



KEVIN COX

**SMALL
CHURCH,
BIG
IMPACT**

A Call For Small Churches to Multiply

Small Church, Big Impact
A Call for Small Churches to Multiply

Kevin Cox

Small Church, Big Impact

Copyright (c) 2014 by Kevin Cox

Distributed via Exponential Resources

Exponential is a growing movement of leaders committed to the multiplication of healthy new churches. Exponential Resources spotlights and spreads actionable principles, ideas and solutions for the accelerated multiplication of healthy, reproducing faith communities. For more information, visit exponential.org

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher, except where noted in the text and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

This book is manufactured in the United States.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version(r), NIV(r). Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.(tm) Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://www.zondervan.com>

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible^(r), Copyright (c) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission." (www.Lockman.org)

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the authors.

Credits

Cover and Interior Design: Karen Pheasant

Editor: Lindy Lowry

With Thanks To...

This eBook is free to download thanks to the very generous support of some wonderful sponsor organizations:

Exponential

Thank you Todd, Eric, Lindy, Terri, Karen, Lauren and team for your help, encouragement and massive patience with a rookie's first journey into the writing world. I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity, and the Exponential team was a major reason this endeavor was so enjoyable. At every turn, questions were quickly answered, stress was reduced and wisdom from experience was passed along to assist me in the writing, editing and marketing of this book. It has been a joy!

It has been my honor to write this eBook on behalf of an organization that values multiplication and expects multiplication from all churches big and small. It is my prayer that God continues to bless this Kingdom ministry.

Glocalnet

I am thankful to be a part of a family that lives and breathes the Kingdom of God. Thank you, Bob, for casting a vision that small churches can and should be multiplying churches. You are a tremendous cheerleader and friend. I speak on behalf of those that you walk with, some of which are named in this eBook. We are forever grateful for you in our lives.

Seattle Church Planting

This eBook would not exist without you. Gary and Natalie, for the last fourteen years you have allowed me to work, train, equip, and love church planters in the Northwest alongside of you, and the honor has been all mine. Somewhere along the way we moved from co-laborers to abiding friends. I would have it no other way.

Vista Church

Simply put: I am so proud of you! You have sacrificed for a vision that would see churches multiplied and God has blessed us in a multitude of ways. God's Kingdom has been extended through you, and I count it as one of the greatest delights of my life to be called your pastor. I look forward to what God has in store for us.

And Finally...

Thank you to the five people in my life that have lived this church planting/church multiplication journey with me: Kathy, Jackson, Grace, Maddie and Walker. This has been a family calling, and you have all embraced that calling. My most ardent prayer is that you would exceed me in making an impact for the Kingdom of God. I believe that God is

answering that prayer. I thank God every day for you, and I cannot imagine this life without you. I love you all. Kevin

EXPONENTIAL 2017

DREAM BIG

BE A PART OF THE LARGEST
ANNUAL GATHERING
OF CHURCH MULTIPLICATION
LEADERS ON THE PLANET!



EXPONENTIAL EAST
ORLANDO, FL
April 24-27, 2017



2017 REGIONALS
Washington, D.C.
September 11 + 12, 2017



EXPONENTIAL WEST
LOS ANGELES, CA
October 2-5, 2017

Chicago, IL
November 7 + 8, 2017

Houston, TX
November 29 + 30, 2017



exponential.org/events

Special Invitation

Please consider attending one of our Exponential 2017 events. Our goal is to help shape your paradigm for multiplication, inspire and encourage you to multiply, and equip you to turn ideas into action. Our 2017 conferences are built on the content of this book, and are designed to help you move from ideas and inspiration to implementation and impact.

2017 Theme: Dream Big: Finding Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication.

Location and Dates: Our East and West locations are larger, full-service events with thousands of attendees, 100+ speakers, 20+ tracks, and 150+ workshops. Our Exponential regional events are shorter and geographically based (which translates to lower overall costs for large teams). Regionals bring the full “punch” of the national conferences’ five main stage sessions without the breakout workshops.

National Events

Exponential East // Orlando, Florida // April 24 – 27, 2017

Exponential West // Los Angeles // October 2 – 5, 2017

Regional Events

Washington, D.C. // September 11 – 12, 2017

Chicago // November 7 – 8, 2017

Houston, Texas // November 29 – 30, 2017

Seattle, Washington // TBA // check our web site

Special Offer

National Events – Use coupon code DREAMBIG2017 for \$39 off the regular rate.

Regional Events – Buy one registration and get one free admission for groups of five or more

B E C O M I N G
5 I V E

FREE ONLINE

**MULTIPLICATION
ASSESSMENT
TOOL**



Discover your church's profile
and pattern of multiplication at

becomingfive.org

Inside

Introduction
Size Does Not Determine Impact

1
Doing Things Differently

2
Multiplication Tensions

3
The Key Things We Did Right

4
My Kind of Business Meeting

Introduction

Size Does Not Determine Impact

It's called "The Cox Curse." Sadly, I have passed on "The Curse" to my oldest daughter, Grace (my second daughter, Maddie, appears to have escaped it). The Curse? We are terribly short people. I am 5'5" to be exact. In my glory days in the eighth grade, I was one of the tallest students in my class. That's when the "The Curse" kicked in.

