

NEVER ALONE

HOW TO AVOID
ISOLATION IN
PLANTING



SEND Network

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INTRODUCTION

Church planting can be a lonely work. It's amazing that a venture in which people are vital can result in isolation. Planting couples often lament the loss of community experienced when they launch out into a new work. Some of this is to be expected; there are fewer people in fledgling church plants, and many of them are non-Christians or immature believers. Yet much of the lack of community experienced by planting couples is correctable. In this short e-book, church planters and their wives discuss the necessity of community and present an assortment of practical tools to find community before it is too late.

CHAPTER 1

YOU NEED IT

KENT BATEMAN

I remember sitting at a conference for a particular church planting network. We had reached the portion of the conference where it was someone's job to get up and fill everyone in on the benefits and reasons for joining the network. I was early on in the planting process so I wanted to pay close attention to what was offered.

He began. "Really, when I think about why you should join [network name], I think of one thing: community."

I listened up, thinking he was about to describe how helpful it is to have community not just in your church, but also among like-minded pastors in your area and region. I would have loved that. But that's not what he said.

"We know that most of you guys can't be in community with your people; you're the pastor. So we want to make sure that when you guys aren't doing well, you have another pastor in your area that you can call and meet up with to share life."

I was confused to say the least. There is absolutely a need for pastors to connect with other pastors in their city and region to care and

pray for one another. Yes and amen. But to the exclusion of living among the people they shepherd? It's hard for me to get behind that idea.

YOUR PEOPLE NEED YOU IN COMMUNITY

Pastors, there is a need for you to be in community with your people. First, your people need it. Your people need a pastor who doesn't just instruct them to live in community, but lives in community himself. They need to see you as a person just as much as they need to see you as a pastor.

They need to see how you confess your failures, repent of your sins and build relationships with unbelievers. As Wayne Cordiero puts it, "You can teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are." If your people see you walking intentionally in community, there's a good chance they'll follow suit. And, as an added benefit, you won't be speaking out of ignorance when you preach to them about how to practice life in a church family.

YOU NEED IT, TOO

Perhaps more urgently for some of us, you need community, too. You don't just need someone you can call in crisis; you need people who walk through life with you day-by-day. If you wait until you're in trouble to call your other pastor friends, it might be too late. We need people who interact with us on a weekly basis to spot our sins, encourage us in our strengths and point us to the never-exhausted gospel of grace.

I want to be realistic here. There are absolutely details that need to be thought through in doing this well. How should we discuss conflict with another pastor? How do we confess anxiety resulting from a particular care issue and keep the details confidential? Those are absolutely things to take the proper precautions with in community. But brothers, that can't be an excuse to avoid community altogether. It can't be a justification to avoid walking in the community God calls us to—the community that both our people and we desperately need.

As a fellow pastor, let me plead with you to not live over and beyond, but instead among your people. You need it, and your church will be better because of it. I can't help but think of how many burn-outs we could prevent and how many moral failures we could avoid if we as pastors put a little more effort into being known by our people. And moreover, think of how much healthier both our churches and we would be and how much more attractive our communities would look to outsiders if everyone was known fully and loved fully—starting with us.

CHAPTER 2

NO MASKS ALLOWED

NOAH OLDHAM

I was in the middle of small group when I got the barrage of text messages. People that I knew from several different places were trying to get a hold of me. Their pastor had been fired for a moral failure. They felt betrayed. They were confused. They didn't know where to turn so they turned to me. I was glued to my phone for most of small group that night as I too learned the details of this pastor's failure when the church released a public statement. My friend, a co-laborer in my city, a mentor of sorts, had fallen. In that moment and in the days to come there were more questions than there were answers.

As we were closing up small group that night, I shared the news with the 10 guys that sat on old couches and the cold concrete floor in my unfinished basement, our wives sitting just above us in the living room. And I did one of the most important things a planter can ever do; I gave them permission. I gave them permission to peer, poke and prod as deeply into my life as they wanted. I told them I needed it. I needed to be known.

You see, it wasn't because this man was the pastor of a mega-church that he failed (though that very well may have been a contributing factor). It was because he wasn't known. Isolation—the creation of an online and on-stage persona and a distancing from honest accountability—was where it all began. Let's be perfectly clear: it isn't just the big names with the big stages and the big opportunities who are vulnerable. Every single one of us is vulnerable. As Kent pointed out in the previous chapter, all pastors and their wives need community. It is vital to the work of ministry.

