's hands or will there be more? In the end, will I be compelled to confess that I was lazy with His church or that I put it to work?

Momentum may not be a large church, but we can still multiply like crazy. We wanna multiply churches like gremlins in a swimming pool. Like cockroaches in Florida. Germs in a kindergarten class. Octomom through *in vitro*.

Okay, I'm done.

A dozen churches can love, serve, reach and disciple far more unchurched "Dan Smiths" than a single, large church can. Momentum has to send seeds and nutrients in every direction to fulfill our mission as a church. When we moved here, Cleveland didn't need one new church. It needed many.

I love Luis Palau's quote. "The church is like manure. Pile it up, and it stinks up the neighborhood. Spread it out, and it enriches the world."

## **"Me No Likey Multiplication"**

There are a lot of reasons why leaders don't multiply their churches. If you're one of those leaders, maybe you think your church is too young. You don't have enough money. You can't afford to send people because you still have your own slots to fill.

On the other hand, maybe you don't *want* to multiply because addition is working out just fine. You lead a strong, growing or well-established church. I imagine that the better you're doing at growing a church, the tougher it must be to make the decision to multiply. I mean *obviously* something is going well. It's probably tempting to just go for the blue ribbon in your county.

When Shannon and I had our firstborn, Zion, he was a really fast crawler, like a freaking spider. Our pediatrician told us that babies who are really good crawlers often take longer to learn to walk than bad or average crawlers. In other words, if you're successful at one form of progress, it's frustrating to fumble around with something completely different. It takes a lot of faith and humility to try something new. Your attempt to "walk by faith" may include a few face plants. But eventually, you'll be able to do both, when needed, and the new thing will be better in the long run. Pun intended.



Back in the '90s, I attended a leadership conference at a megachurch that I greatly admire. I remember the lead guy speaking about the church's tremendous growth over the years. He said critics occasionally asked him why they didn't multiply the church in some way. He told us how he responded to that challenge.

"If we started another church in another part of town, how would we split up the staff? Who would go where? Which of the two churches would I lead? Where would our other preacher go? Which one gets to have our main worship leader?" Then he asked us rhetorically, "Do you see the problems this creates?"

When I heard this in my early-20s, his explanation made total sense. Today, however, I realize that those weren't insurmountable obstacles. They were snags. This megachurch was more prepared for multiplication than most ministries *because* they had multiple preachers, worship leaders and student ministers! In many ways this amazing church was *killing* it with faith, generosity, service and outreach, but they wanted to keep the Dream Team together.

To their credit, years later, the church acknowledged multiplication as an area of weakness. "Man, we missed the boat on church planting for *years*," the staff said. "We were late to the party but better late than never, right?"

Definitely! Today they're not only a multisite church, but they also invest a metric boatload of money into planting new churches in hard-to-reach areas of the country and the world. Well done.

## **The Uncola of Megachurches**

When it comes to fighting the giant squash mentality, our partner, RiverTree Christian Church, has been a great example to Momentum. I have always called them the "uncola of megachurches." 7UP used to market itself as "The Uncola" to set itself apart and create a counter-culture feel for their soft drink (notice I'm avoiding the whole "pop" vs. "soda" vs. "Coke" debate here).

The megachurch stereotype—whether it's fair or not—is that these churches often build their own kingdoms, centered on a "big" personality. Cynics in the community see their large buildings and amenities and sometime nickname them "Six Flags Over Jesus."

Meanwhile, RiverTree is giving money to church plants, encouraging members to sponsor impoverished children, and sending out vital staff members to start churches and campuses. If growth is the only goal, RiverTree is taking some major risks that could greatly affect their blue-ribbon status.

RiverTree's former lead guy, Greg Nettle, had some key donors he would speak to sometimes when there was a large financial need at the church. Yet I know that Greg often—perhaps *mostly*—approached these donors about Kingdom opportunities like church planting in Ohio or in Third World countries. RiverTree's most generous and resourced givers have heard an awful lot of visionary pitches about things that would not advance RiverTree's kingdom in any way.

The truth is, even if we tried, Momentum would probably never win any blue ribbons at the county fair. We'll never really know because we're trying to resist the strong urge to absorb all the nutrients we can or put all of our potential into one piece of fruit. Some of those nutrients—specifically money and people—should be absorbed by whatever is being planted around us.



## Chapter 4

# Sending Money, Sending People

The toughest thing about being a sending church is obvious: the *sending*. That's *one* thing we don't want to do! Sending money to fund church plants creates financial insecurity. Sending out people causes "people problems"—and eventually *more* money problems! Watching friends leave is flat-out excruciating, creating the need for new disciples, musicians, team members and leaders. Nonetheless, sending money and people is the means by which we will continue to multiply churches. It's how we'll fight the 600-pound squash mentality.

### #1 – Sending Money

What is one of the biggest immediate needs at Momentum—in any given month?

Whiz and Iceman from the old TV show *In Living Color* answer that question with their popular catchphrase: "Mo money, Mo money, Mo money!" Yep, I just quoted "Homeboy Shopping Network."

One of the biggest tensions we face as a sending church is choosing to be generous when we really can't afford to be. The problem begins in prelaunch. When someone chips in to help start a church, there is an expectation the new church will become self-sustaining within a reasonable amount of time. I've always heard three years is the "reasonable."

For instance, NOAH and RiverTree supported Momentum with large sums of up-front money. Southeast Christian sent a sizeable amount every month for three years. Several other Kingdom-minded churches generously cut checks to Momentum. Tons of our friends and family members supported us within the first three years. They sacrificed their hard-earned money to see God's vision for Momentum come true. We are so thankful. Because they gave, there are now more people who follow Jesus.

Whether or not they thought about it, the majority of those churches and individuals probably assumed Momentum would be taking care of herself after a couple of years. Even if they didn't know anything about the process of starting a church, they (graciously) assumed the fundraising letters would eventually stop. But they didn't. The letters just kept arriving in their mailboxes. Three years after launch. Four years after launch. Five years after launch!

Of course, our neediness hasn't been due to irresponsibility by Momentum's leaders or stinginess on the part of our team members. Every January since our launch, we've taught Momentum peeps about spending, debt, saving and giving in some way. In spite of this, we're still consistently tight on "Mo money."

### *The College Student Analogy*

About two years after we launched, when we were approaching the date of Southeast Christian's final monthly check, I shot straight with Momentum about the leap we needed to take. Several times, I gave the talk I call "The College Student Analogy."

“Momentum is like a college student,” I said. “We appear to be independent, but truthfully our parents have been paying our bills for the last few years. They’ve even put a nice chunk of cash in our bank account. They agreed to bankroll us for a set amount of time, so that we can eventually become self-supporting. We *appear* to have a lot of money because we have a pretty sweet sound system in our dorm room and some other really nice stuff.”

I motioned to the equipment in the auditorium where we meet to worship. “The truth is Mom and Dad bought these speakers for us. We couldn’t afford them on our own. Here’s the scoop: Our college years are almost over, and the time has come for us to start paying our own bills. Our current situation is kind of like we’re working part time at Starbucks. We’ve got some income, but it’s not enough to cover all of our ‘big boy’ expenses. If we stay on this path, we’ll drain our account quickly. So we have to be more responsible, step up and increase our income in a hurry.”

After this talk, Momentum grew to be a 600-pound squash, and everyone lived “comfortably ever after.”