The Curse also affects your limbs. They are usually short and stumpy. The love of my life for the last 20 years, my wife Kathy, seems to get some kind of sadistic glee out of announcing to anyone who will listen that I have "hobbit" feet. Just because it's true doesn't mean that you have to share it! Right? I keep encouraging Grace that "big things come in small packages." In fact it has been a constant refrain. As she tried out for cross-country track this year, competing against girls whose legs were twice hers in length, I reminded her that "big things come in small packages." As she tried out for seventh-grade girls' volleyball, she heard "big things come in small packages." Grace is learning to overcome "The Curse."

We have a similar statement at Vista Church: "Size does not determine impact!" We firmly believe that our size should not be an impediment to church multiplication. Our source of inspiration comes from Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. To this small band of believers, Paul painted what is arguably one of the most majestic pictures of the supremacy of Christ found in the New Testament:

***15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities---all things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. **19** For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-19, ESV).*

The Colossian church was the least important church that Paul would address. In fact, Paul never personally met them. However, it was to this fledgling church in a declining city that the Father gave the entire body of Christ its deepest Christology. Size does not determine impact.

Similarly, as God used the Colossian church to unveil a larger view of Christ, we believe that He can use Vista Church in Heartland, Texas, to unveil a larger view of Christ's Kingdom through church multiplication. In fact, we believe this to be true for any church willing to multiply churches regardless of their Sunday morning attendance. Size does not determine impact. This vision has been the driving force behind our local church helping to plant thirteen churches in the last seven years. The best part about this is that if our church can do it, so can yours!

1

Doing Things Differently

The story of Vista Church actually begins in a community aptly named Maple Valley, Washington, nestled in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains 25 miles southeast of downtown Seattle, Washington. Kathy and I had planted Maple Valley Community Church 10 years prior, and now we were returning home to Texas to plant again.

At this point, full disclosure is in order: God spoke to Kathy first. When she approached me with the insane thought of relocating to Texas and planting again, I dug my heels in against her and God. I argued: We loved the people of Maple Valley Community Church. The church was beginning to grow. We finally had a facility to call our own----no more nomadic church. Finances were flowing. We had a good reputation in the community. We had labored for ten years to get to this point. Start over? Ironically, I knew Kathy was speaking truth. The Holy Spirit was stirring in my heart as well; I just wasn't ready to admit it.

Kathy and I had moved to Maple Valley in 1997 with no kids and one dog. We had received no church planting training and had limited ministry experience. We had no church planting coach, supervisor, mentor or even peers to call upon. Calvary Baptist Church in nearby Renton, Washington, graciously paid for three years of my salary along with some start-up money. Now ten years later, we had four children, a dog, a fish, no money, no sponsoring church and a dream of planting a second time in our home state of Texas. I vividly remember turning to Kathy as we drove east on I-90, leaving behind our home of the last decade and saying, "This time we're going to do things differently."

Honestly, at the time I didn't entirely understand what I meant by that statement, but it would ultimately lead us down a path of multiplication and become the guiding value statement that would compel Vista Church to partner with thirteen church plants in seven years; coach an untold number of church planters; and conduct our first-ever church planter training and cohort this past January. We have definitely been doing things differently. We would have had it no other way!

A Story With Many Friends

In his work, *Meditation XVII*, author John Donne coined the famous phrase, "No man is an island." Vista Church's journey of multiplication is a perfect example of Donne's sentiment. We did not get here on our own. The story of Vista Church is replete with friends who molded us for multiplication. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 describes our journey:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up (ESV).

There's something to be said for heeding the advice of those who have traveled the road before you. Church multiplication is indeed an exciting adventure, but it also comes with its own set of pitfalls and tensions. Vista Church was fortunate that God blessed us with many pioneering friends along the way who instilled in us a vision for multiplication, shared strategy and were always available for advice on next steps. Below, I share a little about how each person came alongside us in each phase to plant, water and nurture the seed of multiplication.

Gary Irby, currently the church-planting strategist for Seattle Church Planting, was the first to sow the seed of planting churches into my life. Gary, who in 1998 had only days before becoming the church-planting strategist for the Puget Sound Baptist Association, held babies in the nursery at the grand opening of Maple Valley Community Church. A couple of months later, Gary allowed me to accompany him to the first church planter training that either one of us had ever attended. To this day, I am still a little bitter with Gary. The information we learned in those three and a half days, took me a full 18 months to uncover on my own earlier. Furthermore, I could have used the information *before* we launched! For the last fourteen years, I've had the privilege to work with Gary training church planters in the Northwest. He spoke on behalf of Kathy and me at our own church planter assessment, and he was the first to challenge me with the notion of multiplication. I can speak with certainty that very few people, if any, know more about church planting than Gary Irby.