In 1 Peter 5:8, having just addressed elders in the church specifically, Peter says, “Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Again, let's be clear: church planter, the devil is your adversary prowling around seeking out someone to destroy. Who is this “someone” he is able to devour? Peter tells us in verses 6-8.

THE PROUD

Satan is coming after those who think more highly of themselves than they ought to, those who are seeking their own glory and their own stage. He is coming for those who love their own voice more than God's. God tells us, therefore, to humble ourselves under His mighty hand.

THE ANXIOUS

Satan is coming after those in anxious situations. In the midst of worry, struggle and emotionally trying circumstances God's remedy is for us cast our anxieties on Him, because of His good care for us.

THE INTERNAL IDEALIST

Satan is coming after those who think: *That could never be me*. Much like pride, internal idealism is unable to see the dark nature of the flesh and the vulnerability that we all face. God's command is for us to be sober-minded.

THE EXTERNAL IDEALIST

Finally, Satan is coming after the external idealist. This person, instead of ignoring the darkness of their own heart, ignores the power of the enemy and the world around him, making him even more vulnerable to the schemes of Satan. To combat this, God tells us to be watchful.

All of these situations can and will lead us into isolation if we aren't careful. Satan wants to use these things and more to drag us into isolation so he can pick us off one by one. So what do we do? Resist him, firm in the faith. And then Peter gives us three things in verses 9-11 that I believe make for a perfect acronym. When the devil comes to hit us, we *hit* back.

H – HONESTY

We have to be honest with ourselves and others when we are suffering. We have to confess that we aren't special people who aren't vulnerable but that like every other human being, we struggle, are tempted and need help.

I – INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Peter tells us that our suffering is common to "the brotherhood" throughout the world. Therefore, we need to intentionally build a

brotherhood with other men who aren't just fans but are truly friends. We need others who we can be honest with and who will pursue honesty from us, hold us accountable and watch our blind spots.

T – TRAINING

We need to be people who are practicing the spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are vehicles that grow us up in who Peter calls “the God of all grace.” And through these disciplines Christ Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish us.

CHAPTER 3

MOVING TOWARD OTHERS OUTSIDE OF YOUR CHURCH

MATT ROGERS

Someone once said that no one drifts toward spiritual maturity and the same can be said for community. Like a young child at the beach, the tides of pastoral ministry will inevitably pull you away from other people and into isolation. Unless you are taking action to abate this influence, then you, like the child, will end up in grave danger.

You can rest assured of one thing—few people are going to take steps toward a deep relationship with most pastors. The nature of our job often gives off an aura that we are unapproachable. Sometimes people simply assume that we are too busy to want to just have friends. Plus, it seems awkward for most people to imagine going over to the pastor's house to watch a football game or cook some wings. This means that pastors must take the first step.

Let's delineate two different types of relationships and consider the implications of forming community on each level. The first: relationships with those outside your church.

This type of community is easier for at least two reasons. First, you are likely to have known these individuals longer. Perhaps it is a childhood friend, a seminary classmate or a ministry colleague known for decades. These relationships have the benefit of time to enhance trust and authenticity. Second, you are likely to have a great deal in common with these friends. They know the trials of ministry. They carry similar burdens, pray similar prayers and pursue similar goals. Friends like these are a treasure from God, and it is foolish for a pastor to squander the God-given gift they can be.

CONSIDER HOW MANY OF THESE FRIENDSHIPS YOU CAN SUSTAIN

God wires all people with a certain relational width. Some have the capacity for deep relationships with a wide assortment of people while others can only sustain relationships with a few. What is important is not the number of these types of friends you can sustain, but the proportion of these types of friends you can maintain without neglecting friendships with those in your own church.

Imagine Johnny. Johnny is a pastor who has been in ministry for over 30 years and has developed a long history of connections throughout North America. He has a compelling personality that endears him to those he meets. He is always on the phone, calling or texting other pastors with words of Scripture or notes of encouragement. Hundreds of pastors would rightly call him a friend. Yet Johnny fails to do the same with members of his own staff and those who attend his church. His people see an ever-busy pastor—one who is seemingly always too busy for them.

In order to avoid this very real scenario, pastors should determine how many deep relationships they can form with others outside of their local congregation without neglecting those in their own flock. Certainly this does not mean that the pastor is rude to others who exceed his relational quota, but that he is intentional and wise about where he puts his priorities.