Um. Psych.

Many people at Mo *have* been generous. There are some amazing stories here about people giving generously—some well beyond the Old Testament tithe. But for you to understand our financial situation completely, I need to mention a few more notable items. In 2004 (the year before we moved here), the U.S. Census Bureau dubbed Cleveland as “The Poorest Big City in the Nation.” We’re also reaching a lot of unchurched people who are skeptical about giving away their money. Additionally, Mo attracts a good amount of dechurched Catholics, and giving per capita among U.S. Catholics is the lowest of all Christian groups. We also purposefully planted very close to the city. Technically it’s a suburb, but it’s a *first-ring* suburb. Garfield Heights is pretty urban with black-white racial diversity, and it’s very blue-collar.

There’s one last thing. As you picture me giving my “College Student Analogy” talk in 2008, try to picture my audience being very distracted by a loud, ongoing noise in the background. “What’s the noise?” you ask. That would be the sound of the U.S. economy tanking during the Great Recession.

Welcome to church planting. Welcome to Cleveland.

### *Perpetual Fundraisers*

Scott Pugh knows the deal. He’s been a perpetual fundraiser for Velocity Christian Church, the first plant we helped. We both laugh at the idea of becoming self-supporting plants in Cleveland within three years. You can count on at *least* five years of shaking the bushes when you’re in this part of the Rust Belt.

Add another complication to the mix. The more church plants you’re involved in starting, the more your neediness may confuse your supporters. Face it, birthing *one* new church is a cute, noble thing to most people. *But* when you commit your whole ministry to a cycle of breaking down and building up the body, some people are going to think you’re bananas.

Comedian Jim talks about something similar in one of his stand-ups. “I recently became a father for the fourth time. After the third kid, people stop congratulating you. They just treat you like you’re Amish. Four?! Well that’s *one* way to live your life.”

He's right! It feels so inappropriate to keep asking for baby showers for your third and fourth kid! By that time, most people are done supporting and congratulating you. Now they're starting to psychoanalyze you.

*How many babies are they going to make?*

Gaffigan jokes, "If you want to know what it's like to have a fourth, just imagine you're drowning ... and then someone hands you a baby."

Multiplying a church over and over *is* pretty bananas. Planting one church is hard enough by itself, right?

In my fundraising letters, I've often said things like: "Five years into our church plant, we are still asking you for support. We promise it's not because things aren't going well! It's the opposite. We've been making disciples, then sending out some of those disciples who are the most servant-hearted and generous. You haven't helped start one church in Cleveland; you've helped start *five*."

When we send out a chunk of people, which I'll talk more about later, our budget reflects that human deficit loud and clear. If we send them away in the spring or fall, next year's budget mocks us. We stare at it wondering, *How are we going to make this work? We have to find \$50,000 somewhere, but there's nothing left to cut!*

I've often prayed, *God, please don't make me cut staff. I'd hate to do that to someone before Christmas. Plus, I don't think I can do this without every person on our team!*

Shoot! If I hadn't worked for Exponential for the past few years, I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to the conference!

As I'm writing this chapter, we're working on our church's first, 12-month multisite budget. It's February, and the budget still says we will lose \$100,000 in 2015. Our initial launch was more than eight years ago, and this is the biggest hole we've ever dug! Why? Because we felt like God was calling us to multiply and start a new campus in a very specific area. We've stepped out in faith, and now we're being frugal and expecting God to provide.

Leading a sending church has *not* been glamorous. Yes, it has been consistently exciting, but it has also been a sacrifice and struggle. Nevertheless, we are constantly choosing to be generous when we really can't afford to be.

### *The Multiplication Fund*

Since the day we took up our first collection during a launch team meeting, we've set aside 10 percent of Momentum's internal offering as what we call our "Multiplication Fund." This is our tithe toward reproduction. For the first 10 years of our original campus, 2.5 percent of that money is a "payback" to NOAH, one of our church-planting partners. The other 7.5 percent has gone wherever we've told it to go—for the purpose of multiplication.

Our "Multiplication Fund" can be used toward new plants or new campuses. I know the "new campus" part sounds convenient, because we could just spend that money to become a 600-pound squash. The proof is in the pudding: We've used \$152,000 out of the fund to start new churches and \$0 toward new campuses.

No matter how tight things have gotten, we've set aside 10 percent. When I was giving the "College Student Analogy," we were setting aside 10 percent. When I was writing fundraising letters in "Year Five," we were setting aside 10 percent. Right now

we have a \$100,000 budget deficit, but we're still setting aside 10 percent—at both campuses. Even when we've been in a financial bind, we've always said, "The money in the Multiplication Fund isn't ours. It's God's tithe, set apart for new churches and campuses."

Maybe setting aside 10 percent for church multiplication sounds impossible to you. In that case, think about what you probably teach your members about tithing, and then apply it to your church's budget:

"We can't afford to tithe." *Do it anyway.*

"Our income's too small." *Your faith's too small.*

"Can I work my way up to a tithe by increasing my giving one percent per year?"  
*No. Get nutty and just go for it!*

"We're in debt." *Tithe while you pay off your debt. Follow the first fruits principle in the Bible.*

"The numbers don't add up." *Trust the Lord to provide. You're probably spending too much on yourself anyways.*

"We're barely getting by right now." *You'll live even better off 90 percent or less of your income.*

"I'm scared." *I know, but this is the one area where God tells you to test Him.*

Church leaders, practice what you preach. Give generously. Tithe. Set it aside and resist the temptation to spend too much of it on one piece of fruit. Don't allow it to become the fund you dip into for anything besides new churches and campuses.

"Hey, here's a cool idea for an outreach event. Can we use the Multiplication Fund for that?" No.

"It's outreach!" No.

Set aside the money. It adds up quickly and will make a huge difference. Don't absorb too many nutrients.

Finally, if you can't afford to send money, send it anyway.

## **#2 – Sending People**

Sending money alone doesn't feel like a full-fledged spinoff to me. Multiplication implies *people* being sent. In my opinion, sending part of your tribe is far more generous than sending money. People have the potential to serve, speak, laugh, cheer, love, encourage, worship, cook, lift, invite, inspire, reproduce, parent, baptize, lead, coach, mentor, object, disciple, tithe, protect and unify. Money simply "pays."

Besides, sending people usually *is* sending money. It's a two-for-one. When you send a committed, hard-working, generous disciple to help start a church, it's like you're giving them the goose that lays golden eggs. A "sent person" is literally the gift that keeps on giving. They'll likely be committed to supporting the vision of the new church for years to come. For example, Momentum sent one family who has given an accumulative \$33,631 to their new church. Another Cleveland planter told me one of his former Mo families has given \$59,827 so far. Could Momentum have used another 93 grand over the last few years? By the power of Grayskull—*YES!* The better question is, "Who needed that money more: Momentum or two new churches?" Easy answer.

### *Addition vs. Multiplication*

The topic of “sending people” is where we see addition in direct opposition to the strategy of multiplication. When we send individuals and families, it feels like subtraction because we’re doing something that lowers our numbers. Addition collects.

Multiplication costs.

Every time Momentum sends people, I feel like the ship is about to sink. *How can we recover? Is this the beginning of the end?* I envision what it will look like as we decline and eventually “close up shop” forever. Deep down inside, I want to hold onto all of these people. In the midst of my struggle, I hear Moses saying, “Let my people go.” As much as I want to keep them, our vision to multiply is what usually prevents me from making that egotistical mistake. Without vision, multiplication feels like subtraction.

