



Together for the City

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Foreword by
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How Collaborative
Church Planting
Leads to Citywide
Movements



Vision

*Church planting is good.
A vision for church multiplication is better.*

ED STETZER

What this chapter is about:

- *why the gospel requires us to collaborate through church-planting movements;*
- *why the scale of spiritual need demands a size of vision for a locality that no single church, network, or denomination can realize alone; and*
- *why the gospel not only compels but also enables collaboration.*

We'll also outline five principles that are all implications of the good news of Jesus: fidelity, urgency, compassion, generosity, and humility. Together these enlarge our vision and make the case for the necessity of collaboration.

A Dunkirk Spirit

My (Neil's) uncle Reg is remembered particularly for two things: first, he was born on February 29, which meant missing a lot of birthdays. Second, he was a soldier rescued from Dunkirk during the Second World War.

In May 1940, German forces swept through Belgium and northern France in a blitzkrieg that left the British Expeditionary Force cornered with their backs against the coastline. The new prime minister, Winston Churchill, ordered Lord John Gort, the force's commander, to evacuate as many troops as possible back to Britain from the port of Dunkirk in France.

And so on May 20, Operation Dynamo was formulated. With the Nazis fast advancing, it was estimated that as many as forty-five thousand men might be successfully evacuated. On May 26, Britain held a national day of prayer, and King George VI attended a special service in Westminster Abbey. The Archbishop of Canterbury led prayers "for our soldiers in dire peril in France." Operation Dynamo began the next day.

On the first day, only 7,669 men were saved, and after two days, the total number had risen to twenty-five thousand, which was well below the target. Those in command enlarged the vision, and a call went out across the British Isles: all available sailing vessels, piloted by civilians, must head for Dunkirk and assist in the evacuation. By May 31, nearly four hundred small craft were voluntarily and enthusiastically engaged for the effort, and the rescue numbers began to rise. In response to the moment of national crisis, 933 ships sailed to Dunkirk: private yachts, motor launches, lifeboats, paddle steamers—anything that would float. Over a period of eight days, it was not just forty-five thousand that were rescued but 338,226, including my uncle Reg.

As Christians, we face a similar situation. Many people are in dire peril, and God's Operation Dynamo is underway. We sense the urgent need for action and are working hard at mobilizing our congregations to reach the lost. We run guest events and inquirers courses. We plan community projects and train in friendship evangelism. And all of these are wonderfully used by God to bring people into his kingdom. More churches than ever are grasping a vision for reaching out further through church planting, and yet these endeavors alone can't reach the full extent of the communities God has placed us in.

The population of the United Kingdom is currently growing by around half a million people every year, which is a growth rate of 0.8 percent. The church in the United Kingdom has a growth rate of negative 1.4 percent per year.¹ According to *Operation World*, the growth rate among evangelicals in the United Kingdom is estimated to be zero percent.² Across Europe as a whole, only 2.5 percent are estimated to be evangelicals, and the annual growth rate of Christians is negative 0.3 percent.³ The population of the United States has a steady growth rate of 0.71 percent. And yet, according to historical theologian Albert Mohler, four thousand churches close their doors every year, with only one thousand evangelical churches being planted in their place.⁴

We are in dire peril. What does it mean for us to respond to the need and to enlarge the vision? What if a truly collaborative answer to the call is possible? What if there is a way for faithful churches across denominations, ecclesial styles, and theological traditions to partner in a rescue effort that would rival Operation Dynamo? This is the vision of a local collaborative church-planting movement.

We need a Dunkirk spirit, where a huge number of lifeboats were mobilized to realize a vision far too big for any group to achieve alone. The result was extraordinary—in fact, miraculous. It was a

life-and-death effort, and Uncle Reg was saved because of it. In this chapter, we want to show how it's possible for churches to be mobilized to get as many boats as possible in the water, of all shapes and sizes—anything that will float—to rescue the lost.

One Local Vision: 2020birmingham

Allow us to introduce one local, fledgling attempt to be together for the city.