CONSIDER WHO YOU WANT TO BE LIKE

We all know the truism that we become like our friends. This is not merely true for those in grade school but for pastors as well. If we pursue deep and ongoing relationships, our friends will shape the men we will become—for good or evil.

For this reason, it is wise for pastors to give great thought before they whimsically choose these friendships. Take pastor Johnny again. Rather than forming hundreds of relationships, he limits himself to 10 meaningful relationships. But each of these relationships are with unhealthy pastors—defeated and broken men. Each time they talk, Johnny feels like a counselor attempting to unravel the chaos in the other man's life. At first he feels helpful—like he is pastoring other pastors. But if this is the extent of his friendships, his soul will soon begin to shrivel.

Pastors must choose a friend or two at this level who loves Jesus, loves the church, loves his family and loves his congregation in a way that is compelling. He should find those that cause him to think, *Man, I'd sure like to love others the way that guy does.* These are the relationships worth developing.

CONSIDER HAVING A FORMAL CONVERSATION

Far too often, we allow our fears and insecurities to keep us from expressing our needs to another person. What will they think? Will it be awkward? These fears are common, but we must push through our fears if we are going to pursue the types of relationships we desperately need. This conversation might go something like this:

“Hey man, I know we are both really busy and have a ton of stuff on our plates, but I’ll be honest—I could really benefit from us hanging out and talking on a regular basis. Pastoral ministry feels very lonely at times, and I see myself moving toward isolation. I know this is not healthy, and I’m trying to fight it. But I need your help. Would you be willing to find time each week when we could connect, talk about life and pray together?”

This type of overt request is helpful on a number of levels:

- It forces you to be clear about your needs and serves as a God-given gift to grow humility in your heart.
- It clarifies to the other person what you are looking for in the friendship and allows them to discern whether they can provide what you are asking.
- It provides a point of accountability for you in the weeks ahead, making it more difficult for you to go a long time without connecting with this person.

As you have this conversation, make sure you give the person an out. They may not have time for this level of community or they may be stretched thin relationally already. If so, the formal conversation can alert you to this reality and protect you from having an expectation of the level of friendship that the other person simply cannot meet.

CONSIDER THE LEVEL OF HONESTY THESE RELATIONSHIPS PROVIDE

The beauty and ease of these relationships lies in the fact that, most often, these friends are not in your natural, daily circle of relationships. As a result, you should find it easier to bare your soul in places that might be challenging with someone on your church staff or in your small group.

One word of caution is needed at this point: guard your heart against sinful gossip and malicious talk in these conversations. Due to the relational distance, it is easy for you to take advantage of these conversations as a time to air all of your frustrations with others. Conversations like that can quickly devolve into speech that is unhealthy and sinful. We can unload our pain in ways that shame, expose or harm others by saying things about them that we'd never say to them. One of the best tools to avoid such folly is spinning the conversation to yourself. Discuss not merely what another person did to hurt you or the sin that you observe in others' lives, but talk about how this person is exposing your own sin.

Relationships with other pastors or friends from another church are a great gift to church planters and pastors. Particularly in the early days of planting, when you may have very few mature Christians in

your church, these friendships provide a valuable context for community. However, these friends are not enough. It's to these other relationships that we now turn.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING TOWARDS OTHERS IN YOUR CHURCH

MATT ROGERS

The challenge of community for pastors with members of their own church is undeniable. While they may live in relationships with hundreds of people, these relationships are often temporary and unbalanced. Who is the pastor's friend? Who does he confide in other than his spouse? Who are his true friends?

CONSIDER THOSE YOU'VE KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME

Some pastors and planters are fortunate enough to lead a church with friends they've known for decades. It is quite common for church planters to begin their new venture with a college roommate, a guy they served with at a summer camp or a buddy they've known since high school. These long-term friendships provide the pastor with a built-in context for community. These men have known the pastor before he was the pastor. They likely know his youthful sin struggles and passions.

It's far easier to drop pretenses and be real with guys you've done life with for some time. However, it is wise for you as a pastor to have a formal conversation with these long-term friends, address the challenges of maintaining friendship and covenant together to do whatever is necessary to maintain a deep sense of community.