Jim Gatliff watered the seed. I met Jim in the early days of planting Vista Church. Jim currently serves as the director of missions for the Hunt Baptist Association in Texas and at the time that I met him, he was dually employed as the church planting strategist for the Kauf-Van Baptist Association in Texas. During his tenure there, Jim created the PRIME Program, designed to help small churches take "baby steps" into planting churches by setting aside one percent of their budget for church planting. These churches committed to helping plant a church when the opportunity arose. As a result of Jim's influence in my life, we began to set aside one percent of our budget when we first began meeting and talking about multiplying. At our first launch team gathering in May of 2007, six people, all strangers, sat around our kitchen table while I cast the vision for planting churches. We also took up our first offering and committed to use a portion of our giving to start our first church. After nine months of saving our money, we helped Connect Church in Lynnwood, Washington, get started by giving them our church planting money and committing for three years to support them monthly.

While Gary planted the seed of multiplication and Jim watered it, the next person we encountered turned a fire hose on it! I first met **Bob Roberts**, pastor of NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, at a day and a half Turbo event hosted by NorthWood. At this gathering six Baptist boys got their worlds rocked. The program centered around four values: Kingdom, disciple, society and church. The last three values would later shape our fledgling church plant (and continue to do so today), but it was Bob's teaching on the Kingdom of God that captured my heart. Bob introduced me, and the five guys that attended with me, to the importance of teaching and living within the Kingdom of God. Collectively, we seemed to know that we were all about to be a part of something bigger than ourselves and bigger

than the starting of a single church. Bob's teaching answered the all-important "why?" question: *Why should we plant churches? Because the Kingdom of God is not about addition but multiplication!* Within the Kingdom of God, we have a new set of metrics. We still measure progress through baptisms, finances and, attendance, but now we also measure fruitfulness by how many disciples are released, how many new cell groups are formed, how many new community engagement opportunities are created, and, of course, church multiplication. The Kingdom is not about seating capacity, but sending capacity. As Bob would say, the Kingdom is not about being the biggest church in the city but "churching" the city. Recently Bob said to me, "Kevin, if small churches started churches, we would have a chance of reclaiming our culture!" Through Bob's encouragement, we began to see our first church planter training take root.

Through Bob, I met **Brian Hook**, the lead pastor for multiplying disciples at Hope Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. At the time when we met, Brian was serving as the city catalyst for Vision360 Dallas. His single greatest contribution to the Vista Church story is the notion he had to send Kathy and me to a church planter assessment school at Green Lakes Conference Center out in the middle of nowhere in Wisconsin. At the end of a weeklong assessment, Kathy and I met with three people to hear our results. At the time, Vista already had 30 adults plus kids regularly meeting, so we were fairly confident we would "pass"---or at least we hoped! But what we learned was much more significant.

The lead assessor proclaimed, "We are not passing you because we believe you can plant a church. We are passing you because we believe you can multiply churches out of the church you're going to plant." For me, this was a watershed moment. People who had no financial or personal obligation to us believed that God would do a major Kingdom work through Vista. On the way home, in the midst of the Illinois cornfields, Kathy turned to me and said, "That was the greatest confirmation of what God has called us to do that we have ever had." I am grateful to Brian that he continues to help me hone my church planter training skills by allowing me to present at his church planter training at Hope Church.

I am indebted to **David Alexander**, who serves as the church planting lead associate for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. David opened up a new piece of the multiplication process to me by offering me the opportunity to coach planters throughout Texas. After our church in Texas began to multiply, David invited me to join his church planter training team. As we trained church planters, we began to see a need for ongoing coaching. David gave me the opportunity to begin coaching church planters in a more formalized setting. I am now convinced of the absolute necessity of ongoing church planter coaching, especially if you plan to multiply. Coaching ensures that no church planter in your system falls through the cracks. The coaching experience has often evolved into a spiritual fathering role with many church planters focusing not only on the "nuts-and-bolts" of planting but also the spiritual dimension of the planter's heart.

Through my connection with David, I was introduced to **Sam Douglas**. Sam is a unique individual with a varied background that positioned him well to coach church planters. Sam is a former pastor and church planter and the lead coach for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. Sam also started his own company, Just Lead Me, where he

coaches church planters around the United States. Sam is also the North America World Zone Leader for Dynamic Church Planting International. After David assigned coaching assignments to me, Sam trained others and me in coaching techniques, especially in how to ask the difficult questions. One of Sam's favorite sayings is, "Church planters don't know what they don't know!" I often ask Sam for wisdom and advice when confronted with coaching situations that I have not experienced before. Simply, Sam has coached me in how to excel in coaching planters.

Omar Reyes serves as the glocal impact pastor at NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, and has been instrumental in helping us shape our own church planter training called Release. Omar has been generous with his time and instruction. On day one of our first module in January of 2014, Omar was scheduled to join me to present our five church planting teams when the Dallas/Ft. Worth area got hit with record-breaking snowfall. Omar couldn't get out of his driveway, much less trek across the Metroplex to where we were meeting. Before and after each unit, I texted him for instructions and nuggets of wisdom for the next unit. Omar never tires of my questions and thoughts and has been gracious to help me work through our Release training so that we can offer the best church planter training possible for the Kingdom work these people are embarking upon.

Each of these individuals played a significant role in developing our multiplication process and story. I love this wonderful picture of the Kingdom of God!

Just the Beginning...