### *Catch and Release*

Among recreational fisherman, there’s a practice known as “catch and release.”

It’s a technique of conservation; a way to keep the population up in commonly used fishing spots. After a fisherman catches a fish, he unhooks it and throws it back in the water. In some places, there are daily limits to how many fish you’re allowed to catch and keep. In those places, if you want to catch, cook, and eat fish, you might plan to catch five and keep releasing the sixth. This keeps you within the limit and allows you to share your fish with others.

Of course (fishermen tell me) there are guys who catch and don’t release. They hoard more fish than they’re supposed to keep. They may catch their limit for the day and then go home and come back later to do it again. There’s no accountability for releasing fish. It’s all done on the honor system.

Mark 3:14 tells us Jesus “appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” We call those 12 men “apostles,” which means, “sent ones.” (By the way, there are many other “apostles” mentioned in the New Testament.)

Robert Lewis from Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock was the first to mention this concept, as far as I know. Lewis says, “Jesus was a catch-and-release fisherman. He would catch men and women with His gospel and spend time with them to develop, season and ground them in God’s ways, but then ... He’d release them!”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus wasn’t just a “fisher of men” (Matt. 4:19). He caught *and* released people, therefore teaching His followers to do the same. This strategy rippled through early Christianity, and we see it in the culture of the Antioch church in Acts 13.

Over the past few years, I’ve had a few opportunities to learn from Leadership Network. I feel like one of their messages to church leaders has been, “Churches are good at catching people, but terrible about releasing them.” I agree. If releasing fish back into the water is hard for recreational fishermen, it’s even more difficult for church leaders. We have to make sure people don’t become statistics, or we’ll potentially hold onto them until some of our potential “sent ones” suffer and die. We’re afraid to set people free or, at the very least, give them our blessing to do ministry unassociated with our church’s logo. Some leaders are afraid to allow people to return to their own environments to pursue God’s vision for them in their own community. There are definitely lead guys who would never consider sharing “their fish” with others who are starting churches.

*No way. I’ve busted my butt to catch all these fish. Church planters can catch their own fish.*

*It's too risky. I don't want to jeopardize the jobs of our own ministry staff by losing too many people.*

They especially wouldn't release any of their "big fish." The impressive catches. (You know, the ones they've taken selfies with.)

I get it. The leaders at Momentum, including myself, have had the same sinful thoughts. But as difficult as it is, we've forced ourselves to give our blessing to anyone and everyone who may be called to leave.

The best way to fight this internal struggle is to change your scorecard. Stop measuring stats that are *only* about "catching." You know—bumps, bucks and baptisms. A scorecard that only records "catching" stats is an incomplete scorecard. Start tracking—and celebrating—stats about "releasing." Update your church by announcing stuff like:

"So far, we've permanently released six people to help start other churches!"

"This year, we've already sent \$15,000 to help start new churches."

"We have officially apprenticed and released two church planters!"

Remember you are, or you become, what you celebrate. Mike Stachura, director of the missions organization Operation Mobilization, which works with local churches, nailed it when he said, "The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity."

### *The Commissioning Service*

As I alluded to in the last chapter, we started having a "Commissioning Sunday" whenever we sent off a new batch of people. This is one way we celebrate "releasing" stats. On that Sunday, the sermon and creative elements usually relate to sending or multiplication. At the end of the service, those being sent come to the stage—kids and all—and we celebrate them. In light of these people, we announce and cheer about our latest "total number of people sent." In the spirit of Acts 13, we lay hands on them as an act of blessing, pray for and release them to continue God's work as a part of the new church. It's so awesome.

At the same time, it really sucks. I always have tears of sadness and pride in my eyes during my short commissioning talk, knowing I may never worship next to those guys on a Sunday morning again. Oftentimes I say to them, "Man, I can't wait until Heaven when we'll have permanent and unbroken community without any more goodbyes."

### *Granting Immunity*

This leads me to one of the hardest things about developing a sending culture in your church. No matter how much you're tempted to do it, you cannot grant immunity to anyone. In the reality TV show *Survivor*, anyone who has the "immunity idol" cannot be sent off the island. They're untouchable. If you really want to create a sending culture, you can't allow anyone to become untouchable. It will make people jealous, wreck the planter's trust in you and threaten the entire church-planting movement you've been working to create.

I've never gone public with the information I'm about to share, but years later now, I think it's safe. Dave Mariano was the first person I *really* wanted to offer immunity. Dave is a super-likeable guy. He looks a lot like Tom Cruise, but he's less insane. He met Jesus—and his wife Heather—at Momentum. Dave's a really generous



dude, largely because he doesn't want money to be his god. He was also a killer volunteer at Mo. As I said earlier, he took a huge load off James Fruits, Mo's creative arts guy, by being the volunteer leader of a worship band. What I may have loved most about Dave was his desire to talk to his friends about Jesus. Today, there are at least two strong leaders at Mo, Josh and Cortney Kaser, who might still be far from Jesus if it weren't for Dave Mariano's influence.

I never told him, but I was planning to disciple Dave in hopes that he would be one of Momentum's first elders. We had several solid guys at Mo in that era, but only two whom I thought fit perfectly into the role of "Momentum elder." Our plan was to have elders within five years of showing up in Cleveland. But Dave was considering leaving to help CityEdge. I knew that sending Dave there would completely napalm any hope of having elders by year five.

One day Dave and I scheduled a lunch in Cleveland's AsiaTown to discuss the possibility of the Marianos helping CityEdge. He was seeking my advice. During my drive to the Vietnamese restaurant, I wrestled with what I should say. I considered subtly talking him out of going. I thought about planting seeds of doubt. I even considered telling him the sob story that he was one of my two potential elders. The other side of my mental battle was dominated by one consistent thought: *How awesome would it be to give CityEdge—and my buddy Kevin Rush—a potential elder?*

The decision wasn't easy, but I knew I couldn't give immunity to Dave and Heather. If I did, I'd end up keeping all our "really strong people" from that day forward. If I started granting immunity to all my BFFs, besties and favs, Momentum would end up on a slippery slope toward becoming a 600-pound squash.

*God, this is nuts! We have only two potential elders at Momentum ... and we're sending one of them to CityEdge!*

To this day, we still don't have elders at Mo. Being a sending church has really slowed that process. Right now, I think we're closer than we've ever been. On the other hand, knowing that we've released guys, like Lenny Chormanski, who have become elders at churches that are younger than Momentum has been rewarding. Whether it's true or not, I like to think that "being sent" helped mature their faith to the point of becoming candidates for eldership.

A few years ago, I was reading a commentary on the Book of Acts and was relieved to read the thoughts of scholar Ajith Fernando. Through his work, he counseled me with these words: "Contemporary Christians who read Acts with an open mind will find themselves challenged with pointed applications by what happened in the early church. In an age when many churches spend so much time, money and energy on self-preservation and improvement, Acts presents churches that released their most capable people for reaching the lost."<sup>3</sup>

Yes! I think we have to be willing to catch and release our "most capable people." That's what the church in Antioch did when they released Barnabas and Saul. I'm afraid Barnabas would receive immunity from a lot of today's churches: "Barney's just so darn encouraging and likeable. He's far too capable for us to let him walk. He's a keeper. On the other hand, that Saul guy can bounce. He's a little intense for my tastes."