CONSIDER THE NECESSITY OF MAKING NEW FRIENDS

Like relationships with those from another church, relationships with old friends can easily be an impediment to forming new, vibrant friendships. The nature of a 30-year friendship can be deceptive. Often, these friends are likely to have common sin propensities and blind spots. They know one another so well that they grow accustomed to one another's weaknesses. They no longer challenge one another to grow in Christ-likeness since they assume this is just the way the other person is.

New friends are critical for healthy community. They force you to do the hard work of getting to know another person, sharing your story with them and inviting them to challenge you to walk with Jesus wholeheartedly.

CONSIDER WHO YOU LIKE AND TRUST

This point seems quite simple—and even selfish—but it is essential if deep community is going to form. First, look for those in your church community with whom you have something in common. Maybe it is a common hobby—like hunting, fishing or playing soccer—or a common passion—like rooting for the same college football team.

These shared interests are often a point of connection that will allow you to enter the friendship as a normal person and not just a pastor.

It's not selfish to lean into these relationships; in fact, it is foolish not to. Yes, you are called to love and serve all people as a pastor. There are those who you will find hard to love and those with whom you have little in common. These people are unlikely to be a source of deep friendship for you. And this is okay!

From that subset of the church, further narrow down your deep friendships by assessing whom among those people you can genuinely trust. This will take time to discern. A wise and discerning man can take baby steps into relationships, assessing the other man's past character and trustworthiness in the developing relationship. If the person proves trustworthy in small things, then you can trust him to continue to develop the depth of the relationship.

PRAY FOR THE SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE

The friends you form will define the trajectory of your ministry. It is hard to overstate this point. You must be wise and discerning about those whom you give access to your heart. The proverbial wisdom of "guarding your heart" applies as much to friendships as it does to dating relationships (Proverbs 4:23).

We should beg God to bring people into our lives who can serve as lifelong friends. God knows we need these relationships. He is not holding out on us. So we are wise to ask. We should entrust our needs to Him, asking that He would sovereignly orchestrate the relationships of our lives to allow us to cross paths with those we like and trust. In His kindness, God will often cause just the right person to

move into your neighborhood, join your small group or bring up a shared hobby in casual conversation. Do not mistake this as a coincidence. God wastes nothing.

CONSIDER HAVING A FORMAL CONVERSATION

Those in your church are not as prone to be able to differentiate between the various relationships you maintain. They are likely to assume that you have many friends and might find incredible affirmation in knowing that the pastor likes them and trusts them enough to be a friend. Again, you should not rush this conversation. Give it time for the relationship to develop organically and for you to observe a pattern of trustworthiness. In time, you should have a conversation that defines the relationship.

You might say something like this:

“I’ve really enjoyed hanging out over the past few months. I’m thankful God allowed our paths to cross. You might be surprised to learn that it can be incredibly lonely to be a pastor. Our family often feels like others keep us at an arm’s length. We struggle to know whom we can trust. We long for a few good friends, but we know that we cannot have the same level of relationship with everyone in the church. It’s just impossible. But we can have meaningful friendships with a few people. We want friends whom we can trust, be real with and who will allow us to be normal. Would you be willing to be that kind of friend for us?”

This conversation alerts the person to a number of realities. First, it affirms them by stating that you observe mature, Christ-like character in their lives. Second, it acknowledges that you need relationships. Third, it makes it clear that you are seeking something from this friendship that is different from what you are seeking with others in the church. Finally, it states that this relationship will have to be marked by vulnerability and confidentiality. This type of clear request will pave the way for the other person to know just what they are getting into should they agree.

CONSIDER HOW TO NURTURE THE RELATIONSHIP

As a pastor and leader, it is on you to set the precedent for what you desire from the relationship at the outset. You cannot be passive and wait for the other person to seek you out. You have to continually move toward them. This will mean, at minimum, that you reach out to them on a regular basis and find time to talk. This might be simply sending text messages on a regular basis, a weekly phone call or a recurring time to grab lunch together.

It will also mean that you find ways to invite them into the natural rhythms of your life. This might mean that you will spontaneously call them and invite them over for dinner with your family. Or it might mean you call your buddy before you tackle a home repair project and ask for his advice. At the far end of the spectrum, it might mean that you invite the family to vacation alongside your family one summer. What's important is that, in little and big ways, you are tak-

ing active steps to cultivate the budding friendship and trust God to develop it into true community.