Since that initial meeting around our kitchen table almost eight years ago, Vista Church has been privileged to participate in the planting of thirteen churches in cities such as Seattle, Boston, Toronto, Ft. Worth, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Bangalore, India, upstate New York, and Dallas. Moreover, we have also witnessed what every parent longs for: grandchildren! With cooperation from planter Scott Venable we helped start Mosaic Church (recently renamed New City Church) in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago. Scott and Mosaic in turn helped plant Timber Ridge Church led by Nic Burleson in rural Stephenville, Texas. I vividly remember the first time I met Nic. The conversation went like this:

Nic (a large man with an awesome *Duck Dynasty* beard): "Hi! I'm Nic. You don't know me, but I'm using your DNA words of 'Christ, Community, Cause.' Scott Venable said he stole them from you, and I stole them from him. So, I guess that I'm actually stealing them from you! Is that okay?"

Me (still attempting to comprehend this scene): "Yeah, that's no problem. Who are you again?"

Nic: "I'm planting a church in Stephenville, and Mosaic Church is helping plant us. Scott said you're helping him get started and that most of what he's doing he got from you, so I wanted to make sure that it was alright for me to use your stuff."

Me: “Oh my gosh! You’re my grandchild! (minus the spectacular beard, massive physique, the fact that he’s two feet taller than me, and several years younger) Vista planted Mosaic, and Mosaic planted Timber Ridge. You are my grandchild!”

Kathy and I have four children total: Jackson, Grace, Maddie, and Walker. One of my greatest prayers is that all four of my children far surpass me in their impact for the Kingdom of God. Likewise, I am praying that our church plants far exceed Vista Church in their Kingdom impact and that they all receive from us the DNA for multiplication:

- Scott Venable at New City Church in Chicago has the DNA and is already multiplying.
- Nic Burlison at Timber Ridge has already brought on church planting interns and has helped a church plant in Toronto get started. He has the DNA for multiplication.
- W.A. Subash in Bangalore, India, has started a church planting school. He has the DNA for multiplication.

This past Easter, Vista Church recorded our largest-ever attendance of 275 people. We were excited, but another number thrilled us. The combined attendance on Easter weekend of all of our church plants and their church plants was over 2,000 people. On the Sunday after Easter, I presented that number to the people of Vista Church during our offering time to thank them for their financial generosity. Applause broke out! The people of Vista have the DNA of multiplication. That is a Kingdom metric. When we multiply, our ministry touch extends far beyond our community. We pray that for Vista Church this is just the beginning.

2

Multiplication Tensions

Over the last fourteen years, I've had the privilege of training, coaching and walking with numerous church planters and their teams. From Seattle to Dallas to San Diego to Chicago to Las Vegas, I've met church planters, their wives and their teams that had God-sized dreams and visions for church planting and multiplication. With the exception of a few, all envisioned becoming a multiplying church. They were church planters. Multiplication was their DNA.

I heard phrases from them such as, "We want to launch pregnant" and "We want to be a church planting center." Many of these church planters had solid strategy and processes for multiplying. However, the same startlingly statistic that only four percent of churches ever multiply includes church plants as well. I've often wondered what prevents these church planters who have so much promise from achieving their vision. Looking back at our church multiplication journey at Vista Church, I can identify several tensions that we have navigated through and around, some of which may be inherent in other church planters' stories as well.

Tension #1: Growth

We're not content with where we are numerically at Vista Church. It is my prayer and hope that we never become content with our numerical growth. We are engaging, serving, loving and blessing a community that continues to grow. Our community currently has approximately 1,450 homes with another 5,000 planned for future growth. From all over the Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, area, people are moving into our community. Because the price points of the homes are relatively inexpensive, many individuals and families are able to purchase a new home for the first time. This has led to an interesting sociological dynamic. We have white, black and Hispanic people living right next door to one another. Furthermore, we have a growing Nigerian population in our community. We believe that God has brought our church to this community for such a time as this. We are not content with our size.

However, there is always the tension of how much we should focus on our own growth attendance (addition) versus starting new places of growth through church multiplication. We have resolved this tension by adopting a "both/and" philosophy. We attempt to balance the need for addition growth at Vista Church with multiplication growth through church planting. In essence, both are necessary to fulfill the Great Commission. Acts 1:8 is our guide:

"What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be My witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world" (ESV).

In this version of Jesus' Great Commission, we don't understand Jesus to be outlining a step-by-step process. He's not saying, "First, you will be my witness in Jerusalem *then* in

Judea *then* in Samaria and *then* to the ends of the world.” We interpret Jesus to be commissioning us to go to all places at the same time. For us that would be Heartland, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, the United States, and the ends of the world at the same time. Obviously, Vista Church cannot physically be in all those places at once, but we can plant churches in all those places at the same time. We are dreaming of the day when we plant another church in our own community. Our “both/and” philosophy compels us to reach our community and to grow numerically while we multiply churches and watch the Kingdom of God grow.

Tension #2: Mother’s maturity vs. baby’s maturity

“Are we mature enough to parent a child?” I’m not sure anyone is mature enough to parent a newborn child. However, simply voicing the question seems to convey some sense of maturity and self-awareness. Parenting has a funny way of exposing your flaws, warts and imperfections, and good parenting acknowledges those blemishes rather than dismissing them. Acknowledging our lack of maturity in certain areas helps us grow in those areas. As we mature as parents, then we become capable of helping our children mature.

