



GOSPEL

Saturation

PRIMER

Preface

This *Primer* is nothing new. That's a terrible place to begin, right?

Or, is it?

The truth is there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc 1:9). Certainly that includes thoughts about God and His Church. In fact, since we are speaking about the eternal God we should find the same truths resounding again and again in the concepts we read as church leaders.

Yet, we should be confronted with truth in such a way that it forces us to rethink ideas we know and believe. God's truth should be jarring—it should propel us out of patterns of belief or behavior that are sub-biblical or errant altogether. The daunting onslaught of challenges faced by the modern church means that such a challenge is needed time and time again.

The Gospel Saturation *Primer* is designed to be

**The Gospel is
for every man,
woman, and
child.**

**We want
to create
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one such tool that works to understand God's mission through His church. We want to create a shared language for a shared culture sent on a shared mission.

Be warned: This work is going to compel you to want to act. As with any new concept, our first impression will be to flip switches, pull levers, and push buttons. If anyone knows that things need to change in the church it is those to whom God entrusts leadership. But, you must resist this urge at all costs. It's vital that you sit and soak in these truths for a while before you act on anything. For true and lasting change to result, these ideas are going to have to implant themselves deep inside your heart and mind, and that will take time.

For that reason, we've also created a companion volume to this *Primer*, the *Gospel Saturation Accelerator*, that is meant to aid you, and the leaders in your church and city, in putting the truths we discuss here into practice. For now, simply remember that God is not in a hurry. He is on mission and one of the key places that mission begins is in your heart as you consider His purpose for every man, woman, and child to see, hear, and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. ■

Flow of Conversations

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Introduction

Jesus loves His Church. This isn't news to us, especially to those of us who have given our lives to help lead, plant, or pastor a church. We love the Church as well, or else we wouldn't invest in its health and mission. Every year, thousands upon thousands of blogs, hundreds of books, and dozens of conferences are produced in an effort to help the Church we love. These tools come alongside the scores of denominations, agencies, and networks that are tasked with the responsibility of facilitating the Church's work.

IS IT WORKING?

Some say yes. There's no question that there are more tools available to church leaders than at any point in history. In a click, those who care about the Church can find resources to address any issue they might face—ecclesiology, missiology, leadership, evangelism, vision and on and on. This is a kind gift of God's grace. There's also little question that our day is seeing a rise in church planting passion. We champion and fund the work of planting and, as a result, more and more churches begin. This, again, is a gift of grace. Finally, there are bigger churches. The relatively recent rise of the megachurch is a phenomenon that has had wide-sweeping effect on the Church in North America. And, in His grace, God has seen fit to use these churches in mighty ways.

Yet, with all of our attention and investment into the craft of doing church, Christianity is fading across our country. Other scholars are far better equipped to trace the macro-level cultural trends that have propelled Christianity to the margins. This is not the purpose of the *Primer* you hold in your hands. We are starting with the assumption that there is a problem and that our current methods aren't working, at least not in the ways or to the extent that we'd like them to. It seems that all of the attention and engineering that we've been working on over the last half century has not produced what we all desire to see: a movement of God and His Kingdom for His glory in our land.

This means that church leaders must do the hard work of assessing current models and determining a course forward. The *Primer* you hold in your hands is an effort to do just that. But, it's important that you not approach this like a book you might read. You know the kind that are likely littered all over your bedroom and office? The ones that you started, underlined a few catchy phrases, and abandoned because something more important demanded your attention? You're going to need to process, reflect, and discuss the ideas presented in the pages ahead. That's not to say the concepts we discuss are going to be earth-shattering or new for most of you. It's because we've intentionally constructed this *Primer* as broader conversations with leaders of the church in your city. It's there, as the Holy Spirit works through the conversations of those he's entrusted to lead His church, that something profound happens. So, let's get to talkin'. ■

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Conversation 1:

Operating System

Section 1

He was a new pastor full of promise and passion. There's no doubt that he possessed a fair share of youthful idealism, but as far as he could tell his motives were pure. He longed for God's greatness to be seen in the world through the local church. He wept over the brokenness of his city, the lostness of his friends, family, and neighbors, and longed for people to be transformed by the power of God's Spirit. He wanted to see the church radiate as the beautiful bride of Christ in a world overcome with darkness. He had a sense of what God wanted in the world, and he longed to see God do something only He could do. He prayed, sometimes through tears, that every man, woman, and child he knew would come to saving faith in Jesus. He stayed up at night thinking about questions like: What does God want? How can I help the church step into what God wants?

But something happened. It's hard to define the "something". In reality it wasn't one thing, it was many things. The internal needs of the church he pastored were vast—people were hurting, marriages were falling apart, teenagers were rebelling, people were crippled by addiction, and cancer diagnoses were an all-too-common reality. These issues were compounded by the structural needs of the institution of the church. Deferred maintenance left the buildings in disrepair,

often leading to yet another building campaign, the staff hurt from the fractures of disunity, and the calendar was littered with events to run and programs to maintain. These outward realities also exposed the lingering brokenness of this pastor's life as the sin that clings so closely continually threatened to derail his race. He battled resentment to those who hurt him, confronted irrational fears and insecurities, and fell prey to the same sins from which he longed for his people to be delivered.

The drift was subtle at first. He found that he spent far more time consumed with the internal needs of the church than the external mission of the church. He didn't sign up to manage an institution, but more and more, that's what he found himself doing. He still believed in the mission, but he struggled to find the time and energy to prioritize it. Some nights as he tossed and turned in his bed, he felt the zeal for God's mission return. He remembered the early days of ministry when his feet hit the ground in the morning with an unrelenting passion for God's glory to be seen and known. He dreamed that those days would come again, hating the missionless reality he observed in most Christians and terrified of seeing the same apathy bubbling up in his own soul.

Every pastor gets it. For all of us, our calling started with a desire to see God do something in our city that only He could do. Yet, we've all been this pastor. Some of us still are. The question hasn't changed: What does God want in the world? Our answer likely hasn't changed either: To fill the earth with His greatness. What we don't know is how to get from where we and our churches are to the place God wants us.

So what do you do?

There's an App for that.

This sentence was once nonsensical—now it's hard to go a day without using an App for something. Apps allow us to do everything from managing our bank accounts, finding directions to a meeting, or checking the latest sports score. We use them to Tweet pithy thoughts or post pictures of our adorable two-year-old for the world to see. We can even fill a few spare minutes using Apps to play Angry Birds, Pokémon Go, or any other silly game. Apps are everywhere.

Yet the pervasive presence of Apps is predicated on another technological invention—one you can't see and may even forget about, at least until it's time for the latest update to be released. Every App depends on an operating system (OS). Built on the fundamental binary code of 0's and 1's, an operating system gives direction to everything else, including every App we use each day. The OS drives the Apps and if the operating system is incomplete, faulty, or defective, the Apps are useless.

Every aspect of our lives consists of both Apps and operating systems. We make decisions about right and wrong (Apps) because of our fundamental worldview (OS). We invest our money (Apps) because of an understanding of the nature of financial markets (OS). Sports teams run certain plays (Apps) because of a predetermined style of offense or a realization of the weaknesses of their opponents (OS). Parents send their kids to public school (Apps) because of fundamental convictions about the nature of education (OS). We live in a world of Apps driven by operating systems.

The church is no different. Pastors and church leaders are inundated with Apps designed to help the church accomplish all sorts of tasks. Need a model for training your people to share the gospel? There's an App for that. Need a plan for developing a multi-site model? There's an App for that too. It doesn't matter what you are looking for—discipleship, evangelism, church growth, mission trips, Sunday School, preaching, or leadership development—you can find an App for that.

Is It Working?

In spite of the multitude of Apps, one thing is clear—the church in North America is losing ground. Statistics do not tell the whole story but they do give us a picture of the stark realities of the church in our day.

- The largest denomination in the U.S., the Southern Baptist Convention, reports seven straight years of membership decline among its churches;¹
- Less than 20% of Americans actually attend church on a regular basis, which represents about half of those people who say they are engaged in a church;²
- Census data shows that 19.6% of the American population considers themselves to have “no religion”. Labeled “nones” by sociologists, this category represents those who profess to be agnostic, atheistic, or who believe in nothing in particular;³

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¹ From <http://betweenthehours.com/index.php/2015/06/11/the-southern-baptist-decline-continues/>.

² From the book, *The American Church in Crisis* by David T. Olsen.

³ From <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

- Although 80% of churchgoers believe it's important to share your faith, 61% have not done so in the last 6 months.⁴

The results have been catastrophic for the church. Missionary theologians, such as Leslie Newbigin, writing in the mid-twentieth century challenged the North American church to regain its missionary posture towards Western society. He warned the church that the impending cultural changes would lead to an increasingly marginalized church—one that must learn to engage as a missionary in a third-world context void of gospel witness.

These days are now upon us. However, it's clear that the church has not heeded these warnings and now finds itself in a dire position. The United States is now the third largest mission field in the world behind India and China.⁵ You are probably in the best position to assess the success of App-based answers. We can certainly point to systemic issues within the broader church, but what about in the church you lead? How are the current Apps addressing the deep issues you face as you seek to lead God's people in mission? Odds are your experience only validates the broader cultural reality.

Something is broken. This much is clear. The question then becomes, what? What's broken and how do we fix it?

What Are We Doing About It?

**But what if
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The most common assumption is that the problem is with our Apps. Perhaps things will change if we just have the right information, systems, models, or plans. Evangelical culture represents the biggest App store imaginable—we have more books, more conferences, and more missional tools. We have a glutinous volume of information and more church Apps than ever, yet we still lose ground. Sure, a few churches are getting really large. Data shows that the number of megachurches have increased by 150% from 2000-2011. The rise of church planting fervor has prompted the start of more churches than we've seen in recent decades. Yet, the Christian faith is shrinking in 49 out of the 50 states in our nation.⁶

⁴ From <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/research-survey-sharing-christ-2012>.

⁵ <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1231&context=leaven>

⁶ http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches_research.html

App-based answers to the challenges faced by the North American church are predicated on the "how" question. Whether you are starting a new church plant, re-missioning an older church, or attempting to keep the trend of growth going within a large megachurch, most of our thinking and our leadership conversations begin with one of these how questions: "How can we do church better?", "How can we grow?", or "How can we get people engaged in such and such program?" We answer these questions by going to the App store (i.e. our favorite blogs, the latest conference, or the most popular book by the pastor of a rapidly growing church), finding a corresponding App, and running it for a while. In time, we often find that the App either doesn't deliver the intended results or doesn't provide the lasting change we desire. So, we go back to the App store and try something else. Time after time these Apps prove insufficient. In our frustration, we are prone to believe that the problem is with the App—it's not missional, biblical, contextual, strategic, or practical enough.

But what if the problem in the church can't be solved with new Apps?

What if our issue is much deeper, much more pervasive, and far more complex?

The Normative OS

They [the Apps] can help the church accomplish all sorts of laudable goals, but they fail to achieve their maximum potential if they run on an OS that doesn't fulfill the original intent of the creator and founder of the Church, Jesus Christ.

At the risk of oversimplification, let's assume that "church growth" is the normative OS that is running these Apps in the church in North America. A church growth OS places the institution of the church at the focal point and asks what we can do to collect more and more people into a singular local church. This internal focus demands the church prioritize building the organization, protecting assets, and creating programs. Churches driven by this OS would define success by how

many members they have, how many people show up at their weekly services, or how expansive the church's facilities and budget. And, while most would never say it, the drive for growth creates a competitive mindset with other local churches in our communities. We'd likely say that we are passionate about the Great Commission and reaching those far from Christ, but the current church growth OS reveals that we are more concerned with growing our churches and reaching those who are far from Christ if they help us towards that end.

Leaders of churches with this normative operating system pick Apps that help them accomplish their predetermined goal of growth and the App store continues to give them to us. Many of these Apps are not inherently faulty. They can help the church accomplish all sorts of laudable goals, but they fail to achieve their maximum potential if they run on an OS that doesn't fulfill the original intent of the creator and founder of the Church, Jesus Christ. We wrestle with our inherited OS that we learned through our upbringing, our seminaries, our books, our traditions, and our Western culture, to see if it aligns with the OS that God has always intended His people to have. No matter what good has been accomplished under the church growth OS, if it hasn't produced what God really wants then we must re-evaluate everything. This is the journey we will walk for the remainder of this Gospel Saturation *Primer*.

A Better Question

What if we were to begin with a different question—a question that could help us build a completely different operating system? Rather than asking “how”, perhaps we should ask “why”?

Why are you planting that church? Why do you want your church to grow? Why are you going multi-site? Why are you starting that new discipleship program? We need to get to the heart of why we do everything we do as a church. Most of us may answer those questions above with this answer: to reach people for Christ. We want to see people saved and brought into the church. That's not bad, in fact, that's very good, but we've been attempting to do that for decades and we continue to lose ground as the Church of Jesus Christ in North America.

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The reason we must begin with the "why" question is because the answer to this question fuels our vision. We need to align our "why" with God's "why". It's hard to imagine ever seeing a Kingdom movement if there is a disconnect between our "why" and God's "why", or our vision for *our* church and Christ's vision for *the* Church.

The answer to God's "why" is clear throughout the Bible. It is an answer that does not change regardless of the stage of redemptive history. We've likely considered or taught these truths hundreds of times. At the dawn of creation, God's intentions were clear. The Trinitarian God creates all that exists, culminating with the creation of humans who uniquely bear His image (Gen 1:26–28). God creates these image-bearers to have relationship with Him and represent Him in the world. In a stunning act of empowerment, God grants humans the ability to speak and act with His delegated authority in order to cultivate the latent potential of His creative handiwork. As God's image-bearing worshipers, they would multiply and fill the earth with reflections of the glory of God.

The introduction of sin into the story in Genesis 3 has far reaching effects. People's relationship with God, with one another, and with the creation itself is fundamentally altered. Yet, God's plan remains the same. He promises that one day "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14). How could fallen, sinful humans accomplish a task of this magnitude?

They couldn't.

So, God sent Jesus as the exact representation of the glory of the Father (Heb 1:3). Jesus lived in perfect relationship with the other members of the Trinity and represented God's glory on the earth without spot or blemish. His life, death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled the righteous demands of God and satisfied His wrath against sin for those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' finished work (Eph 2:1–10). God grants His children, as a gift

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of His grace, the righteousness of Jesus and restores their image-bearing task. Jesus' famous commission, seen in this light, is a refrain of the task He gave His people in the Garden:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:18–20).

God's people are once again commanded to fill the earth with image-bearing worshipers who would saturate creation with His glorious gospel. Not only does God have the authority to commission them to this task, but He promises to go with them as they do. Soon thereafter, God sends His Spirit to indwell His people in order to empower them to do what they were created to do in the first place (Acts 2:1–4). He commissions His first followers to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Their witness is the tool God will use to gather His people from every tribe, tongue, and nation and fill the earth with reflections of His glory (Rev 7:9).

