**Church Planting Thresholds: More to the Story**

It was 1992. Ancient history for many. I was a U.S Airman living in an Army stairwell apartment in Germany when my wife and I were introduced to John and Elva Beach. John was an American pastor living there, and he told us they were going to plant a church to minister to the military families living in the area. I had no idea what he meant when he said “plant a church.” I’d not given much thought to how churches formed or even why. But John and Elva loved Jesus, they loved the church, and as a former Airman, he wanted to see military members come to love Jesus like they did. So, we were in.

For the next two years, the Beach’s poured into every aspect of our lives, from our marriage, to parenting, to our individual discipleship. They were intent on helping us not only to see Jesus in our daily lives, but to grow in our ability to reproduce- to disciple others. Shortly before the end of our tour in Germany, a dozen families covenanted together to form High Point Baptist Church, which is still very much going strong today under the pastorship of John and Elva’s youngest son. Out of the dozen military men who signed the covenant that day, all have moved into full-time ministry in some capacity.

Fast forward a little over a decade, and a young pastor approached me to tell me he believed the Lord was calling him to plant a church. As possibly the only member of our church who had done any church planting, I was excited by the proposition to see God work again in amazing ways. Clint Clifton and his wife Jennifer came over to our house with pictures of two locations, an area near Palatka, Florida, where they’d grown up, and Dumfries, Virginia, where we were living. Our shared prayers and God’s leading led to planting Pillar Church of Dumfries, one that has faithfully reproduced many times over.

By God’s grace, I needed knee surgery at just the right time. Because of that, I had several weeks at my disposal to dedicate to planning and strategizing. If you knew Clint, he was a force of nature. Boundless energy wrapped up in oversized ideas and a willingness to try just about anything. It was infectious. My role was to try and take far more than we could ask or think and turn it into something manageable. It was not a question of faith or whether we believed God would do all of this. We were certain He would, even if we could not see it. Instead, it was grabbing onto these amazing faith ideas and putting in place the steps necessary to enable them to start.

Take for instance the phone call to Naethan Hendrix. We knew that it would take two dedicated pastors with complementary skill sets to see this work (see Mark 6:7). After talking through the names of several mutual friends, we remain unsettled. The concept was valid, but the application was coming up short. One morning as we were getting ready to pray, Clint told me he thought I’d think he was crazy, but a name kept coming up in Clint’s mind. It was an acquaintance from college; someone that Clint had attended class with, but wouldn’t have considered initially. I told him he’d be crazy not to call. So, after prayer and more planning, Clint left to go call Naethan. A few weeks later, Naethan pulled up in front of our house with all his belongings in his car, and he moved into our basement to begin the journey with us.

During this season, a small group of men had committed to pray together one night a week over several big ideas. We knew God was moving, and seeking Him literally on our faces was the best means to achieve and learn what God intended to do. From this time of prayer came Pillar, the Iceland Project, and the nascent beginnings of the Praetorian Project.

It was always part of the plan to measure our success by our sending capacity rather than our seating capacity. We make disciples who plant churches who make disciples who plant churches. One story illustrates how you can miss this. A small percentage of the sending church argued we should grow the current church rather than plant a new church. One year in, they were surprised when I told them we’d doubled the sending church in size. Incredulous, they said the same number of people were attending the sending church, so how could we have doubled? I answered that with the new church plant, the kingdom had doubled. It was always about multiplication, not addition.

You might be led to think at this point that as long as you feel called, have a vision to make disciples who plant churches, bathe it in prayer, and have faith you will succeed. I simply say, “People are hard.” This is why Clint always spoke of having a deep resolve to endure the difficulties that come with church planting. Don’t think that there wasn’t discouragement along the way. I remember one evening after a long conversation with Clint in which it seemed everything that could go wrong had, I reminded him, “Pastoring would be easy if it wasn’t for the people.” It’s been said that if you can do anything else but church plant, you should go do that. But for Clint, there were no other options. This is what God had made him to do and lead and to inspire others to do.

That inspiration and an uncanny ability to motivate the least of these to see the bigger picture has led many to see the Kingdom grow. Clint said it best when he wrote, “Our greatest potential for Kingdom growth is found in local churches, whose elders and members dedicate themselves to equipping and sending members to establish new churches in communities that need them.” May God receive our very best.