When we first found out that Kathy was pregnant with our first child, Jackson, she dove into reading all kinds of books on pregnancy and parenting such as *What to Expect When You Are Expecting* and *What to Expect Your First Year*. Honestly, I thought those books were weird and written only to the perspective of the mother. Besides, what could those books tell me that I did not already know? My arrogance was shaken to the core the first time we heard the heart beat. I remember thinking *This is for real!* My arrogance turned into terror. I started reading her books. I was tracking her pregnancy with what the books said. She enrolled us in a birthing class, and I killed a doll attempting to put a cloth diaper on it. I feared for our unborn son. I wasn't ready for this. I wasn't mature enough. Thankfully, Kathy allayed most of my fears by defiantly (in a deep Texas accent) announcing---to the chagrin of every environmentalist in that hospital---that we would be using disposable diapers instead of cloth.

Miraculously, Jackson survived and is approaching 16 years of age. With the succeeding children, Grace, Maddie and Walker, Kathy and I grew in experience, wisdom and maturity. Each child’s birth and early years were different, but we were not overwhelmed. We had grown. We had matured. Each child has added something unique to our lives, and I cannot imagine life without even one of them.

Was Vista Church mature enough to plant our first church? Did we have our act together spiritually? Did we know what we were doing? No, no and no. But with each church plant, new life was breathed into our church. The Spirit deepened us as we multiplied. The more churches we helped start, the more experience and wisdom we accumulated to pass on to the church planters that would come next. Our growth and maturity encouraged and assisted the growth and maturity of the churches we were planting.

Too many churches delay multiplying until they're spiritually mature or healthy, financially secure, or simply have more people in their congregation. While these reasons may sound prudent by earthly standards, we cannot discount the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to bring new life, depth and maturity into the mother church while the mother church multiplies itself in new churches.

Tension #3: Sacrifice

Parenting four children has taught me many life lessons, one of which is that parents often sacrifice for their children. Additionally, because children are typically self-absorbed and clueless, they rarely witness or comprehend the lengths their parents went to in order to sacrifice for them until many years later---if at all.

When couples are contemplating starting a family and yet are hesitant in embarking on this lifelong commitment because of the escalating cost of having children, inevitably someone will say, "You will never have enough money for children." For those of you who are gluttons for punishment, consider this:

For a middle-income family in the United States, the average cost of raising a child born in 2013 to age 18 is approximately **\$245,340** (or **\$304,480**, adjusted for projected inflation), according to the latest annual "Cost of Raising A Child" report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

So if my math is correct, Kathy and I will have spent over \$1 million raising four children to age 18! I'm a church planter; I don't have that kind of cash. Somewhere along the way, my parents failed to let me in on this little secret: Parents sacrifice for their children. Granted, \$250,000 per child may be inflated, but children are costly and Kathy and I have sacrificed for ours (in 2011 we honeymooned in the Dominican Republic ... 17 years after our wedding. It was wonderful, so much so that we won't wait another 17 years to go back. It's our kids' turn to sacrifice!) Bottom line: Parents that desire for their children to succeed will sacrifice their own desires, interests, wants and, sometimes, needs. Those of you with newborns know exactly what I'm talking about. Kiss that sleep goodbye! It will return again... in 18 years.

Churches that multiply and parent other churches and deeply yearn for their offspring to succeed will have to live sacrificially. Make no mistake. Small churches will probably feel this sacrifice more deeply than larger churches and church plants even more deeply because resources are so limited. Multiplication requires finances---money that could've been allocated for programs and local outreach, upgraded facilities, necessary equipment and additional staff. And as any church planter or leader of a small church knows, people resources are even more crucial. In a church multiplication culture, the best and brightest leaders and families may feel called to go and help with a new church plant or to start a new church themselves. This kind of "release" involves major sacrifice from the parent church.

Tension #4: Failure

Watching your children fail is one of the most challenging parts of parenting. You so long for them to grow, mature and succeed that as a parent you'll sacrifice to help them in any endeavor. Inevitably, though, failure comes---whether it's missing the mark with grades, failed friendships or not making the team. Through failure, our children have learned life lessons and have become better for it, but as their parents Kathy and I want them to succeed more than fail. I believe their failures are probably more difficult on Kathy and me than they are on the kids.

Our children are resilient. Admittedly, when it comes to our kids Kathy and I are not. They fall. They pick themselves up. We, on the other hand, question our parenting ability. What could we have done better or differently? I knew that allowing Jackson to have three pacifiers when he was a baby (one for his mouth and one for each hand ... yeah, don't ask) was bad parenting and would come back to haunt us in high school!

If I had known how gut wrenching it would be on me when my children fail or fall, would I have entered into this world of parenthood? Probably, but with a lot more trepidation. I still remember the first time I got the word from a church planter that they were closing their doors. Due to circumstances out of his control, like a hurricane driving many of his people from their homes to which they would not return, his church plant was disbanding after a year and a half. Immediately, the questions flooded my heart: Could we have trained him better? Could we have resourced him better? Should we help him plant somewhere else? What can we do?