One day not too long after I had lunch with him, Dave Mariano visited our house. Shannon and I talked with him as he tried to sort through whether or not God was calling him to CityEdge. He was becoming more certain that the Marianos were supposed to go.

The calling was starting to galvanize inside his soul. When he left our house, I was really starting to have peace about him going. Again I thought, *How cool would it be to hand off a potential elder to a brand new church?* At the exact same time, my wifey started to freak out.

“This is stupid! We can’t afford to send them! We’re not exactly a strong church *with* them!” She started foaming at the mouth. “We’re gonna die! WE’RE ALL GONNA DIE!” She only settled down when I threatened not to make out with her for a couple of days. After that, I reminded her of all the reasons we want to be a multiplying church. She knew all of those reasons already and slowly acquiesced to the vision she has helped create.

To be a sending church, you’ll have to fight through moments of doubt and force yourself to stay the course. And you’ll have to cast vision over and over to those around you who occasionally have those same very natural reactions. Your most committed team members, your staff, even your *spouse* will reveal flashes of weakness as they falter and get scared. They’ll suddenly panic and ask, “Remind me again why we’re sending some of our most capable people? This is ridonkulous!” Your job is to cast vision.

Samuel Johnson, the famous English writer, said, “People need to be reminded more than they need to be instructed.” Proactively and repeatedly remind people of your church’s mission and calling to release people. Vision leaks. When you’re doing something this crazy, it leaks out the jugular.

Eventually we sent Dave and Heather Mariano to CityEdge. I don’t see Dave a ton anymore, but when I do I just ask him to hold me. “It was you, Dave. It was always you. You were the first person I really wanted to give immunity to.” He just strokes my hair until I fall asleep. I wake up the next morning in the fetal position, sucking my thumb and hoping it was all just a bad dream. It wasn’t. The Marianos are gone.

Being a sending church is really tough.

### *The Challenge to “Go”*

Vision casters, if you want to create a culture of sending, there is nothing more powerful than offering your personal endorsement and blessing to go. You can announce a new church plant, give money to it and invite the planter to speak at your church. Those are great strategic moves, but until you stand up in front of the church and challenge people to pray about going, the thought won’t even occur to most of them. When the planter visits, stand up next to this leader, put your hand on his shoulder and tell everyone, “This planter needs a team to accomplish this task. I want you to ask God if you’re one of the missing players.”

Whenever you know about a New Testament church being planted (whether or not it’s one of “yours”), personally make an announcement and give people your blessing to go. I’m not just talking about church plants close to members’ homes. One of the most powerful things you can do to create a sending culture is challenge people to pray about joining projects that are brewing far away from their homes. Tell them to ask God if He wants them to sell their homes and move to the target area. As the vision caster, your job is to let them know this kind of faith isn’t ridiculous.

Maybe you’ve led your church to the point of sending money and temporary volunteers to help with a new church, but you’ve never asked people to leave permanently because the new church was “so far away.” Well, that’s a great start! Now

take the next step. If you don't challenge them—due to your lack of faith in God or in people—you will rob them of opportunities to increase their faith.

One of Mo's launch team members, Stan Munson, gives the advice, "Don't say no for people," meaning sometimes we imagine why people may say no, so we don't ask. In some situations, we should ask and give them the chance to say no. They might surprise us and say yes.

After we sent money to start a church in Ecuador, I realized I had missed a killer opportunity. I should have said, "I wouldn't be surprised if God has been preparing a few of you to move to Ecuador. I dare you to ask God if you're supposed to go." Our church's faith could have increased simply through individuals arriving at a willingness to pray *that* prayer!

Can I be really bold here? Maybe the best way to increase the faith of your church is by asking God if *you're* supposed to go. Whether the process happens publicly or privately is up to you, but I think the prayer itself stretches you.

Nope. You don't get immunity either.

Student ministers, how cool would it be if you asked your leaders for permission to give that challenge and blessing to your students and their parents? Most church planters would love to have student leaders and adult leaders who would agree to pioneer a bangin' student ministry. They just can't afford to hire another staff member in prelaunch. Without students, it's hard to retain and disciple students. If you have some quality young people and parents who are willing to go and serve—and not complain about the youth group being too small—then send them!

"300"

Leaders, during your endorsement of the planter and the new church, there's something you can do to help the church planter a ton: Raise the bar. Let me explain.

Some pastors may tell your church not to plant until you can send out, say, 300 people. First, that's a *really* big church's idea on how to plant! (See Acts 13 for a different model.) The Cleveland Browns will probably win a Super Bowl long before you get 300 people willing to leave your church, especially if you don't already have a culture of sending.

As a church planter, I don't even *want* 300 people from your church, *unless* they're the spiritual equivalent to the Spartans in Frank Miller's film. Odds are many of them intend to be spectators and consumers. I want warriors, not people who want to attend a church conveniently located closer to their home.

*Honey, a new Starbucks is opening, and it'll be right around the corner from our house!*

If they only plan on serving communion or helping in the nursery once a quarter, you can keep your 300 people.

Sending leader, please do church planters a favor by raising the bar. Weed out some of the spectators. Scare away some of the consumers. Challenge your people to go if—and only if—they're willing to roll up their sleeves and lay down their lives! Tell them they do not have your blessing unless they plan to make the new church one of the top priorities in their lives. Why? Because a smart planter would rather have *three* of your best than 300 who "came not to serve but to be served." By raising the bar, you'll save

that planter from tons of long, prelaunch conversations with terrible team members. He'll be way too busy launching a church for "Dan Smiths," so his time will be very limited.

Here are some more suggested words for your public challenge: "We are looking for pioneers to join this team. Pioneers understand that it will be hard work, which will certainly involve some trailblazing and map making. Pioneers don't complain that there's no electricity. They help provide electricity for people who will come after them. Pioneers don't complain that there's no running water. They create running water for the next generation. If you're considering going for the convenience, let me be very clear that this situation won't be convenient. Don't go. You do *not* have my blessing. *But...* if you understand that you will be one of the leaders who will build the children's ministry, initiate public school outreach, serve on the finance team, organize the hospitality ministry, manage the website, be in a missional band, or lead the student ministry—and you're willing to sacrifice your life to do it—God may just be calling you to go."

### *A Three-Part Decision*

I think it's a good idea to tell people that a "calling" to plant is at least a three-part decision: "Not only do you need to feel like God is calling you to the team, but the planter and I need to agree you're being called."

Tell people to contact the planter directly if they want to chat about it, and let the planter cast the vision and chat with them. Planters need to decide if they think this person is a potential launch team member. Ask the planter to keep you in the loop about whom he's communicating with. Not only will that build trust between the two of you, but also very occasionally it allows you to flag anyone who shouldn't be on a launch team. We all know there are toxic people who would love a fresh new start at spreading venom. There are also people who are too wounded or needy to be helpful for an indefinite season. Going back to the "catch and release" analogy, sometimes you may intend to release a fish, but they are wounded badly by the hook. In that case, you have to count that fish as one of the six you're allowed to take. The point is this: Some people are so wounded they have to be kept.

### *Exponential's Deleted Scenes*

In light of sending Dave Mariano and other capable leaders, Chris Wienand's story has been very thought provoking for me.