Birmingham is Europe's youngest city, with 38 percent of the population aged under twenty-five.⁵ It is also the United Kingdom's second-largest city, with a population of more than 1.1 million people and 4.3 million living within an hour's commute of the center. It's an extraordinarily diverse city in which 57 percent of children under eleven are from a variety of ethnic minorities, and over a fifth of the population is Muslim.⁶

The city is growing by an average of two hundred people a week, but the church is not. Between 2005 and 2010, the population of Birmingham grew by more than 7 percent (more than seventy thousand people), and yet during the same period, the number of churches in the West Midlands increased by less than 0.5 percent—seven churches, to be precise. Ninety-four percent of people in the city are entirely unchurched or de-churched, yet it has grown into one of the United Kingdom's most religiously diverse conurbations.⁷

In Birmingham, a growing number of churches are seeking to see the bigger picture and find ways to work together to reach the city through church planting. 2020birmingham began in 2010 with a simple vision: to see twenty churches planted or revitalized by 2020. In the first year, there were just a handful of partners, one pioneer church plant, and a church revitalization project. But over the past eight years, we've witnessed seventeen new green shoots begin to grow.

We also have prayerfully reset the vision: please God, another thirty by 2030. If we can have the privilege of seeing fifty churches planted or revitalized in the Birmingham area, each with a love of church planting in their DNA, we may see one hundred in our lifetime.

2020birmingham was born out of the conviction that as churches we need to seek to reach the whole city. In comparison to the size of the challenge, we're a small group with modest aims, and yet our prayer is that God will use our endeavors for his glory and kick-start a movement. The goal is certainly not rooted in our competency, but in Christ. He has helped us to see that we can do more together than we could on our own, and we *must* if we are to see our city reached for him.

The churches actively collaborating to form 2020birmingham come from a number of different networks. New Frontiers, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, Acts 29, Christian Brethren, the Baptist Union, and the International Mission Board are all represented within the group. Beyond this active core, a number of others are partnering in a supportive capacity, including Greater European Mission, Birmingham City Mission, and the Church of England.

Note that we aren't seeking to plant churches together but to be together as we plant churches. Significant distinctives set each of these groups apart from one another, but we are also united by a common burden and vision: to see the good news of Jesus flourish in our city. We recognize that unless we're willing to build bridges across denominational boundaries, we'll never see the advance of the gospel that we're longing for.

Only Halfway There: Why We Need a Bigger Vision

Because you've chosen to read this book, we expect that you're convinced of the lordship of Jesus, his glorious gospel of grace, his call to

take up your cross and follow him, his commission to make disciples of all nations, and his means of doing that through local expressions of his body, the church, empowered by his Holy Spirit.

You are likely also to be convinced of the biblical imperative to belong to a church and even to pursue the planting of churches where the gospel is not known. You know that the heartbeat for world mission pulses throughout Scripture. The beautiful feet that bring good news do so that “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10). Even in the Old Testament, the good news of Yahweh has centrifugal force, pushing Israel to declare him to the whole world.⁸ God loves all nations, as Jonah reluctantly acknowledged of the city of Nineveh, where the people couldn’t “tell their right hand from their left” (Jonah 4:11). “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (4:2).

In the New Testament, this comes into sharp focus. Jesus responded to the criticism that he welcomed sinners and ate with them by telling three parables in which the lost are actively pursued and diligently sought and in which heaven rejoices when they are found. The punchline of this whole section of Luke’s Gospel is Jesus’ summary of his mission “to seek and to save the lost”; these are the lost of “all nations” (Luke 19:10, 24:47), those whom missiologists today call “every people group and population segment.”⁹

This then becomes the mission of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises his disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on 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). The church began in Jerusalem, and when even the opposition acknowledged that this fledgling community had filled Jerusalem with their teaching (5:28), the scattering of God’s people and message to Judea and Samaria commenced in the providence of God (8:1). The church in

Antioch was founded, and from there the missionary journeys and the planting of churches to the ends of the earth began. The world still cries out with the man of Macedonia, “Come over . . . and help us” (16:9). And we must respond with anything that will float.