By the time we spoke on the phone, though disappointed, he was at peace. The Holy Spirit had already opened other doors for his wife and him. He listed lessons he had learned through the process. As we hung up, I thought aloud, *"This was not supposed to happen when you multiply."* At that moment, the Holy Spirit gently rebuked me. Failure is part of life. Failure helps us grow. When multiplying churches, we will rejoice with the highest of highs and grieve with the lowest of lows. May the tension of failure not preclude us from the Kingdom work of church multiplication.

Tension #5: Ego

Full transparency and disclosure here: I have an idol—the idol of recognition. Since the moment I began church planting, I have craved to be known. Age, children and a godly, redheaded wife have tempered the longing for this idol. However, as we began to take initial steps toward church multiplication at Vista Church, that idol began to rear its ugly head in my heart once again. This time it was not recognition for church growth but church multiplication. If we plant churches, surely someone will take notice of us---take notice of me. My idol was back with a vengeance!

A few years ago, we started a tradition of having an all-church breakfast the last Sunday of the year. An idea that originated to cover a Sunday usually sparsely attended due to Christmas travel has become one of the highest attended Sundays of the year simply

because of the food involved. One particular year I planned on laying out a theme for the next year on this Sunday in addition to the food and community. As the Sunday crept closer, no theme had emerged that really grabbed me. During this creative wrestling, the Holy Spirit intervened. He already had a theme for us—for me—based on Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (ESV, emphasis mine).

Literally, Paul says, “I am being crucified.” This is a daily dying. Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message* illuminates my heart issue:

“Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with Him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not ‘mine,’ but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (MSG, emphasis mine).

I seriously doubt that many remember me speaking on that one verse or laying out a yearlong theme that Sunday morning. The smell of pecan pancakes and bacon frying is stiff competition. I, however, have total recall. The people. The exact spot where I was standing. The smells. Everything. I realize now that the verse the Holy Spirit drove me to was for me. My idol would have to die for us to multiply. My ego could no longer be central. Recognition from others would need to cease as a value.

I also realized I needed to confess and repent of another form of pride. Behind this idol of recognition was a need to impress the Father. My identity was based on working for God, producing for Him. Through His Word and godly mentors, the Holy Spirit overwhelmed me with the heart knowledge that my identity is based on the truth that I am a son of the eternal Father. I didn't need to feel pressure to impress the Father to gain His attention, recognition or approval. He finds pleasure in me simply because I am His son. When I die, I truly live---in His Kingdom as a son of the King. At this moment, I knew we were ready to multiply. It would be His kingdom that we would extend and His alone.

3

The Key Things We Did Right

When you work with church planters, inevitably the conversation turns to the question “If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?” I count it an immense blessing to have had the opportunity to plant a second church. Kathy and I reflect back on our lives in Maple Valley with great fondness. That 10-year stint at Maple Valley Community Church allowed me to grow as a pastor, a husband, a father, and as a follower of Christ. There were many times in that span that I wished I had done better for all involved. I can also see the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit preparing me for a ministry of multiplication that I could not yet see myself. I am forever grateful to those people for bearing with me as I attempted to lead and shepherd them, as well as allowing me the freedom to work with church planters in the Northwest. Without that loving community, there would have been no Vista Church.

Kathy and I learned much during that planting experience and used that knowledge and wisdom to plant Vista and ultimately a ministry of multiplication. I recall one night not long after we had moved into our house in Heartland, Texas, sitting in the living room with the kids in bed. Kathy and I were reminiscing about our time in Seattle while dreaming about what God had in store with this new adventure. We had gone to the Northwest in our mid-twenties with no ministry experience, and we were now starting over in a new decade of our lives with learned insights and experience in both ministry and life. As we chatted, I off-handedly commented, “What if all that we learned in Maple Valley and the Northwest was not simply to plant a church but to minister to those who will come behind us? What if God is calling us to help others plant and to minister to church planters and their wives and their families? What if our legacy is something bigger than planting just one church?” Multiplication was fleshing itself out in our hearts.

Since that evening, the Holy Spirit has shown how prophetic that conversation would turn out to be in our lives. Countless conversations with church planters and their wives have surfaced and always the question is posed: “If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?” Implied in the question are pleadings: “Please tell us what to look out for and what not to do. Please tell us about your wins so that we can reproduce them. Please tell us about pitfalls and roadblocks and how to navigate around them.” My tongue-in-cheek response is always, “How much time do you have?” We did so many things differently to instill a culture of multiplication, but five items stand out for us:

1. From day one, we started with the vision/DNA of multiplication. Church plants may be short on people, finances, and facilities, but one major upside to planting a church is the opportunity to instill Kingdom vision and DNA from inception.

In the earliest years of our marriage, Kathy and I discussed having a big family; the number “four” often crept into those conversations. After having our third child and second daughter, Maddie, we often wondered aloud if that was enough for us. I recall one evening in Maple Valley just simply saying, “I don’t think we’re done having kids.” Kathy, though not

startled by my revelation, asked why I had said that. My reply wasn't the most spiritual, but it seemed to convince her: "Because we have an empty seat at the table." After child number four, Walker (and no, he is not named after Walker, Texas Ranger) was born, my good friend Gary Irby encouraged me when he said that all good church planters have four children because it means they understand multiplication.