One of the great perks of doing main stage programming for Exponential was filming and interviewing great leaders, and then watching the film over and over (and over) throughout the editing process. Sometimes it was painful to edit videos down to three or four minutes. A lot of really insightful stuff had to hit the editing floor. I often remarked to Shannon, "I'm learning stuff that hardly anyone else at Exponential will ever get a chance to hear."

Chris Wienand's "DiscipleShift" interview was at the top of that list. Shnikies! His story is inspiring! He met Jesus in the 1970s through the Jesus People Movement in South Africa. Chris ended up becoming a church planter, but he knew it needed to be a multiplying church. He started relationally discipling guys who eventually became the 12 elders in his church. Catch this. He had three filters for potential elders. First, they had to qualify biblically (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). Second, they had to exude the characteristics of a

shepherd. Third, he wanted to appoint dudes who were *all* potential church planters. They weren't obligated to plant, but it needed to be a high value and possibility.<sup>3</sup>

After the elders were appointed, Chris let them peek under the hood to see what daily ministry in the local church looked like. In every elders meeting, he intentionally made comments like, "One day when you lead your own church, here's something you'll need to know..." Eleven of those South African elders eventually spun off to plant in places like Australia, Europe and Africa.

I was whining about losing one potential elder. Chris Wienand, on the other hand, raised up elders-pastors-overseers and then released eleven-twelfths of them to plant churches! Eleven of his "most capable people." Now *that's* a sending church!

### **The Tension Between Two Dreams**

A few years ago, Brett Andrews from New Life Christian Church came to speak at Momentum for the first time. At the beginning of his message, he encouraged Momentum by saying, "Some people dream of planting a big impressive tree, while others dream of planting orchards. Momentum is planting orchards."

That meant a lot coming from a guy who has spent most of his life "planting orchards." That's one of the things I love about Brett Andrews: He'll die on the hill of church planting. I'll die there next to him—hopefully several years later.

Brett's analogy reveals a very realistic tension between two different goals. Every day, decisions are made based upon which of these two dreams we're chasing. We either pursue the vision of the big, impressive tree or the vision of the orchards.

Which one do you dream of planting?

Hopefully it will be the option most likely to produce the greatest amount of fruit and result in the words, "Well done."

## Chapter 5

### The Sunset Clause

Exponential Director Todd Wilson has told me that many of the world's most generous philanthropists today want to achieve maximum impact in the shortest amount of time possible. In fact some of them are saying, "I'm not interested in creating a charitable organization that will be my legacy long after I'm dead and gone."

Why do they not want an organization to be their legacy? The answer lies partly behind the fact that most organizations only live out a maximum lifespan of 30 years. Peter Drucker, internationally recognized as the Father of Modern Management, used to hammer the point that few businesses or organizations last beyond 30 years. In his influential book, *Management*, Drucker wrote this about survivability:

"The number of years has been shrinking during which an employing institution can expect to stay successful. This period was never very long. Historically, very few businesses were successful for as long as 30 years in a row. To be sure, not all businesses ceased to exist when they ceased to do well. But the ones that survived beyond 30 years usually entered into a long period of stagnation—and only rarely did they turn around again and once more become successful growth businesses."<sup>1</sup>

By the way, I'm not a management expert. I'm only aware of Drucker's point because I am a disciple of Todd Wilson, who is a disciple of Bob Buford, who is a disciple of Peter Drucker.

You may ask, "What about Coca-Cola? That company's lasted well beyond 30 years." Yes, there are those businesses that make it into—or past—their 30-somethings. The point is they are rare birds. They're Honus Wagner baseball cards.

For another example, take a look at the local church. In *The American Church in Crisis* author David Olson deduces, "The growth rate of churches is highest in their early years." One fascinating chart in his book uses an S curve to plot the collective growth rate of more than 75,000 mainline and evangelical Protestant churches. The chart reveals a strong growth surge sustained throughout the early years, but it tails off completely by the time these churches turn 30 years old. They stop growing. At *best*, churches become stagnant after 30 years of existence. By the age of 40, they're declining.<sup>2</sup>

Does that sound familiar, my fellow aging friends? How are those knees feeling these days? Is your lower back still giving you trouble? My first knee injury came just a few weeks before I turned 30. I was holding my 1-year-old son and squatted down to turn off a fan. Wow. I should have known better than to push my body so hard. Based on Olson's finding, I don't think it's any coincidence that Paul constantly described the church as "the 'body' of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27).

You may be asking, "What about Rockstar Community Church in my denomination? They're 45 years old, and they're still growing." Yes, that's *another* awesome exception. Please remember, though, that Rockstar Community Church is a rare bird.

Consider the Antioch church from Acts 13. It no longer exists, does it? It certainly doesn't exist in the form it used to. None of those great congregations from the New Testament exist anymore. They're gone. I know you probably don't want to think about it, but someday the same will be true of the churches we're leading.

If Drucker and Olson are correct, we've got some tough questions to start asking ourselves in a hurry. If *most* churches stop growing by the time they hit 30, it begs the question: How can we make the greatest impact in the shortest amount of time? How can we take advantage of our early, fruitful years when we're reaching more people? We need to figure this out, because we don't have much time.

In the words of Hannibal Lector, "Tick-tock, Clarice."

## 2035

My friend Todd Wilson was also my first church-planting coach. There are a few things you need to know about Todd. First, he looks like George Costanza from *Seinfeld*.

"George is getting upset!"

"Serenity now!"

"I declare this, 'The summer of George!'"

Second, his spiritual gift is making people feel stupid. He doesn't mean to do it. It's not that he's rude or proud. He's just *that* smart! When it comes to brainpower, he's the Dr. Sheldon Cooper of God's church. Every time I hang out with him, I leave thinking, *Why, God? Why can't I be that intelligent? Why did you have to make me so beautiful instead?*

The cool part of Todd's story is how he shares his knowledge and strategies with so many leaders to help the church accomplish its mission. I am definitely one of the lucky suckers Todd has blessed. I will accept any amount of time that he will give me. Anyone who has been encouraged or inspired by the Exponential conference has also been blessed, if indirectly, by Todd's freaky smarts.

In the early years of Momentum, I had a coaching conversation on the phone with Todd. I was feeling like I was in over my head. We had sent 50 people to Velocity, and I was secretly struggling with the wisdom behind multiplication and sending. That morning, Todd told me about a concept in philanthropy called the sunset clause. A sunset clause essentially puts an end date on something you don't want to exist forever. The concept dates back to the Romans—and is still used today in the public policy of many countries—to put time limits on specific laws.

In the area of philanthropy, some individuals have started benevolent organizations, but they've included a sunset clause to shut it down in, for example, 30 years. Therefore if they started a nonprofit in 2010, they would insist on all of its money being spent by 2040. Other founders create a type of sunset clause stating that all of their money should be spent by the time they die. Bob Buford, a cable-TV pioneer and venture philanthropist, has joked that his goal is to "make the last check bounce." Essentially, these benefactors are saying they don't want their legacy to be an organization that will be ineffective 30 years from now, burning resources just to stay in existence or to pay the staff. They want to make the biggest impact with their resources in the shortest amount of time.

After explaining the sunset clause concept, Todd asked, “Dan, what if a *church* instituted a sunset clause?”

Whoa. My wheels started turning 100 miles per hour.