CHAPTER 5

THE PLANTER'S WIFE IN COMMUNITY

KATHY LITTON

“Lonely” and “isolated” are words that many ministry leaders—both male and female—use to describe their lives. Smack in the middle of an organization that calls itself a family (the Church) are leaders finding themselves without spiritual community. Leadership comes with a price, and one of those ironic costs is lack of community. If you are a planter or a planter’s wife, you can just ramp this entire conversation up a notch. Rick Warren once said, “Planting a church is possibly the loneliest, hardest thing on the planet.” I’m going to skip over the part where I explain that spiritual community is hard to come by for planters and their wives. No one needs to convince this readership.

We long for the wife of every planter to advance the gospel with her husband. We want her to be healthy and thriving. We want her roots to go down deep and strong in the Word and in her Savior. We want spiritual fruit to be borne in and through her life. We also need to clarify this: your core team may or may not (especially in early stag-

es) provide spiritual community for you and/or your wife.

Ruth Haley Barton points out how a team may lack the ultimate focus of life-giving spiritual community:

“One of the fundamental differences between a team and a spiritual community is that a team gathers around a task and when the task is over the team disbands. Spiritual community gathers around a person—the person of Christ who is present to us through the Holy Spirit. We gather for the purpose of being transformed by the presence of Christ so that we can discern and do the will of God both personally and together.”

Without this type of community, a planter’s wife won’t be vibrantly healthy. She needs spiritual community on two levels:

1. Biblical, relational discipleship
2. Relationships with women who are also planter’s wives

Just reading that in print reminds me of how impossible those two scenarios feel to most planting couples. Not to mention that merely talking about it in a ministry marriage is complicated, if not also risky. She doesn’t want to put one more demand on her husband or to appear needy. He would rather not be reminded again of the huge cost required of her that comes with church planting. Plus, both of them are spent—pushed to the edge physically, emotionally and spiritually with little reserve. Avoiding it can easily become a strategy.

All believers need relationships around the Word of God where authentic conversations and heartfelt prayers occur.

Community is not a mere luxury. Nor is it optional for genuine spiritual maturity. Right here I could insert examples of lives I have witnessed in 40 years of ministry that crashed upon the rocks of lone-

liness and isolation without any personal spiritual community. Lives, ministries and marriages ended up in places they never intended to be.

Relationships where accountability, confession and repentance can happen with people sharing each other's progress and standing with each other's failures are essential. We need to speak and live the gospel with each other.

I see two common perspectives from wives that keep them from seeking community:

1. In the tsunami of relentless demands, she doesn't have the energy. It seems to be a complete impossibility.
2. She has no real driving hunger for community often because she has yet to see its true value in her life.

COMMUNITY IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Planter and wife, it's a team effort. Husbands, you need to own this. She needs your pursuit of this on her behalf. Wives, you must believe it.

How do you find the community she needs?

1. **Pray.** Ask God to provide it.
2. **Move it up the priority list.** If it is number seven on your list, move it up to number three.
3. **Get on the offensive.** Go looking for it. Passivity is not an option.
4. **Be creative.** Think past the traditional model or delivery system. Look for fresh sources, new solutions and new faces.

5. **Men, be sacrificial.** Give up your time or space to help create opportunities for her. You shepherd others, so shepherd her as well.
6. **Men, lead her lovingly.** Nothing is stronger than a gentle, loving leader.
7. **Push past your own discomfort.** If this isn't your "thing," please understand it is for your soul's good, even if some awkwardness is involved.
8. **Don't be shortsighted.** Going it alone and being a brave little soldier won't end well if you become empty, isolated, depleted and lonely.

Don't allow "lonely" and "isolated" to describe your journey as church planters.

CHAPTER 6

OPENNESS AND VULNERABILITY

CHRISTINE HOOVER

For the first eight years of our ministry at an established church, I didn't have a friend to my name. In those same years, I birthed and stayed home with three children, and I remember willing myself not to get sick because I didn't know who I would call for help if I did. Community was something I created for other people, not something I enjoyed myself. At least that's how I felt.

When we prepared to plant out of that church, my husband gathered prospective core team members in our living room and asked, "When you dream of what church could be, what is it that you think of?" For me, the answer was simple. I timidly spoke aloud what I'd held inside for so long: "I don't want to feel as if I'm standing outside of community, helping it happen but not enjoying it myself. I want our church to be the kind where I get to enjoy the inside. I want to have friends."

We make choices that either invite or hinder community—the very thing we long for the most.