With four kids in the house, life is never boring. At some point all four of our kids have exhibited behavior resembling Kathy's or mine. Without fail, Kathy and I will glance at each other and say, "I wonder where they got that from? I've never done that, so it must be from you!" The hard truth is that the Cox children have both of our DNA's within them. Good, bad or ugly, they resemble both of us, act like both of us, imitate both of us, and think like us. On one occasion our youngest daughter, Maddie, proudly announced, "I want to have four kids just like you and Mom!" With all the fatherly love in my heart I replied, "Maddie, you might want to seriously reconsider that plan." As our kids have grown, we have attempted to parent and help shape them into the people they're becoming, instilling our values and beliefs into their minds and hearts.

When we started Vista Church, from day one multiplication was the vision, value and DNA. We would multiply. We could not wait a month, a year, or for a 10-year anniversary to multiply. If it was indeed who we were, then we would vision-cast it on day one, begin financially preparing for it on day one and be prepared when the opportunity arose. Since then, we have instilled who we are into the people of Vista. Because people are inspired by a vision that is bigger than themselves, our church's vision for multiplication has often been a drawing point for people to join our church. We've shared the multiplication DNA with church planters we have partnered with, and they in turn have instilled this same DNA into their church plants from day one, as well.

2. We taught the kingdom of God. Admittedly, I'm a pragmatic person. Show me the blueprint and then let me run with it. My introduction to the teaching of the Kingdom of God was literally a fresh beat of the Holy Spirit in my heart. The Kingdom of God is His rule or reign in my life. The Kingdom of God demands surrender, reminding me that church multiplication is not my idea but flows from the heart of the Father.

Why do we sacrifice money that could easily be used for a "good" event or a staff position in Vista Church? The Kingdom of God. Why do we invest in church planters, their wives and their families? The Kingdom of God. Why do we give away sound equipment to church plants rather than selling it for our own use? The Kingdom of God. Why did a godly and generous family in our church build a training facility on their property so that we could increase the amount of church planters we equip? The Kingdom of God.

When we started teaching the Kingdom of God, multiplication took off.

3. I involved our family in our ministry. One Sunday morning my oldest son, Jackson, and I were on our way to one of our launch team meetings at our community's volunteer fire station. We had outgrown our house, and the fire department allowed us to use their common area, kitchen and bays for our meetings (that is a whole other story of

craziness!). Halfway to the station, Jackson, age 9, asked a theologically astute question way beyond his years: "Dad, where is the church meeting today?" As you let the profundity of that question sink in, understand that for most people in our context in the Dallas area, church is something that you *attend* on Sunday mornings, not something you *are* twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. However, for Jackson the church was literally the people. From the fire station, we would move to a community center, a school and eventually to the school where we currently meet. Later, while presenting at a church planter training and retelling this story, I realized that my children had never been part of a church that owned its own building. We had always been nomadic. Their only church experience had been church planting.

I've heard the horror stories of how ministry has hurt wives and turned pastors' children away from the church, but for us church planting has always been a family affair. Kathy has often poured into church planters' wives, and our children have been active participants in all of our church's events. My hope for all of them is that through this involvement they will grow to understand multiplication, that they will be multipliers and continue to be involved in church multiplication. I love to bring them around other church planters so they can hear the stories of the Kingdom of God and its advancement through church multiplication. Church planting and church multiplication have given my family and me a deeper understanding of Christ's church.

4. We learned from others. For our church planter assessments, Kathy and I underwent a battery of personality assessments and tests, spiritual inventories, background checks and psychological inquiries to determine our spiritual, emotional and mental health. One of the assessments we completed was the StrengthsFinder 2.0, which is designed to help an individual discover their top five talents and build upon them. Most church planters have hip and cool talents like "Futuristic" which StrengthsFinder characterizes as, "inspired by the future and what could be." People strong in this theme "inspire others with their visions of the future." *Surely, that's one of mine*, I thought. Another strength often evident in church planters is "Strategic," characterized by "creating alternative ways to proceed." Faced with any given scenario, people strong in this theme can "quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues." *That described me, right?* The "Achiever" has "a great deal of stamina and works hard." The "Developer" "recognizes and cultivates the potential in others." *All of these sounded good, too! I'm surely all of them!*

With a sense of excitement and my chest sticking out a little farther than normal, I read my results. I can't tell you what my other four strengths are because I haven't been able to get past my top strength: "Learner!" StrengthsFinder describes these people as having "a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them." How in the world do you plant a church much less multiply with "Learner" as your top strength? Could there be a more boring, unhip, uncool, un-church planter-like strength? Surely the results were wrong, or I misunderstood the questions. I talked with some StrengthsFinder coaches about retaking the assessment. They all agreed that retaking the assessment could potentially skew my results. I elected to take the StrengthsFinder assessment again anyway on my own and once again: "Learner!" (so much for skewed results). Evidently this is who I am, a learner.