Paul makes it clear that this mission isn't simply the task of a faithful few. All those who are "in Christ" are entrusted with the "ministry of reconciliation" who serve as "ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:17–20). In God's intended OS, every believer is a missionary, mobilized where they live, learn, work, and play.

Every Believer = A Missionary

This mission is not an arbitrary add-on to the life of discipleship, but the fundamental mission of God's people and, in turn, the driving impetus that creates the local church. Paul's rhetorical question reminds us "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news'" (Romans 10:14–15)! The answer is clear—they can't. So we must go!

This is the task of God's people until the day Jesus' returns and ushers in the new heavens and new earth that will forever be free of the tyranny of sin. There the long-awaited promise of Habakkuk will finally be realized as the glory of God will fill the earth. Until that day, God's people, empowered by His Spirit, are given the mission of testifying to the glory of God to every person on the planet because God is patient towards us, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:8–9).

Most of us as church leaders know these passages. In fact, we've probably preached on them a time or two. Our sermons are filled with words like "gospel", "glory", "discipleship", and "mission". But why? If our "why" is to reach people to grow our own individual church, we've shortchanged the entire vision that God has for His people. God's "why" is His glory filling His creation through His people, or what we could call, Gospel Saturation. In God's intended operating system, we take responsibility for giving every man, woman, and child (EMWC) opportunities to hear, see, and respond to the gospel, not just those who are most likely to respond and grow our church. God's glory must be the "why" behind the story of every disciple, every leader, and every church.

EMWC + an Opportunity

Section 2

What does all of this have to do with Apps and operating systems? Everything! The biblical answer to the “why” question reveals that God wants Gospel Saturation. We can define Gospel Saturation this way:

The church owning the lostness of an identified people in a defined place ensuring that every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This starting point is vastly different than the “how” question on which so much of our current church vision and activity is based. If we have the wrong “why” (church growth) then it really doesn’t matter what App we choose, because we will never get after God’s “what” (Gospel Saturation).

“How” Questions Lead to Answers Based on Apps

“Why” Questions Lead to Answers Based on Operating Systems

Gospel Saturation is the OS on which the Christian life and the church's mission is meant to run. This OS forces us to relentlessly ask: "Do I really want what God wants?" If our vision is to grow a large church, it will be quite small compared to filling the earth with God's glory and declaring the Good News to all creation. What if we had a vision to saturate our city with the gospel and not just grow a larger church? Gospel Saturation is all about giving every man, woman, and child repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus without having to go anywhere. This is God's intention for His church. It's derived from His missionary heart and His redemptive mission seen throughout the Bible.

We know that confronting an OS that many of us have been running is a lot to absorb. It's important that we don't make any sudden changes to "how" we do church yet. We need to prayerfully search God's Word and invite the Holy Spirit to help us align our vision with God's. If we are going to switch over to a new OS of Gospel Saturation instead of church growth, our practices will most certainly change in at least four critical areas. Don't worry too much about teasing out the implications of these practices yet. We will return to them in the final chapters of this *Primer*. For now, let's merely note the ways that our practices derive from our OS.

Four Priorities for Gospel Saturation

Every church has priorities that shape its mission and ministry. This is an unavoidable outcome of the differing operating systems of the church—meaning a church can't have a church growth OS and effectively run Gospel Saturation Apps. The predetermined OS will force the church into certain priorities that will either result in church growth or Gospel Saturation. The shift in operating systems will require a shift in priorities along these four key lines.

From Collection to Mobilization

A church growth OS aims at collection while a Gospel Saturation OS seeks mobilization. Rather than the inward magnetism on which the former OS is built, an OS of Gospel Saturation would

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propel God's people outward. When the human population began collecting to make a name for themselves by building a great tower, God scattered them to multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 11). When the early church wouldn't leave Jerusalem because they had a good thing going with lots of growth (Acts 2), God scattered them to multiply and fill the earth by sending persecution (Acts 8).

By nature, we collect and build. God's nature sends and fills. God is always seeking to get us moving out and into territory unmarked by His kingdom. Since God's Spirit indwells all His people, we know that every disciple of Jesus becomes the access point for the gospel as they fan out in neighborhoods, schools, businesses, gyms, playgrounds, restaurants, and every other place that they go on a regular basis. It's in these contexts that disciples of Jesus fulfill their created design of representing His glory and testifying to His greatness before a watching world. It's there that they actually meet every man, woman, and child, build relationships with them, and live out their missionary design. Our new operating system would necessitate God's people own the lostness where they live, learn, work, and play, and are being mobilized to fulfill this mission.

From Attendance to Transformation

The second priority shift between a church growth and a Gospel Saturation OS would move the church from valuing attendance to valuing transformation. A greater vision must be cast to the church God allows us to lead. God wants His people to be more than attenders of church services and programs. For this to happen, God's people must be transformed by the power of His Spirit. Transformation cannot be programmed by any leader, no matter how gifted. It occurs when God's people are captivated by the gospel, empowered by His

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indwelling Spirit, and compelled by love to live holy lives (Gal 5:22–23). Holiness isn't an end in and of itself, but a means by which God's people can rightly represent Him in the world. Leaders are then empowered "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12–13). Pastors are then freed from the oppressive weight of fulfilling God's mission on behalf of His people, and are instead released for the life-giving task of equipping God's people to live out their mission as "living epistles" of God's power and presence,

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From Competition to Collaboration

Transformed people living on mission for the sake of Gospel Saturation will soon discover that they need each other, thus the third priority of collaboration. The Trinitarian God models for us that mission, community, and collaboration are not exclusive. There isn't a city where any singular church can accomplish the mission of filling their community with image-bearing worshipers. There isn't a workplace, gym, neighborhood, or school where any singular Christian can accomplish the mission alone. Even if we had 100 percent of our people living on mission 100 percent of the time, they would still be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. As a result, Christians and churches with this Gospel Saturation OS would work to collaborate with others to saturate a defined geography with the good news. They'd be less interested in drawing lines of division and demarcation, and more committed to finding meaningful ways to partner with others and live on mission together.

From Addition to Multiplication

These practical changes culminate with a radically new definition of success. We would no longer be satisfied with a small increase in Sunday morning attendance, more people attending our discipleship classes, growth in our buildings or budgets, excellence in our music, sweetness to our fellowship, or even the addition of more campuses or church plants. We would define success by whether or not every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the Gospel. We'd long for multiplication. Attendance, programs, music, preaching,

fellowship, and church planting would not be our final destination or our determination of success. They would simply be a catalyst for multiplying image-bearing worshipers throughout the earth. Our prayer would be that God would do more than grow our churches—we'd pray that He'd multiply a movement of transformed disciples everywhere we go.

If we overhaul our OS along the lines of these four key priorities, we would then be positioned to align our "why" with God's "why". We'd offer up our lives and our churches to the great task of giving every man, woman, and child the opportunity to hear and respond to Jesus Christ. We wouldn't abandon the App store altogether, but we'd now have an OS that is capable of utilizing these Apps for the outcome of Gospel Saturation. We could finally begin asking the "how" questions with the right target on the wall and the right scorecards to evaluate what we are doing.

So, what about you? Is your "why" aligned with God's "why"? If not, you may find that you squander the glorious entrustment you've been given in leading the local church and spend countless years toiling on things that just don't matter all that much. Now's the time to make a change.

Where are We Going?

This new Gospel Saturation operating system is at the heart of this *Primer*. We are burdened that the Church in North America, and in many other places around the world, needs a total overhaul in its OS. We lament the constant clamoring for a new App to run on a flawed OS. We long for churches to embrace Gospel Saturation as their driving OS for everything the church does. We pray for the day when every man, woman, and child in North America can see, hear, and respond to the gospel without having to come to our buildings, programs, and events first.

This *Primer* is not meant to be another App. It's a conversation that is deeper than the difference between attractional or missional or confessional. It's a discussion that is deeper than small groups, missional communities, or Sunday school. It's about concepts far deeper than programmatic churches vs. simple church.

Yet, without certain foundational convictions, these priorities will always remain theoretical or aspirational at best.

We are seeking to rediscover or reexamine an operating system that God has hardwired into the nature of His people and Kingdom. We want to put a pause on asking all the “how” questions that we are inundated with, and spend some time thinking about the “why” and “what” of Gospel Saturation.

The ultimate goal of this *Primer* is to help develop convictions that drive the priorities we’ve outlined above. We know that most pastors and church leaders, at least on their better days, will give mental assent to the need for these shifts to take place. Yet, without certain foundational convictions, these priorities will always remain theoretical or aspirational at best. We will talk about them, pray and preach towards this end, and even pick Apps that we hope will move our churches in this direction.

But, at the end of the day, we’ll revert back to the same old OS because changes like this aren’t easy. They are costly. They will keep you up at night. They’ll probably make some of the church mad. You might lose friends. We certainly might have to restructure our priorities.

None of us will do this work unless we are convinced, at the core of our being, that it’s worth it. If you long to make the transition to a new OS, to one that is about Gospel Saturation, then you’ll need to do some foundational, DNA-type of thinking that will be essential to process. In the pages that follow, we will outline four fundamental principles that must shape our motivations and desires, as well as our philosophy about the mission of the Church. If we hope to see lasting change, these four principles must be hard-wired into the DNA of every believer and leader within the church.

Principles lead to Priorities

Think of these as the four principles that are used to create the OS of Gospel Saturation. They are the core beliefs that shape every action and drive every priority mentioned above.

- **Movement:** God is on redemptive mission among every man, woman, and child through the active engagement of His people;
- **Kingdom:** God’s Kingdom is greater and more important than any singular church;
- **Harvest:** God loves His creation and always wants His people in the harvest to proclaim His glory and gospel to every man, woman, and child;
- **Disciple:** God accomplishes His mission in the world through the transformed lives of His people.

These principles must get in our bones. We have to believe them at the very core

of our being. Building a new operating system demands teaching these principles to our churches and laboring to equip our people to live out these principles in their lives each day. By God's grace, this new OS will be a catalyst towards the transformation of our churches and, more importantly, the transformation of the lives of multitudes of men, women, and children who currently live without saving faith in Christ Jesus. May God help us towards that goal.

Before we move to these four principles, let's return to the pastor we met at the outset of the *Primer*. Perhaps this pastor is all-too-familiar. You intuitively know that you've neglected these questions and settled for something far less than God's design for your life and your church. Take heart! The gospel you preach and teach each week reminds you that God's grace is the foundational reality of all human existence. His actions, through the person and work of Christ, remind us that He is infinitely capable of taking a mess and making it beautiful. If He's capable of taking your sin-drenched soul and making it pure, He is more than able to bring life and passion to you and your church once again. Praise God that with Him nothing is impossible and this includes the work of engaging your church in His mission to fill the earth with His glory. ■

Conversation 2:

Movement

Section 3

Imagine two scenarios. In the first, you are driving down the interstate on your way to a vacation at the beach. The car is packed full of all the essentials—boogie boards, beach chairs, a few good books, and enough sunscreen to lather on the children for seven days in the sun. Your family is jazzed with anticipation about the fun they know awaits them in just a few hours.

And then you see it. The brake lights in the distance warn you that trouble is ahead. As you near the slow-down, you quickly recognize that this isn't a stalled car on the side of the road slowing down a stream of curious onlookers. Cars are backed up for miles—in fact, as far as you can see in the distance there is nothing but one car after another. It's clear that people have been there awhile, since many of them have cut their car's engine off and are now leaning against the guardrails wondering when, or if, they will ever move again.

The second scenario is a bit different. This time your wife has talked you into going to the mall on the last Friday night before Christmas. Assuming you've done something terrible to deserve your fate, you agree to go along. You've driven this route many times over, but tonight you know things are going to be different. As you veer onto the mall exit, your foreboding fate becomes sight. You see every lane exploding with traffic, each car trying to maneuver its way into the turn-lane for the mall. You now know that, not only will you be spending two hours

pretending to care about the color of a shirt for your ten-year-old, but you'll likely be spending just as long sitting in traffic with your fellow mall pilgrims.

What makes these two scenarios different? They certainly have much in common—a planned trip with your family that is interrupted by traffic. But, they are fundamentally different because of one key component—vision. In scene one, you have a vision of a family vacation at the beach. While you've got some 300 miles left to drive, you are driven by the hope of a preferred future that is compelling, life-giving, refreshing, and full of joy. You'll endure the momentary impediments that come your way because of the scope of your vision. Yet, you're not satisfied with incremental progress for the very same reason. Who cares if you move a quarter of a mile in the next hour, when your destination is Florida!

But in the mall scenario, a quarter-mile could be a game-changer. It might mean the difference between sitting next to the dude with his bass turned up a bit too loud and at least being able to walk around the mall eating one of those oversized pieces of greasy pizza. This paltry hope pales in comparison to a week at the beach, so the likelihood of you erupting in anger at the unending stream of traffic is exponentially higher. You know that where you are going is sure to be a let-down, so why endure this agony?

Vision shapes your understanding of your current reality and your hope for what is to come.

The same is true in the local church. The nature and scope of our vision changes everything. The vision for those operating under the old operating system is simple—they want to see more and more people come to faith in Jesus and become vibrant and active members of our local church. Now, certainly it is true that all sorts of factors can usurp the place of this

**Vision
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vision such as the need for enhanced facilities, a bigger staff, more money, better programs, or more effective strategies. Yet, the vision driving each of these needs is defined by growth in our local church.

We would not want to imply that there is anything inherently wrong with this vision. It is a godly desire to long for more people to meet Jesus. We certainly want those people to be discipled in the context of a healthy church. And the result of this growth in conversion and discipleship should have a corresponding positive effect on the growth of our local church.

While this vision isn't wrong, it is inadequate. It has much in common with the trip to the mall at Christmas we mentioned above—both in terms of the weakness in the final destination and in terms of the evaluation of movement to get to that goal.

An Inadequate Destination

**There is often
an inverse
relationship
between
growth and
joy.**

Let's start with the final destination. Ask any leader who has been at it for any length of time and they will tell you that the destination of growth always over-promises and under-delivers. As a church plant of 50 people meeting in a rented gymnasium, most assume that if they just cross the 100-person threshold then everything will change. But, invariably some move past 100 only to find a whole other series of problems and fears waiting on the other side. They now think that if they just have 250 people then, surely, they will be fulfilled. By that point, they would likely be self-supporting, capable of hiring a few staff members, in their own meeting space, and able to launch the programs that the church down the street does so effectively. Not only that, but if they hit 250 quickly enough then they will surely be celebrated as a success among the pastoral fraternity and might even get that coveted invite to speak at the next church planting conference.