Our prayer is that you may be convinced of all these things, if you aren’t already. However, a deeper, more sustained reflection on the gospel calls us to be part of a *bigger* vision. Even if we’re convinced of the gospel, convinced of the need for gospel ministry, convinced of the necessity of the local church, convinced of the need to plant churches, we are only halfway there. The bigger vision is not that we be atomized vessels sailing off in isolation, but a flotilla, working together to create a movement like Dunkirk.

Actually, this has always been the vision. We’re tempted to focus only on our little Jerusalem. We struggle to contemplate neighboring Judea and Samaria, let alone the ends of the earth. However, the early church was interdependent. As the disciples scattered when persecution broke out at Stephen’s martyrdom, they traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Disciples from both Cyprus and Cyrene together went to Antioch to tell the good news to Greeks. When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to encourage them. Barnabas tracked down Saul in Tarsus, and they settled in Antioch for a year. During that time, they raised financial aid to help the church in Judea before being set apart for their first missionary journey. These weren’t isolated tribes. The early church was a broad movement of disciples functioning so evidently like a single body that they start to be collectively referred to as Christians (see Acts 11).

A bigger vision won’t be created by new principles that need to be discovered but by old principles that need to be recovered, flowing from our faith in Jesus himself. What are the principles we find in the gospel itself that enlarge our vision?

Fidelity

Our primary need is fidelity. Unless what we do is born out of and empowered by faith in Christ, we'll create a monster, not a movement. For those involved in gospel ministry, some of the most sobering words of Jesus were recorded by Matthew: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

We can be doers of prophecy, doers of exorcisms, and doers of miracles—and *also* be doers of evil. It isn't enough to preach, pastor, and plant; to evangelize, contextualize, and organize; to feed the poor, heal the sick, and house the homeless. In fact, "it requires far more than most people seem to think necessary, to save a soul."¹⁰ (See again Acts 11.) It requires us to be rightly known by Jesus through repentance and faith, by his life-giving gospel. We begin there.

It's easy to lose sight of the Savior. I (John) learned this the hard way. For three years in a row, I picked up a mild illness from one of my kids, and rather than shaking it off, I was bedridden by it. I was exhausted for several weeks before I went to the doctor in search of a miracle cure. She heard my sorry tale and began to ask a few diagnostic questions.

"What do you do?" she enquired.

"I'm a church pastor," I replied.

She raised an eyebrow. "How many hours do you work on average?"

I murmured a vague number.

She raised the other eyebrow. "When did you last take a day off?"

I squinted, as though trying to recall the date, looking up and hoping the ceiling tiles would provide me with an answer. "Erm," I began.

At this she rolled her eyes and put down her notebook. "John," she said, "just get some rest. You don't need to save the world today."

What a great evangelistic opportunity, I thought. She doesn't realize that Jesus already is the savior of the world! I was about to launch into my response when it hit me: She may not believe Jesus is the savior of the world—and *functionally*, with the way I was approaching ministry, neither did I.

When we take our eyes off Jesus, the danger is not just illness or burnout. We are on a trajectory that may end in moral failure, damage to the local church, and even apostasy. But when we begin with and remain in Jesus, that changes everything. As pastor and church-planting mentor Tim Keller wrote, “The gospel creates an entire way of life and affects literally everything about us.”¹¹ The more deeply we reflect on Christ and his gospel, the more deeply he empowers us and the more richly the principles in this chapter are borne out in everything we do, including church planting.

Without faith in Christ, we are like cars with the wrong fuel in the engine. As we pull out of the gas station, we may not notice we absentmindedly put gas in a diesel tank; our car is still like every other car leaving the gas station. But twenty minutes into the journey, we come to a grinding halt.

Faith in Christ leads to a bigger vision. When we trust in ourselves, we only see small. The spiritual need we see is the one we think we can meet. The ministry opportunity we see is the one we think we can take. But when we trust in Christ, we begin to see big. It isn't about what we can do but about what he has done—and can do through us. Deep reflection on Christ, the gospel, and our world leads us to this conclusion: *The spiritual need and opportunity is far bigger than we think.*

Consider figure 1.1, “A bigger vision.” Healthy mission-minded churches exist in box A. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see needs and opportunities that compel us to step out in evangelistic endeavors,

train our members for witness, run group studies, have guest services, and create mission weeks.