What I didn't yet realize is that community isn't something that comes to us; it's something that we go toward. The reasons I'd struggled in friendships were many—my lack of initiation, the specific parameters I'd placed around what type of friend I wanted and how they would relate to me, time constraints that I used as an excuse. But primary among them was that I chose not to take the risk of vulnerability with other women.

God gave me a do-over with church planting because the difficult nature of the work made it nearly impossible to hide behind carefully maintained facades or self-sufficiency. My spiritual, physical and emotional neediness pointed like arrows toward asking wise and faithful women for help. And so I did.

Vulnerability is the spark for us to enjoy and help cultivate true community. Only through vulnerability can we fulfill the many “one anothers” of Scripture—pray for one another, confess to one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens. Because only then do we know the burdens of others and only then do they know ours.

Vulnerability for the church-planting wife is risky and must be done wisely. I have learned to move slowly toward vulnerability with others, praying all the while for God to give me wisdom and discernment not only in who I am vulnerable with but also in what I share. Who are wise women around me? Who holds confidences well? Who speaks truth with grace to others around them? Who values me as a child of God and not just as the pastor's wife?

In discerning what I share, it's important to note that there are just some things that we won't be able to talk about with anyone in

our church community, but I can generally always share about myself. I can share how God is working in my life, how God is convicting me and how I need prayer. I can even share how I am struggling with church-related things without giving details that are inappropriate to share. Simply put, vulnerability has been key for me in developing community that is not just one-sided but mutual and life giving.

I look back at those first eight years of ministry, and I see that I did in fact have fledgling friendships. All those prayers I'd prayed to God for a friend? He'd actually answered them with Kelly, Jamee, Ashley and Niki, but I'd never taken the risk of vulnerability with them. I'd been more concerned with impressing them than knowing them or letting them know me. As a result, the friendships had faltered before they'd even truly started. I had been my own worst enemy all along.

Church planting wife, don't be your own worst enemy. Resist making excuses or thinking of yourself as "other" because of your role within the church. Yes, be wise, but don't let fear and severe self-protection hinder the very thing that you long for. Take that risk of vulnerability.

CHAPTER 7

INTENTIONALITY AND CULTIVATION

SHAUNA PILGREEN

Think of something that happens quickly—a roller coaster ride, a microwave meal, a vacation, slamming a finger in the door, ice melting on a hot sidewalk, that addictive series on Netflix.

Raising kids? Nope.

Growing a garden? No.

Starting a church? Definitely not!

Building community? We wish.

If community could happen fast, we'd call it another name—like the newest neighborhood in town or a Yahoo group. And while I can't answer for you, I'm not necessarily looking for another group to be a part of!

What you and I want to build and be a part of is a community that can't be described or defined by the world's standards. We want to be a community that inhales the gospel and exhales authenticity.

This requires time. Community is commitment. It requires you—the truest of you, no doubt. Community will not happen

with a bunch of hypocrites. It certainly won't last. God designed His Church to be a people who are highly committed to Him and to one another. It's what Christ prayed for. This requires intentionality. I am positive that for most of my 20s and the greater half of my 30s, I wanted to be intentional without doing the work. Well, self, that's not intentionality. Intentions in and of themselves are ideas that never reach planet earth. They are floating in the clouds and never produce much of anything. Intentions are plans. Intentionality is to make good on those plans. Intentionality is an investment.

Before we can begin to cultivate community, we have to ask ourselves if we are fully committed with our time and truest selves and will treat this as an investment.

If the answer is yes, then how do we cultivate community?

He is the foundation for community. You can't cultivate community if you haven't first planted Jesus.

Do what the Bible says.

It's how you prepare for it.

He told us we would be His witnesses in Acts 1. We would tell His story. We are commissioned to invest in those in our church that are seeking, those who are on board with the vision of our church. We are to tell our story to those that don't come to church yet, and ask them their stories. We point them to Jesus as we tell them what we do on Sundays and how our values are built upon His teachings in the Scriptures. He is the foundation for community. You can't cultivate community if you haven't first planted Jesus.

Reap what you sow.

It's how you grow it.

Galatians 5:9 tells us “not to grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Doing good is practiced in a number of ways in Scripture: practice hospitality, give to those in need, love others like you love yourself and serve one another. Reaping is the reward for sowing. Sowing is where the intentionality takes root. It's week in and week out. It's faithfully praying for those in your small group or on your serve team. Sowing is checking in on them throughout the week with a text or phone call or coffee date. Sowing is hurting when they hurt and celebrating when they are celebrating. Reaping is seeing God work through our sowing.