And what happens? Some surpass 250 only to find another growth metric waiting on

the other side. Now it's 500 or 1000; mega-church or multi-site church. The common variable between each of these destinations is that they are inherently inadequate. And, ironically, there is often an inverse relationship between growth and joy. With more people comes more problems, more marriages in crisis, more staff to manage, more budgets to design and manage, more sermons to preach, more people to please. It's like Christmas shopping for your toddler in Baby Gap and realizing that even if you get the perfect gift this Christmas, she's going to keep growing and soon you'll be shopping for a teenager.

Most pastors and church leaders know this to be the case, but because they are locked into a faulty operating system they can't seem to envision an alternative. So, week after week they plod after something they know will not satisfy even when they get to the destination.

An Insufficient Measure of Progress

Not only is the destination inadequate, but the lack of vision also causes us to celebrate progress using the wrong metrics. Think back about our two scenarios at the outset. The car heading to the beach evaluates progress in miles and hours, while the car in route to the mall sees success in feet and minutes. In the first, you get excited when you are in the fast lane watching little green mile marker signs disappear in the rear-view mirror. In the second, you are thrilled when the car in front of you edges forward and you make it through the light that's not so yellow anymore.

The same is true in the church. Leaders running the OS of church growth measure progress altogether differently than those driven by Gospel Saturation. Consider the normative church of 150 members. Most pastors would be ecstatic to grow by 20% from one year to the next, meaning that a church that was considered exceedingly healthy would add 30 new members over the course of a year. But we'd have to go even one step further to assess the true impact the church was making. Among these 30 new members, just how many

Gospel Saturation measures progress not in terms of the growth of any singular church, but in terms of the movement of God in a city.

of them were actually new followers of Jesus? Odds are that number is far lower. Most often the majority of the church's growth doesn't come from new converts, but from those who have been out of church for a while and decide to reengage, or those who attend an unhealthy church in the city and decide to leave, or those who have been a part of a healthy church in another part of the country and move to your city looking for the DNA that your church embodies. If we factor these individuals out of our scorecard, then the average growing church may see just a few people come to faith in Jesus and be disciplined effectively. That kind of progress doesn't even register against the vast lostness of our cities. Sure, these converts matter to God and we should praise God for this, but is it real progress? In the grand scheme of things, it amounts to little more than inching up at the traffic light when you are trying to turn into the mall.

Gospel Saturation measures progress not in terms of the growth of any singular church, but in terms of the movement of God in a city. Is there a measurable difference or decrease in lostness? It is to that topic that we will turn in the next section of our reader.

A Story about "Movement Thinking"

by Mitch Maher

I pastor Redeemer Community Church in Katy, Texas, 25 miles west of Houston. Back in 2009 I heard my friend Chad Clarkson at Clear Creek Community Church talk about his vision of a new thing he was hoping to start—the Houston Church Planting Network. He talked about giving every man, woman, and child in the greater Houston area repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I heard what he said, but it kind of went in one ear and out the other. A month later I came back to another meeting, and Chad said the same thing again. This time I thought, "He must really mean it if he's going to say it every time we get together." I drove back across Houston, thinking to myself, "Every man, woman, and child in Houston? There are over 6 million of them! He's out of his mind." I went back the following month, and this time there were pastor friends of Chad's from all over the country. Each one got a chance to share what God was doing in their cities, and each one of them talked about every man, woman, and child. "Every man, woman, and child in Austin, TX." "Every man, woman, and child in Buffalo, NY." "Every man, woman, and child in Columbia, SC." The thing that struck me most was that each one of them talked like they meant it.

Then I started thinking about Katy, TX and the 300,000+ people that live in my city, and I wondered if this is what God wanted for Katy. Did God want every man, woman, and child in Katy to have repeated opportunities to see the gospel in action, to hear it in a way they could understand, and be able to respond to Jesus? This idea of owning the lostness of my geography began to grip my heart and haunt me. As I

began to think about the possibility of that kind of vision becoming a reality in my city. I realized that the church I pastor, Redeemer Community Church, would never get it done alone. I had to reach out to other pastors in my city and see if they might want to be a part of this. I had my assistant make a list of every church in Katy. Another guy on staff had been in Katy for years. I asked him to put a check mark by every church he knew and trusted. I began making some phone calls to introduce myself to the pastor and ask if I could meet him for coffee to tell him what God was laying on my heart. I had that kind of meeting with about 10 pastors, shared with them my story concerning this vision of every man, woman, and child, and made sure I communicated two things: 1) I'm not interested in having another meeting of pastors where we pat each other on the back and talk about how good we're doing—because if the goal is every man, woman, and child in Katy, then I'm not so sure we're doing well; and 2) I do not want to waste your time.

I invited each of those pastors to come to one meeting. I said, "We're going to watch a video together and then talk about it. After that you can decide if you want to come back for another meeting." I knew that each of the guys needed to decide for themselves if they were going to own this conviction. I couldn't convince them. Well, most of those pastors kept coming back, over and over again. We invited more pastors into our group, and they kept coming. Over the last several years we've seen God do some pretty cool things. Pastors are coming together to build relationships of trust. We are beginning to share the language and own the vision of every man, woman, and child. The vision that every man, woman, and child in Katy, TX matters to Jesus is beginning to take root in our hearts and within the churches we lead. Now we are beginning to move towards more action, which is very exciting.

This conviction has never left me. Sometimes I wish I had never heard it and could go back to doing church the way I used to. But, I know what God wants and why He had me hear the vision years ago. By His grace, we're going to go after every man, woman, and child in our city, and trust that we'll see a movement of God.

Section 4

In our last conversation, we defined “movement” as God on redemptive mission among every man, woman, and child through the active engagement of His people. There’s no greater example of this in Scripture than the entire book of Acts. The main character in Luke’s account of the early church isn’t Peter, Barnabas, or even Paul. It’s the Holy Spirit. The story of this God moment through His church is a miracle. From a rag-tag group of misfit disciples, to a small group huddled in an upper room, the message of the gospel spread like wildfire. Everywhere the gospel went, people trusted in Christ, disciples were made, and churches were planted.

It’s hard to imagine the nature of the movement of God in these early days. Clearly the multiplication of the church was explosive, as evidenced by the mass conversions following Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41). Widespread persecution in Jerusalem propelled the first disciples to surrounding cities and towns, and with them went the message about Jesus. Once again churches were planted and disciples were made. We can’t overlook the nature of this movement in Acts 11:19–21 when some ordinary believers planted a church that became the greatest sending church in the New Testament. The hallmark of any movement of God is not the select few experts doing great deeds, but the ordinary disciple of Jesus taking the commission of Jesus seriously. Out of this church came Paul, and

his missionary travels were a driving impetus behind the formation of the church among the Gentile regions once thought to be removed from the scope of God's covenantal love.

Today the words of Acts 1:8 ring true as the gospel has traveled from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In a very real way, the entirety of the New Testament from the book of Acts forward, tells the story of God's movement. We, in the church in North America, are the recipients of the movement of God in these early days, since the gospel has come to us through the faithful obedience of these first followers of Jesus.

It's also hard for most of us to imagine that the same type of movement could happen in our day. We are often prone to believe that the movement of God pictured in the book of Acts was like a giant snowball careening down a hill, picking up speed and momentum as it went. But, now the snowball sits on level ground. Occasionally it might seem to creep forward just a bit, but in general we have given up on the notion of movement and have settled for simply hoping that the snowball doesn't melt completely.



What would it take to reach a tipping point that would lead to a gospel movement in our cities?

Thankfully, there are many church leaders beginning to talk about movement as the starting point for our understanding of the work of the local church. For true movement to happen, the number of disciples must grow faster than the population at large.

Malcolm Gladwell's work in *The Tipping Point* captures the nature of such a movement. Gladwell surmises that compelling ideas, cultural trends, or wildly popular products do not capture public attention in incremental stages—instead they build up momentum among a small percentage of people in a defined subculture until reaching a tipping point whereby they seem to become an overnight, public success. Gladwell traces the popularity of Hush Puppy shoes or the decrease in crime in New York City to the tipping point phenomenon.

What would it take to reach a tipping point that would lead to a gospel movement in our cities?

One thing is certain, if we are going to make headway in addressing the burgeoning mission field of North America and seeing many come to faith in Jesus, we are going to have to see a massive movement of God. If we are going to see the tide of secularism, racism, and every other -ism that is set up against the Kingdom of God, it's going to take a movement that rapidly reproduces disciples who take the gospel to every man, woman, and child in a city. For this to happen, pastors, church leaders, and every missionary disciple must relentlessly answer three key questions.

What Does God Want?

This first question doesn't sound earth shattering, but it really should shape everything we do and it has to be the starting point for the vision that God produces in us. We need to be careful not to distort this question. We can mess it up but asking it with qualifiers. For example, "What does God want for me?" or "What does God want for my church?" can manipulate the answer away from what God really wants. When we leave the question alone, we are the ones that move and align our dreams, desires, and will to Jesus and His Kingdom. As we've seen in conversation one, God wants Gospel Saturation. He longs for every man, woman, and child to have a repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel and come to worship Him.

For this to happen necessitates believing, at the core of our being, one critical concept that is represented in the following equation:

God's Glory > Our Story

My story, my salvation, my personal growth, my suffering is all rooted in the glory of God and His mission in the world. I can't merely seek spiritual maturity for my sake, but so that I can give my life away to the work God is already doing all around me. Not only do I have to believe this, but as a pastor or church leader, I must lead others to believe this as well.

What would it look like?

We must be careful with our qualifiers to this second question. This doesn't mean, "What would a movement of God look like for my church?" Movement thinking

requires including every man, woman, and child in the community where God has us. When we pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." , what does that look like in your context? What would it look like if a gospel movement were to break out in your city? If Jesus showed up in your town or neighborhood, what would change the most? You might consider how the churches, businesses, schools, and communities would change. When we begin to have a clear understanding of what it would look like if His Kingdom did come and His will was done in my city, and not just the church where I serve, our vision will be immensely broadened for the church.

What will it take?

We can't continue to run the same Apps on the same church growth OS and expect to get a Kingdom movement. How many times do we use the first person pronouns when we refer to the activity and leadership we provide the churches we lead? Is it my church or God's Church? Is it my vision or God's vision? It may take a death of our vision and priorities to allow movement thinking to be resurrected within us. If we are truly after a movement of God, it will require us to rethink how we spend our time and how we use our resources. It's important to think about the sacrifices we are willing to make to align our vision and mission with what God wants.

A proper answer to these three questions results in the path to a new operating system. It is the rocket-fuel that makes possible each of the four priorities we've already considered.

Movement Thinking Transitions Collection to Mobilization

God desires missionary disciples and these missionary disciples are the only way a gospel movement will ever happen. A few pastors passionate about the mission will not do. A church running the best ministry programs in town will be inadequate. An annual calendar filled with a host of "mission days" or missionary activities will not scratch the surface of a gospel movement. Movement thinking forces leaders to ask how they can empower all their people to live with gospel intentionality in the places they live, learn, work, and play. We must believe that the church's greatest asset to seeing a movement of God rests not in the gifts and

abilities of our current leaders, but the seed of the gospel that lies within every transformed follower of Jesus.

Movement Thinking Transitions Attendance to Transformation

Church leaders can't be satisfied with church attendance if we are trusting God for a gospel movement. We've preached scores of sermon series that have drawn people into our buildings on Sunday, but they're not leading to transformed followers of Jesus in the streets Monday through Saturday. Far from diminishing the value of the corporate gathering of the church, movement thinking actually enhances the intentionality with which the church gathers. We don't have time to sit around repeating the same stale clichés and attending the same events, if these truths and events are not being used by God to transform our lives and send us into the world as missionary disciples. Movement thinking believes that transformation happens best when individuals primarily hear from God through His Word and His Spirit throughout the week, and not a 30-minute sermon on Sunday. This may strike a blow to the egos of most pastors, but true Kingdom leaders help their people to develop a greater thirst for the person of Jesus and His gospel, and not their sermons.

Movement Thinking Transitions Competition to Collaboration

God wants every man, woman and child to have an opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel. If every man, woman and child having access to the gospel is the desired outcome, then we understand that collaboration isn't a nicety, but a necessity. No one church, denomination, or network can do it alone. Wanting what God wants should compel all of God's people to come to a common table to pray, think, strategize, and walk together to accomplish the mission of filling the whole earth with His glory.

Movement Thinking Transitions Addition to Multiplication

God wants a movement of multiplication. There is no doubt that God has hardwired multiplication into everything that He created. Humans, animals, and plants all multiply by nature. His church is no different. If a movement is going to happen it will not happen through adding a few more members to our church roles; it will happen by multiplying missionary disciples who multiply gospel conversations with the lost and trust God to bring in an overwhelming harvest. The result of multiplying disciples are churches that multiply as well.

At the end of the day, a movement is something only God can do. Kingdom movement depends on the Holy Spirit using ordinary people to multiply the gospel in and from the harvest. We can't manipulate a movement, but we can pray for a movement. We can't manufacture a movement, but we can prepare for one. We can give our lives to a movement. And we can lead our churches to invest in a movement. Maybe some of us will live to see a movement of God in our day. Why not start today by praying and preparing for Him to move? ■

Kingdom movement depends on the Holy Spirit using ordinary people to multiply the gospel in and from the harvest.

Conversation 3:

Kingdom

Section 5

It's become more and more common to hear people discuss God's Kingdom—particularly in theological books or the evangelical blogosphere. On one hand this is encouraging since the Kingdom is the focus of the Gospel writers' summary of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching. In Matthew's Gospel, for example, Jesus inaugurates His public ministry by calling His hearers to "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). He announces the availability of the Kingdom of God on earth, and exhorts all who hear to turn from their sin and enter that Kingdom. Throughout His ministry, Jesus continues to speak about the Kingdom. He equates the Kingdom of God to a pearl (Matt 13:45), a mustard seed (Matt 13:31), or a field containing a great treasure (Matt 13:44). His followers are challenged to seek His Kingdom first—trusting that He would, in turn, provide for all of their needs (Matt 6:31–33). The Bible is filled with Kingdom language so it's helpful to see this word return to the vocabulary of the church.

On the other hand, the word "Kingdom" can quickly become a vague catch-phrase that lacks definition. In an effort to clarify the nature of the word "Kingdom" you often see it linked to some supporting action; such as, Kingdom-living, Kingdom-

mission, Kingdom-expansion. Often the word "Kingdom" is used to mean something like the state of affairs in which good things happen in the world. This simplistic understanding of "Kingdom" is not overtly Christian in orientation. In fact, defined this way, the Kingdom of God could refer to any of a vast assortment of activities undertaken by well-meaning people: childhood literacy campaign, orphan care and adoption, attempts to end sex trafficking, and on and on the list could go. No one should deny that these projects are meaningful, yet they are not central to defining the Kingdom of God according to the Bible. They are mere manifestations of the Kingdom, not the Kingdom itself.