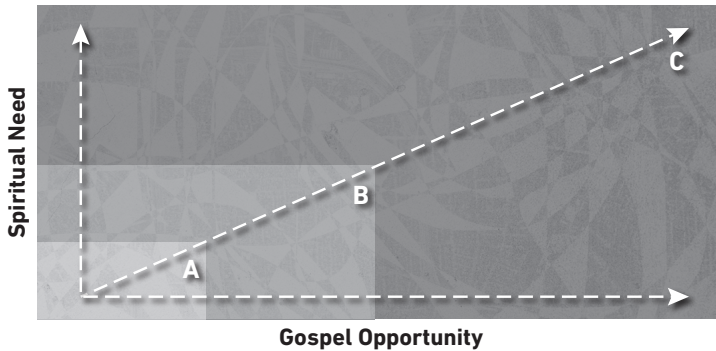


Figure 1.1. A bigger vision

For many churches, as they grow, so does their vision. At this point, they may move into box B. Here they consider planting churches or launching more services. They may also have an influence on a wider family of churches within their network or denomination.

However, both the spiritual need and the opportunity for mission is greater than we often realize. The gospel draws us into what we call a box-C vision, one that's too big for any single church, network, or denomination to pursue alone.

Box C is not new. It's the vision evangelicals have often embraced when it comes to reaching the nations. The heartbeat of global mission is the knowledge that because we have a world to reach, we must do it together. This realization is also at the heart of local collaborative church planting. But do we see it happening?

Many of the churches connected to 2020birmingham have been on a journey through the boxes. For example, one well-established church lived happily in box A. They faithfully engaged its community with the good news of Jesus. They grew steadily over the years and

undertook a fantastic building project that's serving them well in their mission. They're in good fellowship with many other local churches, but they had a blind spot when it came to church planting—by their own admission.

They became aware of a church revitalization opportunity within their network. As they talked, they realized they were the church best placed to help. They entered box B but were feeling overwhelmed and started looking for help. They saw the need and the opportunity, but they couldn't be the solution on their own.

At that point, they began to talk with 2020birmingham. A collaborative effort, with them taking the lead, began to emerge. For the first time, they began to live in box C. Neil helped to recruit a family who may be able to lead the revitalization project, and John was involved in discussions with the church about preparing for revitalization. Churches within 2020birmingham considered whether there were people they could send to join the work. And within a relatively short space of time, it all came together.

The church may have stayed in box B and undertaken revitalization alone. However, it likely would have been a one-off project that would have required considerable recovery time. The project would have been weaker without access to a pool of resources, a growing body of local knowledge, and peer-to-peer support. This way, they skipped box B, entered box C, and are again actively looking for ways they can collaborate.

Are you ready to embrace a vision for your whole city? Box-C vision is not related to a church's size or circumstances. If ministry performance dictates the scope of a vision, 99.9 percent of us will remain in box A. A handful will limp our way into box B, but we will go no further. Box-C vision isn't linked to our success but to our Savior. Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples, and they returned focused on

their performance, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17). However, he directed their vision away from their success and onto him, saying, “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (10:20). Box-C vision doesn’t rest on competency but on Christ.

Seeing big in terms of need and opportunity sets us on a trajectory toward a different, bigger outcome. It has been said that what we build today either empowers or restricts us tomorrow.¹² When we’ve spent a lifetime in boxes A and B, it’s hard to leave them. But if we dare to dream, our mindset shifts. So “our thinking, our skills, our relationships, our sense of what is possible and what it takes all grow on the journey to big.”¹³ We still start small, but by seeing big, under God, we may be surprised by what is possible.

A Spiritual Need That’s Bigger Than You Think

A vision shaped by the gospel begins with faith in Christ. Let’s look together at four implications of the gospel that grow out of the foundational principle of fidelity: urgency, compassion, generosity, and humility. As God cultivates them in our hearts, he sharpens our vision.

The principles of urgency and compassion open our eyes to a spiritual need that’s bigger than we think. Spiritual need is the vertical axis on the figure 1.1. As our urgency and compassion grow, we begin to be led into a box-C vision. Let’s take each principle in turn.