Momentum’s first few people arrived in Cleveland in May 2005. What if we acknowledged that our early years would be our best years, and we literally added a sunset clause to Momentum’s name and logo? What if we determined to use up all of our resources by 2035 and cease to exist as a congregation? How would that fuel the urgency of our mission? How would it affect the way that we love, serve and impact Greater Cleveland? How would it drive our calling to launch spinoffs by sending money and people?

Church planter, what impact would a sunset clause have on the church you lead or are about to start? How would that affect the culture of your church? What if you stood up at your gathering once a year and said something to the effect of, “Happy birthday, everyone! We are turning three years old today! We’ve only got 27 more years to go! Let’s do this!” Imagine the urgency that would communicate!

### **Urgency in the Early Church**

Paul seemed driven by a similar urgency in the first century. He was a tenacious church planter set apart by the Holy Spirit and released by the Antioch church to spin off new churches. In one of his writings, Paul taught, “The Lord himself will come down from heaven ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the LORD forever” (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Did you notice something there? Paul says, “*We* who are still alive.” That sounds an awful lot like Paul thought Jesus would return during his lifetime, doesn’t it? Paul didn’t make lame predictions about the exact “day or hour,” but I think he had concluded that the end was imminent. He sincerely believed that Jesus would come back while he was still kicking, and Paul lived his life accordingly.

Paul dedicated his life to sharing the story of Jesus—and his testimony—with every Roman citizen, Philippian jailor and Greek philosopher God put in his path. He dedicated himself to starting churches across the entire Mediterranean world! Paul would go to a new city, preaching, teaching and appointing elders, and then go and do it again in another city. Rinse and repeat. Why? Because Paul thought Jesus would return at any moment. He wanted to make the biggest impact in the shortest amount of time.

Many individuals and congregations in the first century already had a sunset clause. It was called “the return of Christ!” They thought Jesus would be back within 30 years! There was a sense of urgency to use up all their energy and resources to expand God’s Kingdom ASAP! They didn’t have any interest in institutionalizing the church. They said, “Our window of opportunity is *now*! Let’s make the biggest possible impact within the shortest possible time.”

What if we did ministry like we had a sunset clause? Better yet, what if we lived and led like Jesus might come back today or tomorrow? We would only focus on strategies that build the Kingdom of God. We would be crazy about training and releasing people to do ministry within their spheres of influence. We’d be passionate



about sending money and people. We'd concentrate on spawning spinoffs in unreached neighborhoods with laser-like focus.

### **The Sunset Filter**

What if your church, as the statistics suggest, only had 30 years to make its biggest impact? What if you embraced the odds and lived out the sunset clause? Imagine how it would change the way you do ministry. It would be an amazing filter for several processes within your church.

**1. Staff hiring** Would we make this hire if we knew our church only had 30 years to make an impact?

**2. Decision making** Would we move forward with this idea or strategy if we were closing down in, for example, 2035?

**3. Long-term strategic planning** Would this be our goal if we only existed for three decades?

**4. Budgeting** With so little time to make an impact, should we spend money this way?

A sunset clause wouldn't allow you to carry on with "business as usual." You certainly wouldn't function like the typical American church. It would light a fire under you to lead with guts. You would have a bias toward action. You would try to make the biggest impact in the shortest amount of time, knowing that tomorrow is not promised to you. It would be like living your life, knowing the exact day you're going to die!

If I didn't have really good judgment, I'd quote lyrics from Nickelback's song "If Today Was Your Last Day" right now. Nobody wants that though. Relax.

### **#1 – Sending Money**

A sunset clause would also drive a church to multiply. Pretend your church had 30 years—and 30 years only—to make an impact with its money and resources. What if you therefore made it your goal to send out every dime and possession within 30 years for the purpose of multiplication? That would be a wise strategy for making the biggest impact. Dole out your resources to other new churches that are entering into their most fruitful years of ministry.

Let me give a concrete example of how the sunset mentality has impacted Momentum's story. In 2009 Darryl Davis was introduced at a KSP network meeting in Columbus. Darryl was a sergeant in the Cincinnati Police Department. He's the only minister I know who uses a Glock for nine-tenths of his sermon illustrations. Darryl needed money so that he could work full time to launch Pathways Christian Church down in Cincinnati. By the way, if you're not familiar with Cincinnati, it's a suburb of Kentucky. (Hehe!)

One of the fun things about our network meetings is how Greg Nettle, the vision caster for KSP, will occasionally stand up and "do his thang" to meet a financial need

like this. I already told you—he’s a baller. In this case, Greg said to the room full of 100 church leaders, “We need \$200,000 to launch Pathways. We’ve got a planter, a launch team and a target area. We just need the money. I think we can come up with most or all of the funds right here in this room. RiverTree will lead the way by giving the first \$50,000. Who else will commit \$50,000, \$25,000 or \$10,000 over the next three years?”

Awkward silence.

Greg started making way too much eye contact.

More awkward silence.

Then a voice I didn’t recognize spoke from the back of the room and said, “I’ll talk to my elders, but I think we can do \$25,000 over three years.”

God’s spirit of generosity started to move.

Whenever Greg does this, it’s a thing of beauty.

When we left the network meeting after Darryl Davis had been introduced, his plant was not yet fully funded. On the drive home, I began talking with the staff saying, “Guys, we’ve been setting aside 10 percent of our internal offerings for a while now, and we’ve accumulated over \$25,000. Personally, I’d like a Cleveland plant to be the first church we support with our Multiplication Fund. It would be easier to cast that vision to Momentum, but I don’t think we should wait that long. Think about the sunset clause. We can’t let church-planting money sit in our bank account, because Jesus could come back today! That money is meant to start churches. I think we should give \$25,000 to Darryl Davis and Pathways.”

Everyone in the car discussed it, and we all agreed, “Let’s do it!”

We invited Darryl and his launch team to worship with us at Momentum on Labor Day weekend in 2009. We introduced him to the church and gave him a hefty check—our first \$25,000 of church-planting money. After the service, I was blown away to see Momentum people high-fiving in the hallway. I remember thinking, *Man, I love this church! They already understand why we are being generous, even though we aren’t fully self-supporting yet!*

Before Darryl came to the stage to talk that Sunday, guess what sermon he and his team heard me preach? My sermon was entitled “The Sunset Clause.”

Ever since 2009, we have had a sense of urgency about giving away our church-planting money. We’ve done everything within our power to make sure we “don’t let church-planting money just sit in the bank.” Jesus could come back today, so let’s start as many churches as we can right now.

### *Brick and Mortar*

Before I wrap up this point, let me cut to the chase about one of the biggest issues that affects, or will affect, our generosity: buildings. If we really, really, really believe Jesus could come back today or tomorrow, would we spend \$5 million to build a building? I think it’s an extremely valid question for church planters and other church leaders. The first Christians didn’t do anything like that. In the first century, every church met in people’s homes and public spaces until the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. After that, some churches *still* met in houses and buildings that had been built for other purposes.

On Momentum's launch Sunday, our newcomer reception called "Starting Point" was packed. I had to stand on a chair to be seen by everyone. Of course, there was one woman whose only question was, "When are you going to build a building?" There's one of those in every crowd.