The Kingdom is the second fundamental principle that is required to shift from an OS of church growth to one of Gospel Saturation. We might begin with the working definition of the Kingdom along these lines: the rule and reign of God demonstrated and declared in all the world because of the work of Jesus Christ. This definition helps us nuance the distinctions between (1) God's Kingdom, (2) the Church, and (3) your church.

God's Kingdom includes all aspects of our world that conform to God's glory and character. Certainly, this would include those individuals who trust in Jesus for their salvation, but it would also be more than personal salvation. It would extend to every domain of society that is shaped towards God's created intentions. So, when a politician leads the charge for a bill to protect the unborn because he believes that child is made in the image of God, the Kingdom of God is manifest. When a school administrator provides tutoring to curb childhood illiteracy the Kingdom of God is seen. When artists embed their lives in the local guild and seek to reflect God's creative handiwork in their art, they, too, are demonstrating the Kingdom of God. We might think of the Kingdom of God as everything God is doing in the world to right the effects of sin and the fall in order for His greatness to be seen.

God's Kingdom includes all aspects of our world that conform to God's glory and character.

The Kingdom of God serves as the transforming force in our cities. It redeems and restores all it touches. For this reason, the mission of God's people through His church is to give everyone in their cities a compelling picture of the Kingdom of God trusting that, as they encounter the Kingdom they will be enraptured by the King.

The Kingdom declared (gospel) and the Kingdom modeled (good works) go hand in hand. What differentiates this notion of the "Kingdom" from the aforementioned vague notion, is the final clause "because of the work of Jesus Christ". The Kingdom of God is Christo-centric—created, empowered, and produced by Jesus Christ. This need not mean that all our actions are a not-so-subtle bait and switch in which we attempt to trap people in evangelistic conversations under the guise of blessing them. Rather, God's people, living with Kingdom-intentionality, should find intentional and strategic ways to make it clear that every "good work" is made possible because of Jesus who brought them from death to life (Eph. 2:1–10).

From there, we see that one of the primary ways that God brings His Kingdom on earth is through the transformed lives of His children. As the pinnacle of creation, humans are uniquely designed to reflect God's image in the world. Because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, God's children are saved from the wrath of God and given a righteous standing before Him. This is a gift of God's grace to all those, throughout human history and in every place on the face of the earth, who have repented of their sins and placed faith in Jesus' finished work. These individuals live freely and passionately under God's rule and reign as embodiments of the Kingdom of God on earth. All of these people—young and old, men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate—are grafted into God's church. Thus, a Muslim convert in Turkey, and French believer in Canada, and a Cuban pastor, are all members of God's Church.

But these individuals are clearly not all a part of your Church. Even within your city, there are likely hundreds of local churches, each containing a subset of the overall people of God in a city. No singular church has a monopoly on God's Church, much less on the Kingdom of God, in a city. In fact, seen from this perspective, each local church contains only a small fraction of God's Church in a city.

Let's take a city of 500,000 people. The largest church in that city has a weekly, Sunday worship attendance of 8,000 people. Now, let's assume that 80% of those in attendance profess faith in Jesus and are living in submission to His rule and reign (an assumption that is likely far too generous). That means that this one church is made up of approximately 6,400 people who are a part of God's church. While this number would certainly be astounding and significant, it reflects only 1.28 percent of the overall population of the city.

One further step might help to put this idea in perspective. Let's assume this same city is home to 200 other evangelical churches (a low number for most major US cities). These churches range in size, but there are, on average, 150 genuine believers in each church. This means that the cumulative total number of

believers in all other churches in our fictitious city would be 30,000 people. Each church's membership would represent 0.00003 percent of the overall population. Combined with our one megachurch, the total number of believers in the city would be 36,400, or 7 percent, of an overall population of 500,000 people.

Three implications are clear. First, no single church, regardless of how large, represents the sole outpost of God's Church in a city. It's hard to imagine any church, regardless of its size, thinking they can bring holistic influence to the various domains of society without the health of other churches. God is gathering people into His church through the ministry of local churches other than the one you attend. U.S. cities, are blessed by God with a diversity of local churches which, when combined, represent God's Church in the city. This blessing is squandered when churches exist in isolation or worse, are known for disunity and divisiveness. Another simple equation might help capture the distinction we've discussed up to this point. What we've said thus far is this:

God's Kingdom > the Church > your church

So, what is the mission of the church? The answer is found by working in reverse order. Your church must strive alongside of The Church to see God's Kingdom come in your city. This is our mission and it's one worth giving our lives to.

God's Kingdom < the Church < your church

This means you should celebrate when the church down the street succeeds, even if the other church's success results in no impact on your church. We should beg God to redeem and restore every aspect of society and use all of us, gathered in many local churches, to do just that.

Next, no one church, regardless of how large, has the bandwidth to reach an entire city. Among the churches in our aforementioned city, the megachurch would certainly be seen as a success. The pastor would likely be admired (or hated)—he'd write books, speak at conferences, and either be the friend or the envy of the other pastors in the city. But, his church is still faced with overwhelming odds when attempting to reach a city. Considered from a negative perspective, these numbers might seem overwhelming—what in the world could such a small fraction of the people of God do to make a dent in the lostness of their cities? But, considered from a positive perspective, these numbers remind us that we have more people on our team than we often realize, and it is going to take all of us to working in unity to fulfill God's mission through our churches.

Finally, all of the churches in a city, regardless of their combined size, can't impact a city apart from the power of God. Seven percent is still a really small number

in the big scheme of things. There is no way, in their own power, that all of the churches working in perfect unity could create a movement of God in their own strength. This is where we are well-served to recall the famous stories of our Old Testament Scripture—stories like Gideon's battle with the Midianites told in Judges 7. God seemingly acts as the worst military strategist of all time. He takes an army of 32,000 men and reduces it to 300 before sending them into battle. Why? God tells us in verse 2: "The LORD said to Gideon, 'The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into your hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand saved me.'" God wants to ensure that when He gives victory there is no chance that the people can flex their muscles and take credit for winning a battle that God fought on their behalf.

The same is true in our day. God's Church faces overwhelming odds, but we serve a God who loves to work against all odds. If we see a movement of God in our day, we can rest assured it's not because we built the Kingdom, extended the Kingdom, grew the Kingdom, or any other description that maximizes our role in the process and minimizes God's. He allows His Kingdom to come as an act of His grace, so that He gets all the glory.

A Story about "Kingdom Position"

by Jerry Gillis

"God, is this what I signed up for?" That's the question I wrestled with for about a year. It's not that things at our church were bad. Everything I dreamed of when getting into the ministry was coming true. We were in a season of incredible growth and saw people coming to Christ. We expanded to four Sunday services. Plus, we planned to build a new facility to keep up with our growth. According to the church growth model I was taught, we were extremely successful. During this season, we did the only thing we knew: we kept making it bigger and better. What made this whole thing even more intriguing was that we were doing it in Buffalo, NY, which isn't exactly the Bible-belt. But in spite of all these good things, something didn't feel right. This feeling led me to keep wrestling with that question for about a year. I sought God because there were times during this whole season when I felt like a giant machine operator, and that was the problem—I knew how to do it. I knew how to run the machine, and even though I was reasonably good at it, I also felt stuck.

During this season of questioning and seeking God, I kept going back to the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, to ask the question, "What does the Kingdom of God look like?" I went back to my original call and realized that what I was doing wasn't why I got into the ministry. Throughout this season, I discovered that our local church was essentially an island separated from the larger big "C" Church. Truth be told, we didn't think we needed anybody. We had created our own sub-culture. We were Wal-mart taking over all the mom and pop stores.

In this struggle of knowing that things needed to change—that I needed to change—I met someone who helped me put into words what was going on in my heart. God used this time to develop a major shift in my thinking. He conveyed a new paradigm to understand His Kingdom. You see, I finally realized that if God was going to write a letter to the Church at Buffalo, He wasn't going to address it to me. I knew I needed to get to know The Church at Buffalo if I was going to have the same heart as Jesus.

The first step I took, since I didn't know many pastors in the area, was to send out a survey to over 75 churches across the region. I asked these other church leaders in my city to tell me what the perception of our church was—anonymously. I would advise you not to do this if you have a problem with self-esteem. We made it anonymous so that we would get back honest responses, and I learned that we were perceived more as a threat than a partner in our city. But it was the last question on the survey that had the greatest impact on me. We simply asked if there was anything they wanted to share with us. The overwhelming response was the same from most churches. They told us that if we would lead them where we really needed to go for the sake of the Kingdom, they would follow us. This was a come to Jesus moment for me.

Secondly, we organized a lunch with the other pastors and churches in the area and shared that if we really wanted to make a difference in our city, we needed each other. We needed the whole Church to work together with a Kingdom mindset if we were going to see our city transformed for the glory of Jesus by giving every man, woman, and child repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel. We had to make a major shift so that everything we did at our church served the Kingdom purposes of Jesus, not just the purposes of our one local church. The progress of Kingdom-work in our city started slowly, but God has allowed us to see more accomplished for His Name than I could imagine.

Section 6

We ended our last section by pointing out that God loves to work against the odds because this allows Him to show off His glory and protects His people from pride. Throughout redemptive history this has been God's habit. He works through tiny nations (Israel) and formerly insignificant people (Abraham, Moses, David) to accomplish His good purposes. This might lead to the conclusion that we should entrust the re-evangelization of North America to a small subset of God's people as well. Rather than expecting all of God's people, much less all churches, to engage in Kingdom-work, why not allocate this role to those God uniquely calls to this work?

Such logic misunderstands the role you and I play in the mission of God. Let's imagine that you were a benchwarmer on the worst team in the NBA on the night they were matched up against LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers (or whoever he plays for when you read this). In a stroke of bad luck, just before the game you find out that the entire starting lineup has a stomach bug and can't play, leaving you to guard King James himself. You panic, knowing that you will surely be the new poster-child for the LeBron-dunkfest and might, in fact, end up in the hospital after one of his ankle-breaking crossovers. So, what do you do? You start begging your teammates to help. You tell the trainer to throw on a uniform. You might even grab a big, burly guy out the stands and ask him to play. You know

that you have no chance alone, but maybe, just maybe, if by some miracle, you and the random assortment of no-names were able to pull off a victory, you would be a hero forever.

This is how we often think about the mission of God. We know we are up against a massive foe. Satan, sin, and death wreak havoc on our world. Lostness prevails and brokenness abounds. Because we know ourselves, we understand how insignificant we are compared to such great odds. At best, we're a benchwarmer on God's team. So, we either throw our hands up in despair and forfeit the game or try to rally as many people on the team as we can. We foolishly think that our only hope rests in coaxing as many people as we can to help out. The results are crushing—when things get hard, as they always do, you get discouraged or simply run out of energy because it takes a lot of work to get people moving in God's mission. You look around and think, "Things are still so broken and I've been working so hard, is it even worth it?" And, those who do join in the mission out of guilt or shame will inevitably give up. It feels good, for a short while, to think that God needs you for His mission to succeed, but in time this weight becomes too much to bear and so people give up.

But what if the mission of God doesn't work this way at all?

The Bible presents a far different picture of the mission of God, one in which the outcome is already determined before our game even begins. We know how the game ends. Satan, sin, and death are defeated forever (1 Cor 15; Rev 21–22). God promises to make all things new in a world free from the contamination of sin. His people, God's true church, dwell with Him and worship Him forever. There's no tension in the air regarding how the final seconds of the game are going to play out. It's like watching a game from the 80's that you've seen a hundred times. You already know how it is going to end. His Kingdom will come on earth

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perfectly and fully as it is in heaven. God always keeps His promises.

This frees you and I to understand our role in God's mission in a fundamentally different way. We have a gracious invitation to be on the team of the Victor, who has already done all that is necessary to secure the final outcome. Instead of a burdensome responsibility, the mission is a glorious privilege. We strive for the Kingdom because the Kingdom is coming.

Jesus inaugurated His ministry by pointing to the prophet Isaiah who said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). He claimed this prophesy as a message about His forthcoming mission. He knew He was sent to bring the Kingdom of God to earth. In a similar fashion, God's people possess great and glorious promises regarding God's coming Kingdom when all sin and suffering are obliterated (Rev. 21-22). In light of these promises from a God who never changes, all of God's people can invest their lives in God's Kingdom.

Which leads to a conclusion about God's work in the world. God invites all of His people to join Him in whatever He is doing in the world. Just because God can, and often does use a small remnant, doesn't mean we shouldn't call and invite all of His people to be a part of Kingdom work. Why would we not? God has already won the victory and that doesn't give us permission to passively bide our time until the end. Why would we waste such a privilege to be a part of what He's doing?

Understood in this manner, the church is tasked with mobilizing God's people for the mission of Gospel Saturation. Remember how we defined Gospel Saturation back in conversation 1:

The church owning the lostness of an identified people in a defined place ensuring that every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Church leaders have the joy of getting people moving in this Kingdom-mission. Two images help to demonstrate the contrast between the normative pattern of the church, driven by the old OS, and a new mission empowered by the new OS. In the first, the church is understood to be a “collecting community.”



The magnetic pull of a collecting community is inward—towards the overall goal of church growth. The church’s leaders, and in turn the church’s members, focus on building the organization, protecting assets, and competing with other churches who might challenge them for the market-share of church attendees. Here, the mission would be driven by a desire to attract more and more people into the collecting community so that they can attract others in as well. Driven by a sense of shared guilt or a vision to build a brand, church members would work to invite others in the hopes that growth would ensue. In short, most of the activity and the main ministry takes place at the church building or campus.

In contrast, the new OS pushes the church outward as a “mobilizing community”, beyond any singular local church and towards the Kingdom of God.

To propel the church outward, the church’s leaders focus on releasing assets, building disciples, and collaborating with other churches. In this model, the mission would prioritize Kingdom growth over church growth. Driven by a deep

understanding of grace, church members would be released into the world in the hopes that the Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.



If we go back to the parable of the sower (Matt 13), we see that Jesus intended that the seeds of His Kingdom would be scattered everywhere, even on rocky and hard soil. These seeds would spring to life in every domain of society. Broken things would become whole—including broken relationships, broken business practices, broken unity between races, and on and on we could go. Because the Kingdom redeems and restores, this new OS would release God's people and the implications would be holistic—shaping every domain of society.

Unfortunately, the way we scatter the seeds of the gospel today is within a large building during a couple weekend services. We believe that Kingdom growth will be stunted so long as the pastor up front on a Sunday morning exists as the primary way in which the gospel seed goes forth. Which begs the question—Are you, as a leader of the church, invested in the Kingdom? Do you give your life away to see God bring restoration into every domain of society or are you so consumed with the internal demands of the church that you just never get around to the Kingdom? If the latter is true, then it's no wonder that the church follows the pattern you've set.

We pray that we would see God's people partnering with all expressions of the Church for the Gospel Saturation of specific places on the map. Such a mission flies in the face of the normative assumption that the church in North America is defined by division and disunity. Through Kingdom-focused partnership we embody Jesus' prayer in John 17:

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in

Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (Jn 17:20-21).