Urgency. Fidelity to Christ cultivates urgency for his mission. We want what he wants. Paul began his letter to the Romans by describing himself as a debtor “both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish” (Romans 1:14). He was under a divine obligation to preach the gospel (1:1). Elsewhere he spoke of how he was compelled to discharge his duties. In fact, he said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16-17). And so Paul was *eager* to preach

(Romans 1:15). Having received the gospel, he now *owed* this gospel to everyone and was urgently paying off his debt.

The pastor David Platt has very helpfully drawn out of Paul's letter to the Romans four reasons why fidelity creates urgency.

We must urgently share Christ with lost people, he writes, "1. Because their knowledge of God is only enough to damn them to hell forever."¹⁴ "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21).

"2. Because the gospel of God is powerful enough to save them for heaven."¹⁵ "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (1:16).

"3. Because the plan of God warrants the sacrifices of his people."¹⁶ "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (10:14).

"4. Because the Son of God deserves the praises of all peoples."¹⁷ "Through [Jesus] we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake" (1:5).

Platt concludes, "He's saying (really shouting) in the Book of Romans, 'I owe, we owe, Christ to the nations, so let's go and make him known! We must do this. This is not an option. This is an obligation.'"¹⁸ If we believe in the lostness of the lost, and the glory of Christ, it will compel us to urgent action.

John Knox (1513–1572) was a minister who led the Protestant reformation in Scotland. During that time, Mary, the Catholic queen of Scotland, was reported to have said, "I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies of England." Why was she afraid? Because of Knox's remarkable, urgent prayer: "Give me Scotland, or I die!" Can

we say that the outcome of our own Bible reading is a godly ambition so bold and a vision so big? Does fidelity lead to urgency in our lives?

Compassion. Fidelity also leads us to a compassion that drives us to our knees. The more our hearts are broken, the more the vision grows. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he wept over the city unwilling to recognize God's king, saying, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace" (Luke 19:42). When was the last time we thought about our cities in such terms as these? As Paul wrote, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people" (Romans 9:2-3). Do we have such a compassion for *our* people? Do we cry out, "My neighbors, if you only knew Jesus, who brings true peace!"?

What is your burden for the people in your city? Why do we struggle to embrace a bigger vision? Could it be that too often our postal address is incidental to who we are and what we seek to do. Yet, the gospel surely doesn't allow us to think or live that way. It is good news to real people in real places. The gospel doesn't waft like a vapor to the ends of the earth; it is carried by heralds who take responsibility for every person at every coordinate along the way. A discarnate messiah cannot save, and a discarnate missiology cannot make disciples.

British author David Goodhart wrote recently on the divides we experience in the United Kingdom. His argument is that we are made up of two types of people: "anywhere" and "somewhere" people. "Anywheres" are highly educated and mobile, value autonomy, and comfortably surf social change. "Somewheres" are more rooted, valuing security and familiarity, and are more connected to a group identity.¹⁹ There is a large, privileged minority (perhaps a quarter of the population) that has the ability to thrive and prosper *anywhere*, and an even larger group (perhaps half the population) that is more geographically

rooted, people of *somewhere*. The rest of the population sits between these two poles.

For Goodhart, this insight helps to explain a number of contemporary political, economic, and social divisions we experience. He notes, “Getting on in Britain means getting out, shaking the Somewhere dust off one’s boots and forming new bonds with one’s fellow Anywheres.”²⁰ As a result, the more highly educated, affluent, and socially mobile tend to disconnect from any particular sense of place, while among the less-educated white community “three in five Britons still live within twenty miles of where they lived when aged 14.”²¹ It’s hard for Anywheres to have a passionate commitment to a place. It isn’t their home, and the law of averages suggests they won’t be there long.

This dynamic is also at play in the local church. In the United Kingdom, 62 percent of people who regularly attend church identify as middle class; only 38 percent identify as working class.²² Eighty-one percent have a university degree, in contrast to 27 percent of the population as a whole.²³ If this is so, the church is full of Anywheres with an anywhere mindset.