*Tomorrow, sweetie. It's a top priority. We'll get right on that.*

Don't get me wrong. I'm not "anti-buildings" at all, *especially* if they're already built. (If 3,500 U.S. churches close every year, there have to be a few empty buildings out there, right?) In fact I really like buildings. I consistently have to fight the temptation to want buildings for ungodly reasons that center on envy, image, comfort and so-called "credibility in the community." Why do I resist it? Partly because we're broke! Mostly though, I just don't believe that spending millions of dollars on brick and mortar is how we as God's church will have the biggest impact in the shortest amount of time. I'm sure there are exceptions to this rule, but I hope we all think long and hard before committing to a building project.

A building often institutionalizes your church, making it stick around for longer than it should. The typical church is in decline within 30 years. However, most churches keep fighting to hold onto their buildings, names and logos long after they've stopped making disciples. We all know church members who have developed an unhealthy psychological connection to "the building they grew up attending." They call it "the church" and "God's house." Their battle to stay afloat often amounts to loads of wasted time, energy and money—resources that could have been used to powerfully advance the Kingdom.

Do you want your current members re-enacting this same scenario after you leave your church? If not, you can relate to the philanthropists I mentioned earlier. Lead your church to give it all away for the sake of multiplication.

## **#2 – Sending People**

Pretend you have 30 years to shepherd your flock. What if you made it your goal to send out most—or all—of those people to start other churches? What if 25 years from now, there was almost an entirely new cast whom you will have grown to love as much as the original cast and this new cast played most of the roles in your church? What if your goal was to be a sending leader?

John the Baptist was a sending leader. He made a career out of setting people up to leave. John had a sunset clause—the *first* coming of Jesus! He preached out in the wilderness, drew a large crowd and baptized people in the Jordan River. One of his messages was, "I'm not the man. There is someone coming after me you should want to follow even more than me. He's the man." When Jesus showed up to begin His public ministry, John exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29, 36). He was pretty much telling people, "You should stop following me, and follow that guy!" A couple of his disciples—maybe some of his closest friends—understood John's challenge and left him to follow Jesus (John 1:37). Clearly, John was driven by the Kingdom's agenda, not by his own ego. His mission statement was, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

I wonder if John was frustrated that more of his disciples *didn't* go. When I read about John's remaining disciples in John 4:1, I'm a little surprised that John still *has* any

disciples left! It seems to me like John was trying to preach his church down to zero. Maybe that's why Jesus said, "From the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing."<sup>3</sup>

Knowing your time is limited should push you toward multiplication. Proactively, you should be preparing your current disciples to follow their next leader, even if he hasn't appeared yet. When the new leader does show up, emphatically point people in that direction. Play the servant role like John. Set up the new leader to be "greater" by making yourself "less." When it's all said and done, God might just call you to preach your church down to zero, so that the Kingdom can be forcefully advanced.

### *The Parking Lot Epiphany (Reprise)*

In the Introduction of this book, I introduced you to Tracy and told you about her feeling called to leave our church. After meeting with her that afternoon, walking back to my car, guess what was in the back of my mind, partially filtering the thoughts that led to my parking lot epiphany? It was the sunset clause.

*If we only survive for seven years, but we start seven churches in that time period, so be it! Who cares about Momentum Christian Church as a nonprofit organization? We shouldn't be concerned about this silly logo because God isn't! Our main agenda should be advancing His Kingdom. We need more spinoff churches!*

That day, I faced the facts. If David Olson is telling us that most churches only have 30 years *maximum* to make their biggest impact, then I don't want to bank on being one of the few who's effective beyond that point. Chances are, Momentum's not going to be Coca-Cola or Rockstar Community Church. Therefore, I will relentlessly tell Momentum that every person is a leader or a potential leader. Every person is a missionary or a potential missionary. Every person is a church planter or a potential church planter. God gets to decide who stays or goes, but I want everyone to consider if his or her calling is to be sent.

### **Literally?**

You may be wondering if Momentum will be closing shop in 2035. To be honest, we've thought hard about it. Our staff and leaders have discussed the pros and cons. I've asked for wisdom from my mentors and coaches. In the end, we haven't felt like God was calling us to literally make a sunset clause. That could change any day. If He calls us to do it, we are willing to obey Him in this area. After all, Momentum Christian Church is His church. However, the concept of the sunset clause has helped to shape our culture. It still drives our urgency to reach the lost and to send money and people. Plus, Jesus might return today.

### **Things I'd Do Differently**

If I could go back and plant Momentum all over again, knowing what I know now, there isn't a lot I'd do differently. Some of our mistakes have led to come-from-behind victories. On the topic of multiplication though, I'd take do-overs in two areas.

1. In 2005 we had several solid leaders and potential leaders on our launch team. Looking back, I wish I would have intentionally prepared them to become coaches and potential coaches. Pushing them to “lead leaders” instead of “be leaders” would have prepared us better for internal and external multiplication. When I was training these men and women in leadership huddles, I should have consistently said things like, “One day, when you’re coaching and discipling your own group of leaders, you will need to remember this.” Had I done this, Velocity and CityEdge might be even stronger today.

2. One other thing I would do differently: I would make all of my staff and volunteers read this chapter. I’d want them to know that we will never ever get these opportunities again. You only get to launch *once*. You only get to experience your second Sunday *once*. You only get to take advantage of your third Sunday once. You only get “Year Two” once. A church is most fruitful in its younger years, so squeeze all of the potential you can out of every opportunity. What if God only gives us 11 fruitful years before we plateau? We need to be prepared to make our biggest impact *early* on and “leave it all on the court.”

If our churches *did* have sunset clauses—or lived like Jesus might come back today—I think they’d look a lot more like the first-century church described in Acts. We wouldn’t have so many church buildings. There would be very little competition between churches. We certainly wouldn’t accept the notion that we have “all the time in the world.” We would focus on multiplication as our top priority. The mission would not just be “catching,” but also “releasing.”

The Antioch church from Acts 13 may not exist anymore, but their legacy lived on through the spinoffs that Saul and Barnabas launched. They saw to it that the church was multiplied and the Kingdom was advanced. As a result, *we’re* this church’s legacy.

## **Our Vision**

Truthfully, I’ll be content with Momentum’s attendance staying between 200 and 400 people for the next couple of decades if—and only if—we’re sending off chunks of 10, 25 or 50 people once a year to start a new church or campus. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to settle for being part of a great church. I’d rather be part of a *movement* of great churches.

Our vision as a church and the CLE Network is to release money and people to help start a New Testament church in each of Cleveland’s 36 neighborhoods and in each of the suburbs in Greater Cleveland. We’d also love to put a missionary in every apartment complex and public school. We want to be good news to every community in and around Cleveland. Realistically, I find it highly unlikely this vision will be fulfilled in my lifetime, but I hope—with God’s help—that we create a church-planting movement that comes close!

I often think it would be cool if, 50 years from now, sociologists study Greater Cleveland and are forced to ask several questions:

“Why has the racial harmony improved so much in the last 50 years?”

“Why have school shootings decreased drastically in the Cleveland area?”

“Why are there fewer divorces, suicides, teen pregnancies, detention centers, drunk drivers, junkies and homeless people?”

“Why is Cleveland no longer the (or one of the) poorest big cities in America?”

These would be tangible signs of the Kingdom’s presence in our city, right?

*This used to be the most miserable city in the nation! How did that change?*

Imagine those sociologists, if they were honest, having to give credit to Jesus and His church.