Paul echoes this theme in Ephesians 4 where he writes,

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace" (v. 1-3).

Notice that Paul says to "maintain the unity." This language demonstrates that unity is not something we strive towards but it is something that we, as God's people, are given by virtue of our shared adoption into God's family. And, as part of God's family, we share the mission together to ensure that every man, woman, and child has a repeated opportunity to see and hear how they, too, can become our brothers and sisters. When God's people are going after the mission together as one, the byproduct is unity. Unity doesn't exist for unity's sake. It exists for the sake of mission. God unites us in the mission and for the mission.

It's clear that no single App which is downloaded on the church growth OS will ever empower this type of Kingdom-intentionality. We have no choice but to overhaul the OS if we want to run after this massive goal. That's why these conversations are so important. As leaders, we are all quick to run to solutions, but simplistic solutions will often only exacerbate the problem. Sure, you could easily pull a few churches together to participant in a shared mission day in order to give back-packs stocked with school supplies to single-moms. These kinds of efforts are noble and will likely appease your conscience for a while, but it will do little to revamp the OS of your church unless it is matched by a fundamental restructuring of the nature and mission of your church along Kingdom lines. Infused by such Kingdom-intentionality, the church can be released into the world to declare and demonstrate the good news of Jesus to every man, woman, and child. ■

Conversation 4:

Harvest

Section 7

Anyone with children knows how hard it is to keep the house clean. Inevitably, the kids' room gets littered with Lego parts, baby doll heads, and a random assortment of broken crayons and dirty clothes. With daily regularity, parents find themselves saying, "That is your room and it's your responsibility to keep it clean." Unless you have the one mythical kid who actually obeys this command, over time mom and dad have to pitch in and get the room in order in an effort to maintain some level of sanity.

The same is true for college roommates who share a 400-square-foot dorm room. Personal space is at a minimum, but it's still vital that each roommate take responsibility to care for his or her space. It's common to have one type-A roommate who fulfills this responsibility while the other roommate is quite comfortable with sheer chaos. Many fights have developed when the room is overtaken by the mess of a roommate who just doesn't seem to care.

The principle is clear: **You are responsible to take care of your space.** Whether it is your house, your room, your car, or your backyard, all people have been given some sphere of responsibility and, within that sphere, they must own their task and see to it that things are in order.

The same truth applies to God's people. At first glance, the scope of the mission of

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God seems expansive and overwhelming. We desire everyone in the world to come to faith in Jesus and be discipled to maturity. That's like asking your five-year-old to clean every room in every house in your neighborhood. Not only is it impossible for children to fulfill this task, they would grow discouraged if you even suggested to them that they should. They'd probably not even try.

Sadly, this same process happens in the church. We hear about God's mission and understand that we should play a part, but we can't seem to get our minds around how our little lives can play some part in God's grand missionary story. You might even begin talking about "every man, woman, and child" to the church that you lead, but it simply becomes a pie-in-the-sky idea that isn't realistic. So many, if not most, of the church simply sit on the sidelines and never do anything.

Combating this trend necessitates thinking from the outside-in. We must figure out ways to make the mission personal and specific to our lives and the context of our local churches. If God's people, gathered in local churches, were to own the lostness where they live, learn, work, and play, we could see a Kingdom movement in our day. This type of outside-in thinking is the result of a four-fold process of vision, responsibility, definition, and strategy.

A Harvest Vision

First, God's people must have a vision for the harvest. The beginning stages of Jesus' public ministry, recounted in Matthew's Gospel, consist of steady activity to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and heal those who were suffering. At one juncture, Matthew provides a brief reflection on the thoughts of Jesus during this arduous work. We read:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest' (Matt 9:36–38).

Jesus sees the harvest. Jesus sees the broken and hurting as aimless sheep living without a shepherd—destined for destruction and death. Driven by compassion for their plight, He calls His disciples to reflect on the vast harvest field of lost men, women, and children and begs the Father to raise up laborers to reap this harvest.

In the same fashion, God's people must be gripped with an overwhelming vision of the scope of the harvest. Do we see the harvest like Jesus? Like Him, we need to be burdened and broken by the lostness we confront on a daily basis. When God's people own the lostness of where they live, learn, work, and play, they are positioned, postured, and prepared for use when God begins to move.

The mission cannot merely be a theoretical or abstract reality; it must be personal. At the outset of this *Primer*, we stated that the church's mission was Gospel Saturation. The church exists to give every man, woman, and child the repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this vision to become personal we need to see the "each" within the "every". If the church exists to give every man, woman, and child the repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ, then every follower of Jesus exists to give each man, woman, and child the repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel:

- Each husband climbing the corporate ladder of success and finding that each new rung only accentuates his sense of emptiness;
- Each single-mom wondering if there's anyone who will ever really love her again;

For this vision to become personal we need to see the "each" within the "every".

- Each middle-school child struggling to understand his place in a world filled with brokenness;
- Each elderly widow staring out of a nursing home window knowing that no one is coming to visit again today.

These are the faces of the harvest. Each follower of Jesus begins by putting a name to the mission. Bill (the husband), Isabel (the single-mom), Jose (the middle-schooler) and Sarah (the elderly widow) are real people with real stories. They are the harvest. If we don't see the harvest like Jesus saw it, or position ourselves within the harvest like Jesus did, the mission of God will be a part-time endeavor of convenience or a mere hobby to stroke our pride.

A Harvest Responsibility

Next, God's people must take responsibility for their role in the harvest. Each person who has trusted Jesus in faith is entrusted with a particular role to play in the harvest. They are the laborers for whom Jesus prayed in Matthew 9. We live in a culture that elevates and celebrates a select few harvest heroes—those who stand on big stages, preach clear messages, go on mission to foreign countries, and seem to see scores and scores of people follow Jesus as a result of their labor. Harvest heroes easily obscure the role that all of God's people play in the mission. The work of the harvest isn't merely for a select few, it is the work of all of God's people and another "each" in our definition. Each disciple of Jesus must strive to give each man, woman, and child in their circles of influence repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the way that Jesus went about His earthly mission as well. Even the incarnate Son of God did not do everything Himself. Luke recounts Jesus' same reflections regarding the harvest (Luke 10:2). In his gospel, he prefaces Jesus' comments about the scope of the harvest and the need for laborers with His

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plan: "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where He Himself was about to go" (Lk 10:1). Ahead of His arrival into a new city, Jesus sent His disciples in pairs to strategic places to do the work of proclaiming the Kingdom message and demonstrating the in-breaking of the Kingdom by raising up, casting out, and healing. Each disciple had a role to play. Everyone was sent with the same mission.

The same is true in the church. We tend to think of the imagery of the body of Christ as merely applying to the internal ministries of the church. God designed the members of the church to be distinct—some are hands, some are feet, some are noses—but they all have a role to play in the gathering of the local church—some keep kids, some hand out bulletins, some sing, and some preach (Rom 13:3–8). But what if the same concept applies to the mission of God? We may be gifted differently, but we are all still ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:19–20). What if all the members of the church are uniquely wired and gifted to play a distinct and important role in Gospel Saturation?

- Each Sunday School teacher who works as a principal in a public school;
- Each woman in the women's ministry who takes their kids to play at the local park;
- Each dad who takes notes during the sermon;
- Each teenager who attends the youth group meeting each week.
- They all have a responsibility in the mission of God. Each and every one of them. Another equation might help capture the heart of this premise:

Every Believer = A Missionary

God works in the world through scattered disciples and churches who give gospel access to every man, woman, and child.

A Harvest Plan

Vision and responsibility necessitate a third step in the process—a clear plan for engaging the harvest. Luke opens his gripping narrative regarding the spread of the church in the book of Acts with this commission: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This commission awaits the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who, in Acts 2, will provide the power to make this mission possible (Acts 2:1–13). The first disciples were commissioned and empowered to reach certain geographies with the gospel. Starting with their immediate location (Jerusalem) they were to extend the mission to the surrounding country (Judea), enemy territory (Samaria), and to the furthest locales in the world (the ends of the earth).

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This geographical intentionality is not only descriptive of the first church, but a model for how the church takes responsibility for the lostness of a geography. The church should understand its mission in terms of a Circle of Accountability (COA). Until we take responsibility for a defined place, it is difficult to truly see and own the lostness in that area. Here we are using "circle" as a generic term to denote a certain defined place and people for whom God has asked His church to take responsibility. The COA outlines the specific community the church is called to reach, and we will spend more time identifying your particular COA in the *Accelerator* that follows this *Primer*.

We must resist the urge to simply target a small subset of this circle who represent people like us. In years past, pastors and church planters were generally taught the homogeneous principle, which meant that a church leader should select a target audience within their community and tailor a church experience that would attract people to that church. It may make sense and actually work to gather a group of common-minded people, but it doesn't reflect the heartbeat and the example of the early church. Rather, we should understand the defined geography as our God-given harvest field and do our part to see to it that every man, woman, and child has a repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. We may need to model Kingdom partnership with other churches and people who are not like us to accomplish the task of reaching that circle.

Finally, we develop a clear and compelling strategy to reach our defined COA. This strategy should take advantage of the two aspects of the nature and mission of the church—the corporate domain and the personal domain. The corporate domain represents the shared space of those who make up each local church. Often, the location in which the church gathers for weekly worship defines this shared space.

There are currently 300,000+ churches in America. This massive amount of churches can pursue the standard OS of church growth. As missiologist, Neal McGlohon, states, "Pandering to consumerism can help reap a bigger immediate harvest in America, but how might it limit the mobilization of transformed people into the harvest and collaboration with others who do the same?" An OS of Gospel Saturation would propose an alternative solution.

If 1%, or 3000 of those churches, were mobilized to identify and own the lostness of different COA, potentially our whole nation could have repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus. If there were 3,000 distinct COA's and they averaged between 10,000-15,000 people, we would saturate our nation.

But this is only one aspect of the nature of the church, which also consists of scores and scores of individuals who scatter into the world on active mission. There, they too, occupy their own circles. We might refer to these as "Circles of Influence" (COI). Every believer living as a missionary is given a distinct COI made up of the places they live, learn, work, and play. It is in these locations that believers are to own the lostness of those around them and see to it that they take personal responsibility for ensuring that every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Our Sovereign God places each member of the church in the midst of a people in a specific place, with an opportunity and a responsibility. They live in the neighborhoods they do because God has appointed them to reach their neighbors. They work in the companies they do as God's ambassadors to their co-workers. Their kids play on the soccer teams they do so that each parent can hear about Jesus. None of this is by accident. Each COI represents the divine handiwork of a sovereign God.

Combined, the COA and COI, provide a manageable scope for the mission of God's' people. They each ask us to own the lostness of a defined people in a defined place. Certainly we can't see to it that Gospel Saturation happens everywhere, but we can own the places He positions us and see to it that we take responsibility for those.

A Story of "Harvest Focus"

by Neal McGlohon

I've been part of church planting for most of my ministry life. I helped plant a church in the Jersey Shore area and remained for 10 years. Then I moved to Charlotte to be a part a church planting network, where we saw a church planted every year for about seven years in a row. About five years into this venture, we witnessed five churches start with the combined attendance of around 5,000 people, and even better, about 2,000 were new, baptized believers. It was blowing and going. It was awesome!

It was during this time that I attended a ground-breaking ceremony at one of the first churches we planted. It was a good night, and everyone was excited and feeling good because the church plant we started was finally "graduating" by building their first building. Driving home that night on I-485, which is the southern loop around Charlotte, I thought, "Man, life is good. God is good. These churches are doing great. Times are great!" I was amazed! Then God stopped me. He interrupted my little glory party and asked me two very difficult questions. First was, "How's My city doing?" Of course, my response was, "God, You know how Your city is doing. Have You seen all these churches? Have You seen all these new people that we've baptized who are coming to church?"

Then God struck my heart with conviction. You see, I knew the data. I had gathered all the data and statistics so we could raise a half million dollars to plant churches all across Charlotte. And here's what I knew: every year Charlotte was more lost than it was the year before. The harvest field was not getting smaller but larger. We had some of the biggest and fastest growing churches in the country right in our city, yet we weren't keeping pace with the population moving into our backyards. This thought haunted me: "Can we say we're successful if more people every year are going to hell on our watch?" If our churches grow, but lostness increases in my community, can I really feel like we are succeeding? Of course, I didn't want to discount the good things that were going on or what God was doing, but I had to face the reality of the harvest in Charlotte.

The second question was this: "How are the people of my city doing?" Again, I knew the data. Families were more broken every year. Poverty and racial tensions increased every year. Crime and addictions rose every year. Every year the people in my city were suffering more, so how could we say that we were successful? I realized that we didn't need more churches, we needed missionary churches that would go into the harvest. We didn't need more people attending church, but missionary disciples who saw the harvest where they lived, worked, and played.

That night, driving home on I-485, changed the entire focus of what I knew we needed. We couldn't just plant churches anymore. We had to plant churches that would own the lostness of their geography if we were going to make a Kingdom difference in the city.

Section 8

We've all heard the objections:

- "But, we already have enough churches."
- "Don't you know how many churches are struggling. Why don't we work to get those healthy?"
- "Who needs another church when we've got a massive, healthy church already in the heart of the city?"
- "Church revitalization is futile. People are too stubborn to change. It's better to just let the church die."

Certainly it is true that our day has seen a resurgence of church planting fervor. For a host of reasons—some healthy and some not—it seems that more and more people have church planting on their radar. In fact, church planting is often seen as a badge of honor for existing churches.

This church planting resurgence has prompted a litany of material designed to foster healthy church plants. The methodologies are endless: ranging from

decentralized house churches, to attractional models, to every permutation in between. The primary question people are seeking to answer is the "how" question: How can I plant a healthy church? How can I ensure that my church survives? How can I accomplish such and such ministry within the life of the church?

The "how" question obscures a more vital question—one that we've attempted to answer throughout this *Primer*. Long before we discuss "how" to plant churches, we must wrestle with the question of "why" we plant churches in the first place.

Why Plant?

The normative "why" answers are derived from the OS of church growth. We plant churches so that they grow, develop structures and systems, integrate new members, and undertake the wide array of ministries thought to be necessary for healthy church function. An OS driven by Gospel Saturation focused on seeing a movement of God and manifesting His Kingdom within circles of accountability would fundamentally change the way we are prone to answer the "why" question. Ironically, those who grasp the nature of Gospel Saturation would argue that the purpose of church planting isn't actually church planting. Church planting simply exists as a means to ensure that every man, woman, and child has a repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to Jesus Christ. Church planting can be both a vehicle to making the gospel accessible to a people and a result of reaching a people in a place.