A big vision for *somewhere*, a city or community, can’t be borne out of an anywhere mindset. But our approach to church ministry often comes from just that. Sunday feels more like a classroom than a community. Sermon applications are influenced by our favorite preachers on YouTube rather than by the people who live next door. Methods of outreach are chosen because everyone is doing them, rather than because of the trial-and-error of experience. It isn’t difficult to see that a denomination or network of anywhere churches can fail to be concerned for its local community. Chances are, we overlook the vast majority of our neighbors and therefore will never reach our cities for Christ.

Having a burden for somewhere overwhelms us. It opens our eyes to the scale of the task before us. What if we began to say our work is

not done until every community in our city is served by a Bible-teaching church? Somewhere churches can't be elsewhere; so to reach many Somewheres, partnership is essential.

By the grace of God, City Church, Birmingham (the church Neil pastors), has planted one new autonomous church, one new Sunday site, and an outreach ministry in a predominantly Muslim area. God willing, this is the first step in seeing a church planted for Muslim-background believers. City Church has also played a significant role in two church revitalizations and a church plant. Beyond that, it has contributed in a variety of ways to the planting of other churches in the city.

City Church tends to attract Anywheres who arrive in the city. It seeks to encourage its people to think about what it means to be on mission *somewhere*. How should they pray for the city? How can they be good neighbors? How can they serve their community? How can they share Christ in their context? City Church also continually sends people out to resource church plants they could not plant themselves, as these Anywheres begin to put down roots. City Church is a case study in how fruitfulness can increase exponentially with collaboration.

The vast spiritual need that casts us to our knees in prayer demands a vision that no single church, network, or denomination can possibly realize on its own. If God is gracious to us, he will show us that we aren't supposed to realize it on our own. Urgency and compassion drive collaboration.

An Opportunity for Mission That's Bigger Than You Think

Fidelity to Christ fosters *urgency* and *compassion*. It opens our eyes to see that the spiritual need is far bigger than we think. However, a deeper appreciation of the gospel cultivates two further principles—*generosity* and *humility*—which help us see that the opportunity for

mission is bigger than we think. This is the horizontal “gospel opportunity” axis in figure 1.1. As our generosity and humility grow, we are led into a box-C vision.

Generosity. Matthew 9:38 is a wonderful verse. As Jesus went through the towns and villages, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and manifesting all its blessings, he was deeply moved by the crowds. He looked out at the vast numbers of lost people, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion. Then he turned to his disciples, saying, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38).

This passage speaks of the overwhelming urgency of our task while reminding us of the compassionate love of Christ. It calls for the response of harvesters while also reminding us to cry out to the Lord of the harvest. It lays out clearly for us the spiritual need in a way that should compel us to prayer, commissioning, and action. But it also speaks of the opportunity for mission. The key word is *plentiful*. We are prone to despondency and shortsightedness, but this verse opens our eyes to fields that are ripe for harvest (see also John 4:35).

However, there is a second 9:38, in Mark.²⁴ It’s a verse you would struggle to use as a slogan for a mission conference. John came bounding up to Jesus, reporting, “We saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” Jesus immediately rebuked him, saying, “Whoever is not against us is for us.” When it comes to gospel ministry, the master is far more inclusive than his disciples.²⁵

Mark placed this exchange in a section of his gospel in which we’re clearly to associate discipleship with childlike behavior. In a culture where children had the lowest status of all, Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” before

taking a child in his arms and stating, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:35, 37). Jesus’ point comes into focus just a few verses later as he rebuked his disciples with the words “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (10:15).

The point is this: disciples of Jesus are to be like little children, gladly and humbly occupying a low standing, refusing to elevate themselves one above the other and living in complete dependence on him. Our human instinct is to seek ways to make ourselves better than others, belonging to the “in” crowd, labeling others as outside of the camp and “not one of us.” We are to resist this with every sanctified impulse in our bodies.