Maybe they’d report, “The good news of relief and transformation in the city of Cleveland has been the result of efforts from local churches: Velocity, CityEdge, Revolution 216, Cuyahoga Valley, St. Michael, Bay Presbyterian and many other churches over the last half-century.”

That would be a sending church’s dream come true, even if Momentum is no longer in existence to make the list or take any credit.

## Epilogue Grundy

Recently, I visited my alma mater, Kentucky Christian University, and popped in to see my old prof and friend, Dr. Robert Ford. As we chatted, he told me that Momentum's story and vision of multiplication reminded him of the late Clarence Greenleaf, a preacher from the mid-20th century.

Dr. Ford explained, "Greenleaf was a minister in Grundy, Virginia. When his church grew to 550 people, he would send out 50 of them to start a new church. When they grew back to 550, he'd do it again."

Momentum has never come close to an attendance of 550 people, but needless to say the story fascinated me. Very few people ever tell me, "Hey! Momentum's vision for sending reminds me of another church." I started digging. Eventually, I got my hands on an obscure biography about Mr. Greenleaf and the phone numbers of some churches in Grundy. What I've learned hasn't disappointed.

Clarence Greenleaf (1915-2004) was a great visionary who ministered in the Appalachian mountains of Virginia at Grundy Church of Christ. In the early 1940s, the church decided they would not be satisfied with addition growth alone. They would multiply their church. They wanted to spread the Good News of Jesus to all areas of the county. Greenleaf's vision was that everyone in Grundy would be within walking distance of a church. In his biography *Preacher Greenleaf*, he told author Joseph O'Neal, "Between Grundy and fifteen miles away, you might have three mountains to go over."<sup>1</sup>

To accomplish the vision, Grundy Church sent 25 to 50 people to be the nucleus for each new congregation. "That's the best way," Greenleaf insisted. "It's hard on the Grundy church, but the best way in the world to start New Testament evangelism and New Testament churches is to send 25 of your best members to a place down the road to begin a new church. Send the members with the most money—now, that will deflate you."<sup>2</sup>

Man, I love this guy! Greenleaf easily could have led Grundy Church to a blue ribbon in the Biggest Squash Competition! Instead, he kept his ego in check and insisted they distribute their church's resources and wealthiest people to other churches throughout the region.

One of Grundy's members commented on their church's sending culture, saying, "This tells you a lot about the man, Clarence Greenleaf. He could have made a big name for himself and built an empire right here in Grundy, or he could do what would win the most people to Christ."

Grundy Church had many strategies for multiplication. For instance, they sent a bus to one target area to bring in a dozen or more people to their services. That sounds like a typical church growth strategy, right? Nope. Eventually, when the bus was full of people from that area, they stopped sending the bus and just started a church there. Grundy didn't see the busload of people as a way to pad their statistics; they saw it as the nucleus for a new congregation. Then they sent the empty bus to a new target area to do it all over again!

Grundy Church started churches in a house, a schoolhouse, a jailhouse and a bus. They also scraped bubble gum off seats and walls to meet in a theater. Does any of that sound familiar, church planters? We're not as innovative and cutting edge as we think we are, right? Apparently "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecc. 1:9).

Grundy spun off Haysi Church of Christ in 1956, Vansant Church of Christ in 1957, Poplar Creek Church of Christ in 1957, Garden Creek Church of Christ in 1959, Breaks Church of Christ in 1960 and Kelsa Church of Christ in 1961—to name a few.<sup>3</sup>

Mike Rife is currently the senior minister at Vansant Church of Christ, four miles away from Grundy Church. He knew Greenleaf personally and worked with him a great deal. Mike told me, "Grundy Church spun off over 25 churches between 1940 and 1960. Those churches are all in the same county within walking distance from one another. You can walk out of one church building and travel two miles to get to the next. Walk two more miles, and you'll find another." Grundy multiplied until there was a church in every "holler." Greenleaf's church-planting vision became a reality.

Greenleaf went to be with the Lord in 2004, a year before we moved to Cleveland. I selfishly wish he hadn't. I'd love to hear more of his stories. I'd ask him dozens of questions about his vision, mission and strategies. Instead, I'll have to settle for being one of his posthumous disciples.

How many people are following Jesus—or in Heaven—today because Clarence Greenleaf led Grundy Church to send buses, money and people? How many will be in Heaven because one of Grundy's spinoff churches impacted their entire family tree? I'd bet my Xbox that the number of people this church has reached is far greater than it would be if Grundy had relied on addition growth versus multiplication.

My hope is that God will use Momentum to be a "Grundy Church" in Greater Cleveland, making disciples and launching spinoffs. On the other hand, maybe our role is to help *start* churches that will have the kind of impact Grundy Church had. Maybe my children, Zion, Azlan and Journey, will be leaders in those churches and in their communities. That's the magic of multiplication. There's more than one opportunity to create a spark.

How about you? What is your vision for your church? What about the region surrounding your church? What is your dream for future generations? Will you release money and people to forcefully advance God's Kingdom?

A lot of future church planters need a generous partner church. A lot of church leaders need to hear this kind of story or see this kind of example. A lot of broken people outside of your immediate area—young "Dan Smiths"—need to hear about the love and grace of Jesus. You can do something to help all of these people—something that might just ignite a culture of multiplication.

Send.



## **End Notes**

### **Chapter 2**

<sup>1</sup> “Baby Got Book” Music Video (Dan Smith)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTYr3JuueF4>.

<sup>2</sup> “Sent” Video (Momentum Christian Church) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnietWxJqY>

### **Chapter 4**

<sup>1</sup><http://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/do-you-truly-believe-these-realities-about-life>

<sup>2</sup>Alexis Wilson, “Four Models for Transforming Marketplace Leaders into Kingdom Leaders,” p. 3; <http://makarioscommunities.co.za/makarios/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/FourModels-Marketplace-Leaders.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Zondervan, 1998), p. 40-41.

### **Chapter 5**

<sup>1</sup>Drucker, Peter F., *Management – Revised Edition* (HarperBusiness; Reprint edition: 1993), p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup>Olson, David T., *The American Church in Crisis* (Zondervan: 2008), p. 83.

### **Epilogue**

<sup>1</sup>O’Neal, Joseph E., *Preacher Greenleaf* (1990), p. 157-165.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## About the Author



Dan Smith is a church planter and the lead minister at Momentum Christian Church in Greater Cleveland. He also leads the “CLE Network,” a church-planting network that is part of Kingdom Synergy Partnership (KSP) and Stadia. From 2011 to 2014, Dan served as main stage programming leader and emcee/”Fungi” for the Exponential conferences. In 2012, he won an Ohio Hip-Hop Award and in 2013 was nominated for the hip-hop album *North Coast Patriarchs*. “Smitty” is also a comedy music writer, having written and performed the viral song/video “Baby Got Book.” His comedy albums include *The Caucasian Invasion* and *D.E.B. ’S. Kid*. All of his songs can be found on iTunes under the worst rapper name ever: Dan Smith.

Dan is a graduate of Kentucky Christian University and has a Masters of Arts in storytelling from East Tennessee State University. In high school, he worked for McDonald’s for two years and was promoted all the way up to Crew Trainer. Dan lives in Garfield Heights, Ohio, with his wife, Shannon, and their three kids, Zion, Azlan and Journey. Together, they cheer loudly for the San Francisco 49ers, Cleveland Browns, Cleveland Cavaliers and Ohio State Buckeyes.

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