If Gospel Saturation remains the goal, then another conclusion naturally follows: It will take all kinds of churches made up of all kinds of people using all kinds of differing methodologies to saturate every geography with the gospel. Far from necessitating every church looking like a carbon-copy of one another, we'd desire to see an eclectic mix of

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We'd also seek to plant new churches in the circle who can join with us in reaching a people. Much like an apple tree, these church plants would have the seeds necessary to multiply as well. Church plants, derived from a Gospel Saturation OS, would begin with a desire to plant other churches from the outset.

Not every church can be involved in church planting in the same way, but every church, regardless of its size can, and should, be involved. The mission is too critical. It might be helpful to consider the following continuum of ways a local church can be involved in church planting:

Levels of Church Planting Intentionality

- 0 – Not on the radar
- 1 – Financial support through network/denomination
- 2 – Financial support to specific plant/planter relationship
- 3 – Intentional prayer for church planters in worship services
- 4 – Publicly celebrating church-planting wins
- 5 – Coaching planters and financial support
- 6 – Sending people from local body to plant
- 7 – Collaborating with other churches to train and plant in a shared COA

Where would you place your local church on this progression? The temptation occurs when we excuse ourselves out of involvement. When our church is bigger, has more resources, or has our house in order, then we will get in the game. But we all know this day never comes. If we do not take steps to increase our level of intentionality, then it is unlikely that the new OS of Gospel Saturation has really gotten in our bones in the first place.



Church planting can be both a vehicle to making the gospel accessible to a people and a result of reaching a people in a place.

Why Revitalize?

The same premise holds true for church revitalization. The rise of church planting fervor has often passively communicated that those who give of themselves to bring life and health to an existing church are second-class citizens. In reality, church revitalization is a massive undertaking and one that requires a unique combination of a desperate church, profound leadership wisdom, and the power of God.

In many ways it might be easier to give up on the existing church. Why deal with the tedious work required to bring change when we could just go start another church and begin with the proper OS? There are two ways to answer this question.

First, given enough time, every church will see a need for revitalization. In fact, seen in this light every church should be revitalizing all of the time. We should all be assessing our current mission and making changes to align our church's culture with God's intentions for His church. There's simply no such thing as a church who gets it right one hundred percent of the time and stays that way until Jesus comes back.

Second, we need all churches in our circles to be healthy to accomplish the objective of reaching every man, woman, and child. The goal of our mission makes all the difference. If the goal is to gather existing Christians in one circle into local churches then we may, in fact, have enough churches. Let's say that a circle with a population of 50,000 people had 20%, or 10,000 followers of Jesus. If the mission exists to church those people, then we would need 67 churches of 150 people to church those believers. Or in the normative circle in North America, we would have one megachurch of 5,000 people, 20 churches of 150 and a whole bunch of churches of 50 people or less. Either way, this mission feels manageable. In fact,

When another church succeeds, then my church succeeds because we share the same mission.

though we'd never say it, we'd even be ok if there were a few less churches. In the circle with 67 churches, what's the big deal if 6 or 7 of them are declining and dying? All that means is that the other 60 churches would need to add 10 more believers to their buildings on Sundays and we'd be ok.

But, if the mission is every man, woman, and child then the need changes drastically. We would need each of the 67 churches in our fictitious circle to average approximately 750 people to reach a population of 50,000. Currently the average size for a church in the United State hovers around 100 people and most simply don't have the facilities or infrastructure to grow to 750. To lower this per-church need, we'd certainly want to plant a host of new churches in this circle, and we'd also want to do everything in our power to ensure that the existing 67 churches were thriving. We would reject the common territorialism that defines the evangelical landscape because we would understand the vast scope of the mission. When another church succeeds, then my church succeeds because we share the same mission.

Which Comes First?

Should we focus on church planting or church revitalization? A Gospel Saturation OS says both! We need more churches in every circle in North America AND we need healthier churches in every circle AND we need every church collaborating to see Gospel Saturation as a reality in their COA.

The oft-asked question in response to this intense focus on one's immediate geography is, "What about the ends of the earth?" or "How do we take responsibility for our own COA while also ensuring that the gospel gets to places where there is not a known expression of the local church?" We might posit the answer to this question using the image of a telescope. A telescope takes something far away and brings it into focus, allowing you to see and make observations about some distant object. A local church can telescope its efforts as well.

The first and most strategic way to telescope the efforts of the local church comes through training and empowering indigenous believers to reach their COA. If there is a Christian, much less a Christian church, among any people group around the world then we can rest assured that person or church is the God-appointed means of taking the gospel to His people. Churches looking to telescope their missionary efforts, can work to come alongside believers to help them understand God's mission for His church and let God's Spirit reveal His strategy for reaching their geography. This is a far cry from the typical form of short-term missions undertaken by many churches that amount to a smörgåsbord

of trips littering the church calendar in which believers go and preach, teach, sing, or perform in foreign contexts. Without intentionality, these trips can amount to running the church growth OS in a new context in the hopes that the strategies and methodologies that work to grow the church in North America will work somewhere else as well. They might (leaving an international pocket of believers who are dependent on outsiders) or they might not (leaving a people who associated the Christian gospel with some form of Western imperialism). Either is bad. Gospel Saturation results in outsiders recognizing that the best they have to offer is their work to equip and train local believers to run the Gospel Saturation OS in their context. This will require repeated trips, strategic resources, and consistent financial investment to the same locations over an extended period of time.

Some locations will require an alternative strategy due to a void of local believers or churches. There are still pockets of people around the world with no known Christian witness. There simply isn't an indigenous believer (at least that we know of) who can reach his or her COI. These locations will require outsiders to prioritize sowing the seeds of the gospel, prayerfully trusting God that they would see an indigenous believer converted. Once this happens, they can immediately embark on the work of training this new believer to reach his community. ■

Conversation 5:

Disciple

Section 9

When faced with any aspect of life that contains some level of complexity, we all need a clear target (or defined outcome) and clear plan of action. If you're a grade-school child attempting to write a five-paragraph essay on cats, then the process is simple. You start by introducing your subject, then define three key traits of cats (furry, adorable, and affectionate) and then conclude with a summary of the reasons others should or should not run down to the shelter and adopt one for themselves. A simple goal leads to a simple process for accomplishing the goal.

The challenges mount as we attempt to tackle complex aspects of life. Quantum theory, for example, can't be described using a five-paragraph essay. You can download an easy-to-follow, Do-It-Yourself plan for building a bookcase, but it's a bit more challenging when you are attempting to build a skyscraper. You can develop a plan for providing a meal for a family in need with just a bit of work, but try to solve malnutrition around the world and you're likely to find that it's not so easy.

Throughout this *Primer* we've argued that the mission of God's people through His Church is to saturate the world with the gospel—to make it possible for every man, woman, and child on the planet to have access to the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. This massive mission is inherently complex. In the last

few chapters, we've argued that one way to make that mission practical—to make it manageable—is for every church to own its COA and for every disciple of Jesus to own their respective COI.

This laudable goal depends on one key factor—whether professing disciples of Jesus are actually disciples of Jesus. Everything hinges on the way we define, build, and send disciples. Disciple-making is the irreducible minimum for Gospel Saturation. It is the fundamental baseline, without which nothing else can be accomplished. It is as essential, as foundational, to our mission as basic addition and subtraction is to more advanced mathematics.

Definition of a Disciple

We know that discipleship is placed at the core of our mission because Jesus put it there. His oft-quoted Great Commission, issues this mandate:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19–20).

The mission is unmistakable—make disciples of all people. Jesus' command is a refrain of God's design from creation, that those who are in relationship with God—those who bear His image—would reflect that image and fill the earth with other image-bearing worshipers. Now, by the indwelling power of the Spirit, God's people are capable of doing what they were made for! We can give our lives away to make disciples. Which then begs two questions:

What is a disciple?

How will we know if we've made one?

The subsequent phrases in Jesus' commission help to answer these questions. First, a disciple is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Though there is much to say about the implications and richness of this command, at a fundamental level the new disciple engages in an act (water baptism) that demonstrates and models their reconciliation to God through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

Those who are saved by grace are then "taught to obey all things Jesus has commanded". Obedience to Jesus is a natural outcome of being saved by Jesus. This obedience will be seen in a person's actions, but, as Jesus taught, these

This laudable goal depends on one key factor—whether professing disciples of Jesus are actually disciples of Jesus.

actions will necessitate a transformed heart from which the actions flow (Lk 6:43–45).

Hence, obedience is both action and motivation. A disciple is defined as one who does the things Jesus did with the motivation with which He did them. We might say that a disciple is someone who is being transformed by God's Spirit to reflect the character and competencies of Jesus. Or, we could say that a disciple is a follower of Jesus who leads others to follow Jesus. What about you? How would you define a disciple of Jesus?

At this point there might be some push back to actually develop a tangible definition with a clear target and simple handles for you and the church you lead to unite around. But imagine for me if you will, a Sunday gathering of your church. You have been asked by the other elders to teach on discipleship according to Jesus. You study a number of passages from the Gospels and after a week of preparation, you've put together a pretty good sermon on the discipleship process of Jesus. As you begin to preach, you mention the need for discipleship in the church today. You talk about how important it is to be a disciple of Jesus, and you may even implore the church to be a part of a disciple-making movement in your community. All of this sounds really good, but if you are preaching to a room of 300 people, most of whom have grown up within the church, how many different definitions for a disciple do you think you'd have among that group? If one man's definition of a disciple focuses on a person's attendance to the Sunday gathering, and another's definition is centered around reading and obeying the Bible, both individuals have come away with two very different understandings of the sermon you just preached.

Having a clear target for disciple-making is vital for a local church. It helps create shared language and culture within a church. When church members have clarity about who

a disciple is and what a disciple does, from your work and the work of other leaders to infuse the idea of discipleship, no one can bring their own traditional understanding or cultural biases to the table. Everyone can be on the same page with a clear definition that you and the other leaders have developed. In the *Accelerator*, we'll spend more time building out the implications of our disciple-making mission, but let's establish some truths regarding this priority at the outset.

Disciple-Making and Gospel Saturation

Let's consider the connection between discipleship and our overall goal of Gospel Saturation. God has linked these two themes throughout redemptive history. The prophet Isaiah, speaking words of hope to the remnant of the nation of Israel, summarizes God's desire for His people throughout the Old Testament: "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Is 49:6). So, using our terms, we'd say that God set up the nation of Israel to saturate the earth with His glory.

How would the nation fulfill this mandate? God told Moses back when he first gave Israel the law: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all people, for all of the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5–6). Obey My voice. Keep My covenant. Be priests. Act like a holy nation. The transformation of the nation was essential for them to fulfill God's mission. The reason is clear—a people who looked just like the other nations couldn't be a light to others. Those who experienced the unique blessing of God, received the law of God, were given the Promised land by God, and through whom the Savior would one day come, could either profane God's name by their disobedience or reflect His greatness through their holiness (Lev 22:32). There was no alternative.

In both cases, Old and New Testament alike, the key to gospel movement was the individually transformed person.

Peter repeats this same theme and applies it to God's church—Jew and Gentile alike:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 5:9).

The theme is once again overt. God's people were given a mission to proclaim the excellences of God. How? They were to live as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. In both cases, Old and New Testament alike, the key to gospel movement was the individually transformed person.

It's no wonder this is the case. If God's people, who profess to be saved by His grace, are captivated by His love, and live intent on pleasing Him, merely reflect the godless ways of culture at large then it's unlikely that anyone is going to be compelled to believe the message they speak. The same is true in every aspect of life. No one is going to believe an obese person who professes the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise. They're certainly not apt to join their gym anyway. The same is true for God's church. There must be a qualitatively different life reflected by those who profess faith in Jesus.

We can define transformation this way:

**God's people transformed into the image of Christ,
resulting in the gospel renewal of lives, communities,
and cultures.**

Facets of a Disciple

This qualitatively different life, as we've already noted, begins at a heart level. Disciples will **BE** different. They will understand and embrace their identity in Christ as unworthy recipients of God's grace. As Paul writes to the church in Rome, all transformation will be rooted in the "renewal of the mind" (Rom 12:2). A mind shaped by the gospel will increasingly and naturally produce lasting behavioral change. This identity will be the foundation for all actions, and without a robust understanding of who they are in Christ, all behavioral change will be short-lived.

Disciples will then **DO** different things. They will exemplify different actions in every aspect of their lives, including what they think, how they speak, and what they do. This paradigm is seen throughout Paul's epistles. They begin with a

thorough explanation of the gospel message, and then move from there to the types of behavior that should flow from this level of gospel understanding. It's the turn Paul makes in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 3 among others. For example, in Ephesians 4:1, Paul challenges the church to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). What follows is a litany of behavior traits that flow from an understanding of one's call.

As a result, others will **SEE** a compelling picture of the gospel through the life of a missionary disciple. There must be a tangible transformation of the individual disciple to reflect the image of Christ. Those who live in their COI will observe a uniqueness about their being and doing. These distinctive marks of a disciple's life will be inherently counter-cultural. This process is vital and inverting it will do more harm than good. If we start by asking our people to demonstrate the gospel, they will be prone to hypocrisy. They'll attempt to act like a person they don't truly believe themselves to be. But, if we start with identity, then demonstrable behavior is sure to follow. If I'm appointed as a professor at a university (my identity), then I'll naturally teach classes and grade papers (my actions) and be recognized by students and colleagues for my role (my demonstration). But, if I simply walk in campus and start acting like a professor without actually being a professor, I'll be known as a fraud in short order. Actions follow identity. It can't be the other way around.

A disciple will BE and DO, and others will SEE!

Which leads to an interesting observation. In 2013, Statistician Dr. Ryan Kozey surveyed 30,000 evangelicals over a 4-year period, asking the question: Have you built two relationships this year with someone who wasn't a Christian? If so, what happened? Forty-one percent of people hadn't built any relationships; the average number of relationships they'd built was 2 people. 33% said they hadn't shared the good news with a single person. 72% didn't see anyone come to faith. Before you're too quick to shake your head, consider those questions in your own life. Could you respond with a greater level of missionary intentionality?

What does this evangelistic void mean and how do we fix it? Our discussion of discipleship up to this point gives us a clue: If we are not seeing evangelism in our people, then we have a discipleship problem. It's less likely that our people don't know how to share their faith, than it is that our people don't really believe the faith they profess. Their identity hasn't been shaped by Christ. So, what do we do about this reality if we want to give every man, woman, and child access to the gospel? That's the subject of our next segment.

Section 10

A Story of "Disciple Expectations"
by Todd Milby

In 2006 I took my first trip to Chennai, India in the midst of some leaders who were planting churches throughout their state. I spent time with five national leaders who were setting 5 year goals to see every man, woman, and child having opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ in their region. They wrote out on a white board their goal of planting 961 new churches in 5 years. My mind was completely blown. Questions filled my head. I forcefully asked them, "How was such a goal possible?"

They laid out a map and showed me every place and village they had identified that didn't have access to the gospel or where a church was needed. My mind wrestled with all kinds of questions: How would they get the resources? How would they find the leaders? How would they train new church planters?