Consider the former elder in the church where I (John) embarked on a revitalization project. He made it crystal clear that he would rather see the church die than be revitalized, because some of those involved were not quite on the same page as him theologically. Consider then the defensive and exclusivist feelings that I had when a church planter belonging to another network approached me and explained that they would like to launch their plant in the second floor of a pub just a short walk from where our church meets. Then consider the defensive and exclusivist feelings he and I both felt when another planter from a network outside the city made it clear that they too would like to begin a new plant locally. Then consider that our local district has a population of about twenty-five thousand people, and none of us had a monopoly on reaching them with the gospel.

In reflecting on these two 9:38s, David Shaw, a tutor in New Testament and Greek at Oak Hill College, imagined C. S. Lewis’s creation, Screwtape, preaching on a demonic Mission Sunday with the aim of promoting a toxic tribalism:

As His subjects gather themselves to work in some area of the harvest field, let them think that only their methods are proper, or that their small corner of some field is really the whole. Let them acknowledge only their efforts as “strategic” . . . and let them pray, but only for their labors. That way, with only a little effort, they can pray for His glory, but all the while seek their own.²⁶

That’s a terrifying sentiment to read in print. But are we terrified by such a sentiment in our hearts?

In contrast, the deeper our grasp of the gospel, the greater our generosity toward others will be. J. C. Ryle, speaking on these verses, remarked, “Is our neighbor warring against Satan? Is he really trying to labor for Christ? This is the grand question. Better a thousand times that the work should be done by other hands than not done at all.”²⁷

Ministry truly done in the name of Jesus is ministry that belongs to Jesus. Will we really refuse to consider partnership on earth with people we expect to spend eternity with in heaven?

Humility. Jesus is not the only one who commands such a radical generosity of spirit toward other believers. Paul does too. In Philippians 1, we see that generosity is underpinned with a remarkable gospel-wrought humility.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)

Notice that fidelity to Christ is paramount. Paul maintained that where the true gospel is preached, there is reason to rejoice, even if the result is personal loss. Elsewhere Paul spoke out in the strongest terms against those whose preaching demonstrated that they were enemies of the gospel (for example, Galatians 1:6-10 and 1 Timothy 1:3-4). But here Paul was generous because his opponents were preaching the same gospel.

Despite the envy and rivalry demonstrated by those who opposed him in Rome, they weren't preaching another gospel. Rather "these rivals to Paul instead seem to oppose the apostle for personal reasons and to have used Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to advance their personal agendas."²⁸ It's not clear how they were seeking to stir up trouble. Markus Bockmuehl offers the most persuasive explanation when he suggests that they "stir up trouble by causing an inner turmoil and pain in Paul as they pursue naked self-advancement, numerical success, prestige and influence within the Roman church."²⁹ While Paul was in prison, they were free to promote their prideful position in the Christian community. Even though Paul may have struggled to endorse them and their methodology, he rejoiced because the gospel was preached.

Healthy church-planting movements depend upon developing a culture in which we choose to rejoice in the ministry success of others. I hope our relationships with other churches would not be defined as ones of envy and rivalry. How much more should we also rejoice that the gospel is preached beyond our tribe.

I (John) described above the exclusivist feelings that so quickly arise when we feel the threat of very different churches launching around us. It has been a challenge not to become defensive and instead to see how we can help. We've had to ask ourselves, do we love this city enough and are we kingdom-minded enough to be just as excited at witnessing revival break out in the church meeting in the pub down the road as we would be to see it happen with us?

In a collaborative movement, this happens a lot. A church leader gives time and effort to a bigger vision and as a consequence a network or denomination he is not personally affiliated to benefits. It may advance ahead of him and his tribe. Collaborating in such instances requires great humility.

For Paul, furthering the gospel was everything, and self-interest gave way to God's concern. "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motive or true, Christ is preached" (Philippians 1:18). Paul certainly did care about the motives of those who preach the gospel (see for example, 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 Timothy 4:16). But that wasn't his point. He was clear here: the gospel must advance, whatever the cost to him.

Pastor and theologian Gordon Fee wrote, "In Paul's case it is his theological convictions that lead both to his theological narrowness, on the one hand, and to his large-heartedness within those convictions, on the other—precisely because he recognizes the gospel for what it is: God's thing, not his own."³⁰ Sadly such humility is often lacking, even when the charges are far less serious. To quote Professor Frank Thielman, "The fellowship of the modern church lies in tatters because of rivalry over turf, competition for money and influence, and petty theological disagreements."³¹

For Paul, fidelity to Christ meant there were reasons to rejoice in the advancement of the gospel amid insincerity, false motive, and personal heartache. *How much more* should faithful churches be willing to extend generosity and act with humility toward those who are willing to be partners with us?