Entrust it into the Father's hands.

It's how you sustain it.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us that we are to give everything to God in prayer and petition with thanksgiving. That's what it looks like to entrust. We do our part, and God will always do His. What was so substantial in the community that was formed in the book of Acts was that the disciples did their part, and God did His. Maybe you've experienced it before—the community that you're praying to form begins to have pockets of meaningful conversation, you see needs being met by one another, you're hearing stories of God's faithfulness. While we can't hold God to our timetable, we can certainly count on Him to never stop loving His people.

Sowing is hurting when they hurt and celebrating when they are celebrating. Reaping is seeing God work through our sowing. Back to the first century church in Acts, believers were forming community

“day by day.” And the Lord was adding to their number “day by day.”
We can count on Him to do His part in strengthening the body of
believers through community.

CHAPTER 8

CHALLENGES FOR THE PLANTERS WIFE IN COMMUNITY

AMY RAGER

Odds are, when your wife joined you on the journey of church planting, she left her friends behind. While it is true that she willingly sacrificed the benefits and comforts of established relationships for the advancement of the gospel, it is absolutely vital to her health that the sacrifice not be lifelong.

The church planting process brings with it unique difficulties for building friendships and healthy community. Identifying and actively countering the following “community building inhibitors” sets your wife on a smoother, shorter road to life-giving relationships.

As we close this e-book, here are five ways church planting inhibits a wife’s community building:

1. Tending to pursue friendship solely with potential church members. In the early, shaky years of a church plant the temptation

is strong to spend time and energy engaging only with those who will potentially join your church. Of course ladies from your core team can become valuable friends to your wife, but in all reality she needs several strong relationships unrelated to the plant. A friend who can listen as she relates her struggle with the demands of the church is vital. It's rare a church member can provide that type of presence for your wife. Also consider if your wife would feel comfortable being supported through a tough time in your marriage by a core team member.

2. Substituting networking for friendship. Relationships with a goal of advancing your church or your career are not friendships; they are networking. Friendship is for mutual care and support, not mutual gain. While some men may consider themselves in community while participating mostly in networking relationships and few true friendships, most women do not function this way. Women want people who love us, not people who love what we have to offer. Friendship is valuable enough to warrant time and effort without an ulterior motive. Don't let the scarcity mindset that is so prominent in church planting tempt the two of you to substitute networking for friendship.

3. Becoming the servant in every relationship. Your wife is invested, reliable and available, which makes her a convenient volunteer and hostess for practically everything in your understaffed church. She is a prime candidate for reaching out to prospective members. Every team your child participates in needs a "team mom"—what better way to meet people? A lady on your core team is struggling with anxi-

ety—you don't have the available time to meet with her regularly and your wife is in need of community anyway, right? The neighborhood association needs someone to organize the annual yard sale—what better way to get her some name recognition in the neighborhood? Allowing, or even encouraging, your wife to enter every situation as the servant is detrimental to community building. Relational habits are hard to break and friendships are difficult to form when the foundation of each is the supposition that she is the fixer, the helper and the giver. Being a part of a community involves giving and taking. Church members, neighbors and potential friends should see your wife doing both.

4. Running at an unrealistic pace. Friendship takes time and effort. Most women intrinsically feel this and will not pursue friendships as long as they don't have the time to cultivate them. Listen, I get it. Your plates are full and your schedules are fuller. What you are doing is important—more important than I can effectively communicate without being able to look you in the eye! But healthy community is important, too—not to mention biblically prescribed. Pushing yourself and your wife beyond the point of being able to build community is a lack of faith in the One who truly builds the church.

5. Not valuing fun. Planters, I'm putting most of this one on you. If you don't value fun and participate in light-hearted things, your wife is not going to feel as if she has the freedom to engage in hobbies or events that will expose her to potential friends. Even existing relationships are hampered when fun is shoved to the side in the name of productivity. Interfacing only with someone during "productive"

events or in “productive” ways leaves no room or honor for the organic nature of friendship.

While the above list is representative of many planting couples’ experience, please consider it only a starting point. Ask your wife what she needs from you in order to build friendships. The question alone will mean the world to her and communicate the value you place on community.

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