I began to see that what God was doing in India was exceptional. In fact, 30 years ago there were about 125,000 churches in India. Today there are over 700,000 churches. So as these men shared with me their church planting vision, I shared with them all my questions. It seemed that they didn't understand what I was asking, and we weren't communicating very well until I realized they had convictions I didn't yet have. They believed that whatever God was going to do, He would do through all His people. Their operating system was so different from mine, so I began pushing them

about resources and training. Eventually, one of the Indian pastors pounded the table and began ranting in Hindi at me. I asked my interpreter what was wrong and he told me that I didn't understand. I asked him to help me understand: how is it possible to plant 961 churches in five years with no resources or formalized training? I asked them how many churches they had planted, and they showed me on the map where they had already planted more than 700 churches in the past five years!

I pulled back. It just wasn't making sense to my American, westernized mind. Then I asked them one more question. "Tell me about how you reach a new person in one of these villages?" They explained how they would go into a village with a few evangelists who would share the gospel with people, and many would respond. As soon as a new believer responded, the discipleship process would begin. They would teach them stories from God's Word, how to pray, and about various other spiritual disciplines. Then the new believers would help establish a new church. From the point of conversion, part of the process of discipleship was the expectation of planting a church. These Indian pastors were confident in the reproductive nature of the gospel for God's Kingdom. They believed that every disciple of Jesus possessed the potential to teach the gospel and start a church in their context.

I realized if Gospel Saturation would ever be a reality back in the US, we needed to take some lessons from our Indian brothers to change our definition of a disciple of Jesus and our expectations of what a disciple of Jesus does. When our understanding and expectation of a disciple aligns with the reality of the New Testament and our Savior, then the possibility of Gospel Saturation becomes tangible.

The church's mission is to make disciples. As a leader of the church you are a disciple of Jesus whose mission is to make disciples who fulfill their mission to make disciples. Each part of that sentence is vital to understanding your mission.

You are a disciple—This is where true leadership begins. Anyone can lead a staff meeting, develop a mission statement, plan a budget, guide a small group, serve in a mission, even preach a sermon. In fact, many non-Christians can do those things as well. But, for true transformation to take place, you must first prioritize your own personal sanctification. By this point, we've all seen friends flame out and read enough horror stories to know the disastrous consequences that come to those whose position outpaces their character. Unless you are personally pursuing Christ then you can kiss all of the rest of this mission talk goodbye.

Your mission is to make disciples. You simply cannot call other people to a task that you don't embrace. It's one thing to preach on disciple-making, it's another thing to walk with a couple of other people as they pursue personal transformation. You can rest assured that your church takes notice. They want to

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see if their leaders actually live the mission they are calling them to pursue. Do they own their circle of responsibility or are they cloistered off in various religious settings? Do they pursue every man, woman, and child? Do they care about seeing others conformed to the image of Christ? The answers to these questions set the stage for the final part of a pastor or church leader's responsibility.

Your mission consists of making disciples who fulfill their mission to make disciples. Paul makes this point clearly in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he reminds Timothy that God has given the church the gift of leaders "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11–12). So, in a real way it is the church, and not simply the pastors, who are the ministers of the gospel. Average, ordinary believers are the ones who should be doing the heavy lifting. Pastors and church leaders give of themselves to equip these men and women to fulfill their God-given calling as disciple-makers.

For this to happen, the church must embrace a decentralized approach that does not rise and fall on any key leader or even on a leadership team. Leaders are important, but they serve as a liability when they obscure or obstruct the responsibility every follower of Jesus receives to be about the work of disciple-making.

This final step in our process is perhaps the greatest liability in the church in North America. You may have noticed that if you preach a sermon on the Great Commission you likely get a wide assortment of grunts, head nods, or perhaps a smattering of "amens". It's not likely that someone will come up to you after one such sermon to say, "You know pastor, I'm not buying that whole disciple-making thing. I just don't see it in Scripture." But, if you take a 21-year-old young man who has come to faith in Jesus in the last six months and pair him with the average 45-year-old church member who's been sitting in the same seat in the same

church for the last two decades and ask the older man to teach the younger man how to "do all things Christ has commanded" you are likely to find that he hasn't the slightest clue of where to begin. This is the normative climate of many churches in our day. Would-be disciple-makers who are either: 1. Not disciples themselves or 2. Have no idea how to make another disciple.

Assessment

We have to be honest about this reality. In fact, the Scriptures give us the mandate to assess the nature of discipleship in our lives and in the lives of those we lead. Jesus repeatedly points out that His disciples will be known by their fruit (Matt 7:16). Fruit is visible—that's the point. You may not know whether a tree is healthy or not at first glance, but the fruit makes it immediately obvious. The lack of fruit means the tree is dead or dying. Abundant fruit means life and health.

We are all prone to bristle at this notion. No one relishes the thought of others seeing their flaws or weaknesses. In the same way, the average church is not often passionate about undergoing a thorough, honest evaluation of their maturation. But this work is vital.

Let's say that your doctor has examined you, done some tests, and has determined you are right on the verge of getting diabetes. He tells you, "unless you lose 40 pounds, you are guaranteed to get diabetes." Any of us who heard that would come to some obvious conclusion: First you would define success – lose 40 pounds. Then you would identify the process—routine of exercise and diet. And finally you would measure if it's working.

Disciple-Making Systems

Systems are designed to move someone or something from point A to point Z. That's what a system does. We want to manufacture a car so we design a process that will take the raw material and assemble it in a proper order producing a safe, comfortable, and efficient car.

Let's imagine that you were invited by the local president of a car manufacturer to take a tour of the factory. You pull onto the sprawling campus and are greeted

by a front-row parking place and the friendliest parking lot attendants you've ever met. From there, you are escorted into the foyer where you are awestruck by the beauty and professionalism of what you observe. The lighting is perfect. The signs communicate the plant's values. The employees scurry to fulfill their assignments. Your friend, the president, meets you and ushers you into his office—one defined by a large desk, full bookshelves, and a number of impressive diplomas and awards. He proceeds to show you a video that outlines the work of the factory and describes the cars they strive to produce. Finally, he gives you a glimpse of the spreadsheets that details the factory's profit over the last year. Revenue has never been better. Before you leave, you make a final request—one that is quite natural for someone in your position.

Can I see a car?

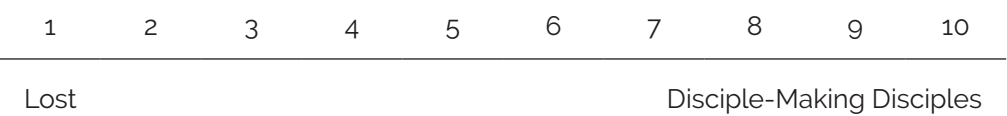
The factory exists to make cars. That's the outcome everything else presented along your tour works toward. If the president can't show you a real car—if he can't let you sit in it, take it for a test drive, and inspect its features—then you'd be entirely justified in questioning the validity of everything else you've observed. Why does everything else matter if you're not producing cars?

The same question can, and should be asked of the local church. Dallas Willard asked it this way: What is your plan for making disciples? Does your plan work? It's our mission to make disciples, so someone shouldn't have to work hard to find a few disciples who call your place home. They should be everywhere. All the staff, greeting teams, facilities, and budgets in the world are meaningless if we're not making disciples. And, if we're not making disciples then, more than likely the problem lies in our system. We're getting what our system is designed to produce. If our system is designed to produce religious consumers, then you'll likely find them in abundance. If we are getting nominal church attendees, then we should look no further than our systems. We aren't producing these types of people by accident. We are getting them because that's what our entire system is designed to make. You are always making disciples

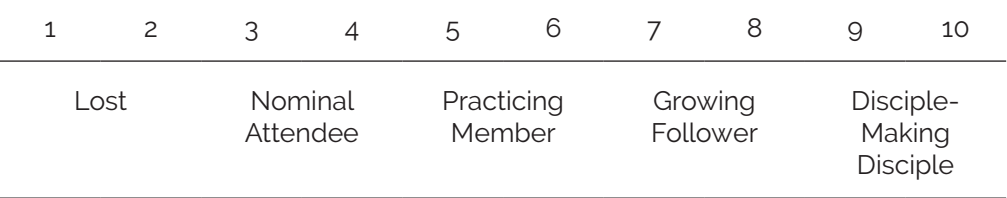
At this juncture, it's important to do a bit of honest assessment. If you were asked to assess the effectiveness of the disciple-making process in your church, how would you measure it? Would you put it on a scale of 1-10? Give it a grade of A to F? How would you quantify it? How would you know it's a 6 and not an 8 or a C and not a B? In business, success is measured by the bottom line: money, profits, and losses. If the church's business is making disciples. . . how's business?

If business isn't good or if you're not really sure how it's going, the place to start is to tackle the hard work of designing a system that leads to the definition of a disciple you outlined above. Think about the most exceptional disciple of Jesus you know and have observed. The one who most closely resembles the definition we've talked through. This individual not only looks like Jesus but is also making other disciples. Then, think of someone you know who is completely lost and living in continual bondage to sin. Let's plot each of those individuals on the chart

below with the mature disciple-making disciple being a 10 and the lost individual being a 1.



Now, let's define a few of points in between. First, a nominal church attendee (3) who isn't faithfully walking with Jesus and but who professes to have saving faith. Then, let's plot someone who is a practicing member of the church (6)—faithful in attendance, giving, and serving. Finally, a mature, growing follower of Jesus (8), but one who isn't working to make disciples.



Now that we have our points, let's tease out the characteristics of those at each point. Use the chart below to list at least five traits of someone at each stage.

Stage	Top Five Characteristics
Lost	
Nominal	
Member	
Follower	
Discipler	

Based on the list above, what percentage of your current church attendees would you place in each column? Even more challenging—where would you put yourself?

Lost	_____	%
Nominal	_____	%
Member	_____	%
Follower	_____	%
Discipler	_____	%

Now, one final step in the process. Let's assume that you are not in a church with 100 percent of your people in the final column. In fact, you don't want to be a church with 100 percent of your people in that column. If your people are living on mission—taking responsibility for their circle of influence—then you should have a good percentage of people at each stage. But, your goal is to move them from one stage to the next. We want to avoid having people stuck at any one stage for decades.

Consider which system or method is best utilized in your context for moving someone from one stage to the next.

Movement	System
From Lost to Nominal	
From Nominal to Member	
From Member to Follower	
From Follower to Discipler	

Now we would certainly want to note that it's impossible to assume that every person's progress through these stages will happen in exactly the same way. Someone may move from one stage to the next in a way that we did not plan or can't manufacture. For example, it's common for someone to move from one stage to the next because of an acute period of suffering. It's not likely that someone is going to sign-up for a class on suffering—well they might sign up for a teaching on the theory of suffering, but they aren't apt to pursue the experience of suffering itself.

Slow progress shouldn't cause us to give up too quickly. God is sovereign and He can and will use whatever means He desires to move people through this process. He will "continue the good work He has begun" (Phil 1:6). But, He often sees fit to use our plans to accomplish these good purposes. In the same way, we pray, not because God needs us to pray in order to do what He wants, but because He has seen fit to arrange the world in such a way that He works in and through our prayers. So, what system(s) is best used to move someone through each stage in this process? A word of warning is needed at this point: Don't simply consider the system that you most prefer. For example, you may be a person for whom God has done His most significant work through the public preaching of God's Word. As a result, you may be prone to assume that preaching is the best way to move people from each stage to the next. This is not likely. Instead, think about the real names of individuals that you would put in each category. What do you believe would be the most effective way to move that individual from one stage to the next?

This emphasizes the reality that discipleship is a holistic process that begins long before someone professes faith in Jesus. It's common to hear church leaders discuss evangelism and discipleship as if they are two mutually exclusive processes. But this is not the case. We are discipling people in the faith from the beginning as they observe our lives and discern what it actually means to walk with Jesus. In the same way, we are evangelizing those who already have faith in Christ when we remind them of the great truths of the gospel. We should do evangelism and discipleship all the time, with people at all different stages, in the hopes that they would give their lives to this great mission as well. ■

Conversation 6:

Convictions

Section 11

If you were an exceptional evangelist and saw 5,000 converts a year through your mass crusade ministry for 34 years, you would have a total of 170,000 converts. This level of success would certainly garner worldwide attention and fame. You would end your career at the pinnacle of success. But, what if I told you that this goal was settling for second-best? What if there was an immeasurably more effective way to run after the Great Commission?

The outcome would be vastly different if your ministry were driven by multiplication. If you were to share the gospel with someone and disciple that one person to maturity over the course of a year then it might seem that you'd done very little. This would not be the case if you and that disciple then replicated the process over the course of the following year, meaning that you shared the gospel and saw someone else come to faith and disciplined to maturity and that other person did the same. By the end of year two, you would have three disciples on your family tree. If you both did the same pattern, there would be 8,568,963,072 disciples by the end of 34 years. This is the huge difference that results from adding converts versus mobilizing missionary disciples.

Imagine that—think about what it would be like to give your life, the entirety of your pastoral ministry, to see to it that every man, woman, and child had a

**Ideas shape
actions.
Principles
develop
priorities.**

repeated opportunity to become a multiplying, missionary disciple. If multiplication gets in your bones, it will change everything about you—what you think about, how you spend your time, your preaching and counseling, what makes you mad, what brings you to the edge of your seat in excitement, everything... Literally everything changes.

We've all observed the life-shaping effect core convictions can have. As I write this, the political landscape in the United States is once again divided over those who long to see every unborn child given a chance at life versus those who believe that a woman's right to choose should be the highest priority. These two differing core convictions shape the lives of many of either side, evidenced by the unending stream of bills, marches, protests, and activist groups.

Parents who believe that homeschool is the best method of forming the hearts and minds of their children will likely defend that position with great earnestness. Others may believe that the mission of God necessitates that children should be placed in public school in order to serve as light and salt to their classmates. These core convictions shape the entire educational pathway for families.

On a more basic level, a football coach is likely to recruit quality athletes if he believes that his program is destined for greatness due to a rabid fan base, a supportive athletic director, unrivaled facilities, and a solid team already in place. Or, an entrepreneur is likely to take more risks if he believes that the trajectory of the market favors his business venture.

Ideas shape actions. Principles develop priorities.

That's been the entire goal of this *Primer*. Here, we've been far more concerned about shaping your core beliefs than we have in changing your actions (at least so far). Think about the ground

we've covered up to this point. We've argued that the OS of the church needs to be driven by Gospel Saturation over church growth. This universal mission is possible by embracing four key principles.

First, we must grasp the nature of movement. God is at work around the world to do far more than we can ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). He is on mission reconciling men, women, and children to a right relationship with their Creator, and He demonstrates His super-abundant grace by allowing His people—His Church—to be a part of this worldwide movement.