A Cautionary Tale

John the church planter leaned over the bridge railing and gazed down into the water below. The core team meeting hadn't gone as

planned. The caretaker had been late opening up, the new couple never showed up, the feedback from Sunday felt particularly personal, and for some reason the prepared handouts had printed back to front again. And this after only Doris had shown for the family outreach event, with Bobby, her Jack Russell, who had quietly devoured all the sausage rolls. *This isn't working.* John thought, staring into the abyss below. *Would anyone notice if we stopped? And would anyone notice if I just quietly disappeared?*

At just that moment, Neil walked onto the bridge. “Hi there. You’re looking kind of down,” he said in his characteristic melodic timbre. “Do you want to talk? You know life’s never without hope!”

“I know,” confessed John reluctantly. “I’m a Christian actually.”

“That’s amazing,” Neil said, stepping nearer. “I’m a Christian too.”

“Yeah? I’m actually a church planter, though we are kind of struggling at the moment.”

“I’m a church planter too. Church of England, or Independent?”

“Independent,” confessed John.

“Me too!” Neil replied even more excitedly. “Baptist or Congregational?”

“Congregational.”

“Me too! Continuationist or Cessationist?”

“Continuationist.”

“Me too! ESV or NIV?”

“NIV.”

“Me too! Missional communities or home groups?”

“Home groups.”

“Die heretic!” Neil cried, and he pushed John off the bridge.³²

That conversation could have been very different. If judgment were replaced with encouragement, we wouldn’t push potential ministry partners off the bridge. Yet we often use fidelity as the reason to pass over cooperation with other churches. In order to

withdraw, we say, “To be faithful, we must remain pure.” We argue that orthodoxy requires isolation, but the opposite is true. Fidelity causes us to be concerned about guarding the gospel, but it also compels us to go with the gospel. This requires compassion, generosity, and humility, all of which cause us to acknowledge we simply cannot and should not attempt to spread the gospel on our own.

Only a deeper grasp of the gospel will open our eyes to see that both the spiritual need and the opportunity for mission are far bigger than we think. These two propel us into a box-C vision, where we grasp the need for collaboration.

As dependent children corporately clinging to Christ, we must learn that the only “us and them” that matters in eternity is not a division within the kingdom of God but *us* who have been found pursuing *them*, his lost sheep. As we answer the call and live for this mission, we should build bridges not barricades and throw ropes not rocks.

A Spreading Vision

2020Birmingham is what God has begun to make possible in our city. And around the world there is a growing recognition that the gospel compels us toward collaboration. In 2017 church leaders from twenty-seven major cities across Europe met to consider how collaborative church-planting movements can be nurtured. In the United States, conversations are taking place in New York, Austin, Baltimore, Chicago, Miami, and Washington, DC.³³ Later in this book, we’ll include contributions from Hamburg in Germany, Tokyo in Japan, Pretoria in South Africa, Chicago in the United States, and Valparaiso in Chile—that is, stories from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, and South America.

Many of these fledgling movements have been helped by the ministry of Redeemer City to City, the City to City network, and various

related networks. In fact, the inspiration, encouragement, and support of City to City has been key to the progress 2020birmingham has made. City to City's vision is to see new movements of the gospel in every major city of the world.

It may be helpful to view City to City as an attempt to bridge the gap between global Anywheres and local Somewheres—a global network of local collaborative movements that could not exist just anywhere but instead are shaped by the context and the people they long to reach. For these groups to flourish into movements, important *anywhere* connections will be needed, but they can't be the whole answer. *Somewhere* connections will be key: connections between neighbors motivated by urgency, compassion, generosity, and humility.

Your community exists *somewhere* and needs a *somewhere* movement. What might God do if churches all over the world began to see that they need this bigger vision to reach their locality for Christ?

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