Movement leads to an understanding of God's Kingdom. The work of God is not centered on any one localized expression of the church. His Kingdom is far greater than that. It is comprised of local churches who are faithful to the gospel, though they may differ in style, structure, or philosophy. What's important, from the perspective of Gospel Saturation, isn't that any one singular church grows, but that God's Kingdom is seen on earth as it is in heaven through the faithful witness of His Church (Matt 6:10).

God's Kingdom compels us into the harvest—the third priority of an OS driven by Gospel Saturation. Those who are intent on seeing multiplication happen and God's Kingdom spread will give of themselves to labor among the harvest. They will be discontent with merely reshuffling the myopic percentage of those who already profess faith in Christ to new churches, and will instead invest prayerful intentionality in sowing the gospel seed among those who have yet to trust Christ (Matt 13:1–23).

And, finally, faithful work in the harvest should result in the production of robust, mature disciples. Gone are the days when a mere profession of faith and a few tweaks to one's behaviors would suffice to define one as a follower of Jesus in our North American culture. The denigration of our society means that churches must relentlessly work to define and make disciples, and then do the hard work to assess the way in which their church systems aid in this task. This is arduous work, no doubt, but it is the only means given by God for saturating a lost and dying world with the salt and light of the gospel (Matt 5:13–16).

These ideas can be summarized in the following equations:

EMWC = An Opportunity
His glory > Our story
A church < The Church
Every Believer = A Missionary

These four principles compel us to three core convictions that drive the OS of Gospel Saturation. When God moves in the world, He moves through:

- [1] All His people (2 Cor 5:17–20; Eph 2:10),**
- [2] Leaders who equip others first (Jn 14:12; Eph 4:11–13),**
- [3] Disciples and churches that multiply (Acts 1:8; 6:7; 9:31; 19:10).**

These convictions drive us to priorities necessary for Gospel Saturation. Notice that these convictions are descriptive in nature. They do not simply prescribe factors that we should pursue, they first and foremost, describe the way a movement of God takes place. This is how God works. As with all of life, if the principles embodied in these core convictions define you and your church, things will never be the same. Or at least they better not.

Though the names and faces are different, we've all heard the story of the workaholic business executive who is hell-bent on success at all costs. His passion inevitably leads to the unraveling of his marriage and family. One night, in a fit of anger, his pre-adolescent daughter expresses deep-seated resentment and hatred for her absentee father. To compound matters, his wife has just discovered a stash of razor blades under her daughter's bed and has noticed cuts on her arms and blood stains on her sheets. In this moment, the husband has a choice. He either continues on with life as normal, and lives with the same corrupting principles that brought him to this place or he can rethink all of life. Ideally, something clicks in this man's heart and he awakens to truths that have been there all along, but those to which he was blind. He might come to believe that he is the primary leader of his home and that his apathy and passivity contributed to his daughter's pain. Or, he might see clearly that his family is far more important than any business deal he'd ever make. Whatever the conclusions, the only way we'd expect this man's behavior to change is if his core convictions, his principles, changed drastically.

This is what we're arguing for in this *Primer*. Yes, there are warning signs throughout the Church in North America that something is wrong. Something is really, really wrong. Like the abandoned family, our churches are on the brink of destruction. Surely we can have confidence that God will not abandon His Church—He will continue to build it (Matt 16:18). But, that does not mean any singular church or even the entire ecosystem of evangelical Christianity in North America will survive.

How do we change? There's certainly two ways to guarantee that we won't change, at least not for long. The first is to do nothing—continue the OS of church growth in hopes that somehow our results will be different than they have proven to be up to this time. The second is to address the symptoms with new Apps. This amounts to little more than the husband in our scenario above throwing out the razor blades and signing her up for some piano lessons to fill her spare time while he's not around. This may stop his daughter from harming herself and it might

divert her attention from her father's failure, but it's certainly not going to bring lasting change. In the same way, addressing the issues in the church by removing negative actions (disunity, sloppy preaching, squandered resources) or by adding positive actions (evangelism training, prayer workshops, or an annual revival) isn't going to bring the lasting change we long for.

This type of change will only happen if our deep-seated convictions change. And, as you would expect when you are seeking to overhaul an OS, they will cause us to make drastic shifts in the way we "do church". But here's the good news. Principles naturally produce priorities. They go hand in hand. Honestly you don't need to stress too much about the priorities and changes that are to come. Yes, they will be hard, you'll likely face opposition, and you may even question if it's worth it. But, you'll soon discover that these priorities are a natural overflow of shared principles. You cannot help but prioritize these things if the principles are really lodged in your heart. They'll be as natural as our newly formed father deciding to leave work early to make it home for a family dinner. I mean, who wouldn't do this if they really embraced the principle that family always comes first? When faced with another in a long line of business travel obligations, this man would naturally find ways to limit his time away—even if it meant quitting his job—in order to be more available to his daughter. Would this be hard? Yes. Would it incur costs? Certainly. But it's just what a man with new principles would do. And, as you'll see in our final section, these types of changes will reshape your ministry and your church as well.

Build-A-Church Workshop

If you are a parent, odds are you've faced the grueling challenge of a Build-A-Bear Workshop. If you are unfamiliar with these ingenious money-pits, then you haven't been to a mall in a while. The store consists of a vast assortment of parts for stuffed animals, including a heart, from which every giddy child can build a unique, personalized teddy bear.

Let's imagine we're at a similar store, but this time it's far more fun. We are working to Build-A-Church from scratch. Here's why this is important. Too often, we are prone to talk ourselves out of changes before we even begin because of the single question that has crushed more leaders than any other: "But what about...?"

What if you could build the church you've dreamed about—the church you believe God wants?

- But what about our debt?
- But what about our facility?
- But what about our current programs?
- But what about those people who always complain?
- But what about my job?

These "but what abouts" are apt to keep us from trying in the first place. But, what if you could start from nothing? What if all the "but what abouts" were gone? What if you could build the church you've dreamed about—the church you believe God wants?

Section 12

You're likely coming to the end of this *Primer* a bit frustrated. You've spent all of this time, engaged in all of these conversations, and read each of these chapters, and you still haven't found the blueprint for doing church. We've all been trained to crave quick, practical tools that can make a difference tomorrow. This *Primer* doesn't work that way, nor should it.

In many ways, this *Primer* has been a parenting tool for us all. Parents should have a vast assortment of practical skills they hope to see their kids embody as adults: they want them to know how to manage money, write a coherent essay, handle themselves in a pressure-packed job interview, cook healthy meals, choose a godly spouse, find a healthy church, and on and on we could go. Great goals, right? Who wouldn't want their child to embody these things?

But, they're not the place to start.

You don't sit down with your eight-year-old and explain the consequences of compounding interest, outline the next literary masterpiece, or discuss the complexity of marital relationships. No, you begin with principles:

- You teach that money is valuable and is earned through hard work;
- You train them to talk in coherent sentences, look adults in the eyes, and say what they mean;

- You work with them to manage their emotions when they are frustrated or faced with something scary;
- You remind them of the value of drinking water and eating vegetables rather than drinking sodas and eating fried Oreos;
- You help them determine what friendships they should cultivate and which ones they should avoid.

The parenting process takes these principles and cultivates priorities that shape the child into adulthood. The same is true for this *Primer*. Our four principles: (Movement, Kingdom, Harvest, and Disciple) embodied in our three core convictions lead to four distinct leads to four distinct priorities that will forever define our ministries and our churches. These priorities are:

- [1] **Mobilization:** God's people owning the lostness of a defined people in a defined place.
- [2] **Transformation:** God's people transformed into the image of Christ, resulting in the gospel renewal of lives, communities, and cultures.
- [3] **Collaboration:** God's people partnering with all the expressions of His church for the Gospel Saturation of a place.
- [4] **Multiplication:** God's people continually reproducing disciples, leaders, and churches for the Gospel Saturation of a place.

If you recall, way back in chapter 1, we hinted at these priorities. That's because it's impossible to keep principles and priorities apart. They are naturally connected. But now at the conclusion of our *Primer* on Gospel Saturation, let's consider how these priorities are seen in our new OS.





Gospel Saturation Prioritizes Mobilization Over Collection

If we truly believe that God wants every man, woman, and child to have a repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel, then we will, by necessity, create strategic and intentional ways to mobilize all of God's people to accomplish this goal. It is clear that the main challenge to those driven by an OS of Gospel Saturation is that of accessibility: How do we make it possible for everyone on the planet to come in contact with a missionary disciple who is ready and willing to communicate the good news of Jesus? The answer to this question forces the church to rethink the purpose of its gathering and its scattering. The church can, and should, gather on a regular basis for a wide assortment of reasons: teaching, singing, praying, community, discipleship, and so forth. But, these gatherings must not obscure the fact that the lion share of the heavy lifting of Gospel Saturation will not happen in our buildings on Sunday morning. It will happen out there—where we live, work, and play while shining like lights in a lost and dying world. So, rather than focusing all the effort and attention on the gathered church, our new OS demands a focus on scattering—an emphasis on mobilizing the Church to be the Church in the world. It's this goal that should inform the questions leaders ask, the way they conduct meetings, the structure of their budgets, the alignment of their staff, the nature of their teaching, and every other aspect of the day to day life of the church.

Gospel Saturation Prioritizes Transformation Over Attendance

Then, as we've seen throughout this *Primer*, church leaders and pastors will prioritize the transformation of their people rather than merely settling for attendance in weekly gatherings. Long before someone trusts in Jesus, we begin to disciple them to understand the gospel and its implications. Once God grants saving faith, we labor to see them transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus, so that they can then be sent, as missionary disciples, into the harvest themselves. For this reason, we are quickly to abandon programs or models that are not producing genuine transformation into the people who attend our churches week in and week out. Even those models that may have been used at one time in the history of the church to bring change, are quickly jettisoned if they no longer produce disciples who follow hard after Jesus. Prioritizing transformation creates an agile church culture that is able to move, change, and adapt quickly in order to pursue God's intended design for His people.

Gospel Saturation Prioritizes Collaboration over Competition

A third priority shift that results from the new OS is one we've seen throughout this *Primer*. Far too often evangelical leaders give lip service to statements like "every church matters" or "we're all in this together". Those with a new OS are intent on making these claims a practical reality. They know that they need more churches and healthier churches in order to get after the goal of every man, woman, and child. Therefore, they prioritize time investing in other churches, building relationships with other pastors, welcoming new church planters to the city, praying together for a gospel awakening, forming relationships for missionary endeavors, and scores and scores of other practical actions pastors and church leaders can take to shift their focus off of their singular local church. A number of beautiful things happen when Kingdom leaders begin to collaborate. First, the spirit of competition that sadly exists too often among churches begins to die. Competition can't exist when we see ourselves under a common King. Second, the world begins to take notice. Jesus taught us in John 17 that one of the greatest proofs about the legitimacy of Jesus and His gospel would be the love and unity that His followers share. When the world sees the Church collaborating for the glory of Christ alone, they see something that they cannot find anywhere else in this world.

Gospel Saturation Prioritizes Multiplication Over Addition

Finally, Gospel Saturation forces us—it compels us—to dream big dreams. We're not content with a 12% increase in attendance or a few dozen more baptisms than last year. The haunting question that will keep us up at night will be how we might see a movement of multiplication. The answer might actually produce subtraction rather than addition, at least for a season. For example, a church might rethink its priorities and determine that sending teams to start new churches in strategic pockets of the city is more important than having those same people pad the attendance numbers at any one church facility. At first glance, it might seem that a church who made that choice had actually lost—meaning that there simply would not be as many people in the seats or dollars in the bank account. But, in reality, the church made the risky choice of prioritizing multiplication over addition. On earth, such changes might seem counterintuitive, but one day we will all see clearly that a shift in priorities, like those we're discussing, will be the means God uses to bring many sons and daughters to glory to the praise of His name (Heb 2:10).



C onclusion

So, where do we go now? These six conversations were intended to instill certain priorities into our minds, and hopefully into our hearts as well. They were written to prime the pump for ongoing conversation, dialogue, and partnership that could bear significant fruit in your city.

We've designed another tool—an *Accelerator*—to aid your group in implementing the changes we've discussed in this *Primer*. We've intentionally refrained from providing many prescriptive statements throughout these six conversations. Prescriptive statements (Do this... Don't do that...) tend to be App-based, whereas our goal in the *Primer* focuses on descriptive statements about our new OS. The *Accelerator* will shift our attention to how we might embody these principles moving forward and how we can invite others into the conversation with us. The content and convictions of this *Primer* have hopefully led to much soul searching. We recognize that even though this OS may be new to us, it's not new to God and it arises from the very essence of what God wants as His story and mission unfold in Scripture.

It is our hope that you have begun to rethink the answers to all the "why" questions you've held up to this point in Christian ministry and church leadership. We understand that the process of owning certain convictions takes time. When we are presented with a new paradigm, we go through an evolution in our mind, heart, and soul while trying to grasp the magnitude of the truth presented to us.

Most leaders, after being presented with the new OS of Gospel Saturation, begin by believing it is an interesting concept. It sounds good in theory, but there are so many things you would need to change in your life and in the church you lead, that you just aren't sure if it's worth the work of transitioning such a foundational conviction.

After the interesting concept phase, many church leaders shift to acknowledging that the OS of Gospel Saturation is a good idea. Leaders in this phase may agree with the conviction in principle, but there are still no changes to how they do life and ministry. If all the content and teaching presented in this *Primer* merely remains a good idea, we will never make the radical reorientation necessary to move towards blanketing our cities with the gospel of Jesus. The move from good idea to foundational conviction is a game-changer. When the Gospel Saturation OS and its conviction becomes foundational to your life and ministry, it alters everything. It not only informs our "why," but our "how" in ministry.

If what we've presented is truly a conviction for you, it can't be something that you opt out of, especially if we seriously want to see a Kingdom movement of God in the harvest through His disciples. The question we want you to wrestle with is this:

Can you go back to doing church the way you always have after being exposed to this new conviction of an OS that seeks to saturate every man, woman, and child with the gospel and God's glory?

When Gospel Saturation becomes non-negotiable, then the priorities of Mobilization, Transformation, Collaboration, and Multiplication will flow through everything we do as a church community. These six conversations were meant to lead you, and other leaders in your city, to rethink the normative OS in the life of the church in order that every man, woman, and child might have repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But we acknowledge that the fruit we seek and the partnership we desire can't take place unless we all have the same driving conviction for Gospel Saturation. Until all of us have a shared vision to see every man, woman, and child have repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel in our community, our efforts to impact our city will be limited.

But, that doesn't have to be the outcome. By God's grace, it is possible for a group of leaders to change the OS of their churches and see a movement of God's Kingdom that will impact our culture. This is our prayer as we end these conversations. If you would like to know more about envisioning Gospel Saturation in your city, or about other resources to help go after every man, woman, and child in your geography, please feel free to contact us at envision@christtogether.org.