My top strength manifested itself in our journey to church multiplication by inquiring early and often from others who had traveled the road of multiplication before us. We learned from some seasoned multipliers. Through their advice and guidance, we avoided many pitfalls along the way and have witnessed God's favor. Maybe, just maybe, a Learner can multiply too.

5. We developed a system that fits us. My youngest son, Walker, utterly idolizes his older brother, Jackson. Walker is 8 years old while Jackson is 15. In Walker's mind, he, too, is 15. Jackson plays high school basketball and baseball, and Walker believes he can do anything Jackson can do. Sadly for Walker, this lack of self-awareness usually ends up with him getting frustrated or worse, hurt. Play basketball like Jackson? Frustration. Wrestle with Jackson? Injury. Walker often forgets how old he is and how big he is, and this typically ends with trouble.

Unlike Walker, our church has a better grasp on who we are. We are not a megachurch. We are not even a midsize church at the moment. For us to multiply, we need to know who we are and what we're capable of doing. We don't pretend to be something we're not, and we only offer what we can do. Furthermore, we have grown into the system that we're currently using for church multiplication.

Our initial system of church multiplication was simply committing monthly financial assistance to a church plant in Seattle. From that simple step of obedience, God opened the door for informal training of a church planting couple that joined Vista Church. For a year, he and his wife learned different aspects of church planting while starting a small group in our community. After he graduated from seminary, we had the honor of sending them off to plant in upstate New York. We committed to monthly support, as well as ongoing communication and coaching. Simultaneously, we committed to partner with church plants in Chicago and Ft. Worth. This last year, we added the last piece of our church multiplication system: formalized training. We trained five church planting teams that are planting or will be planting in Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas and Seattle. With each new church planting partnership, another piece of our church multiplication system emerged.

Seven years later, our system is comprised of four components: assessment, training, funding and coaching. We have a training facility built on their own property by a generous and Kingdom-minded couple in Vista Church, Gary and Joyce Moore. We affectionately call it, "The Barn." Our church planters can use it anytime for retreats or trainings. Joyce and my mother, Paula Cox, did something as simple as hold babies at our Release church planter training so that the wives could participate with their husbands. We have developed a system that fits us. As our church has grown and matured, we have quite literally grown into our church multiplication system. My only hope is that Walker will allow himself to develop and grow before he really hurts himself!

4

My Kind of Business Meeting

A couple of years ago, our navigation team was arguing in the midst of our end-of-the-year budgeting meeting. It was late November, and we were “discussing” the next year’s budget. Now, before you dismiss this as one more church business meeting, I first need to qualify it. We had already completed our budgeting for the next year and had progressed to discussing what we would do with that year’s surplus funds. The people of Vista Church had been extremely generous that year, and the leadership of the church had operated in an equally frugal manner. We call it “the Vista way”; others call it the “cheapskate way” (named after their pastor, I think). Whatever you want to label it, we had \$7,500 left over with a month to go and we believed that God wanted us to use that money to bless others. After putting some in savings, we proceeded to allot “Christmas gifts” to mission groups that we partnered with during the year.

We eventually arrived at our church planters. We were financially supporting five planters at the time, so I suggested that we give them each \$200 as a Christmas bonus of sorts. We were already supporting them on a monthly basis, and I thought we should show our appreciation for what they were doing through an extra monetary gift. What happened next was another watershed moment for Vista Church. One of the guys around the table countered, “I don’t believe that’s enough. Let’s give it all away, \$1500 for each planter.” Before I could even comment, a vote had been taken (without me, I might add), and the checks were being written. J.J. Moore, one of our leaders at the table that night exclaimed, “Now that is my kind of business meeting---where we argue over how much *more* we’re going to give away, not how much we’re going to hang on to!” I knew then that multiplication as a value of Vista Church was growing and deepening.

After that meeting, I recalled how Jesus’ parable of the Kingdom spoke directly to our situation:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" Matt. 13:31-32 (ESV).

My interpretation of this passage? Big impact comes in small packages! I am grateful that the Holy Spirit uses all kinds of churches to extend His kingdom and multiply churches. So if your church is small, don't count yourself out of this Kingdom work. Begin to multiply and allow God’s Spirit to use you!

My daughter, Grace, won fourth place at her district cross-country meet. She was all smiles. “The Curse” had been broken. Short legs can run fast and long. She believes that big impact can come in small packages. So do I. So does Vista Church and the offspring we’ve daughtered. Do you?

About the Author

Kevin Cox is a church planter/pastor who is focused on multiplying disciples and churches. He is the founding pastor of Vista Church, a seven-year-old church in Heartland, Texas. Kevin has earned a Masters of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and planted another church in Maple Valley, Washington, which he pastored for ten years. He lives in Heartland, Texas, with his wife Kathy and their four children: Jackson, Grace, Maddie and Walker. Connect with him at kevincox@thisisvista.com or through Twitter @kevincox94.



Related Multiplication Resources

FREE eBooks

20+ new free eBooks are in our multiplication library. Authors include J.D. Greear, Ralph Moore, Larry Walkemeyer, Bruce Wesley, Tim Hawks, K.P. Yohannan, Ajai Lall, Brian Bolt, Jeff Leake, and many more. These leaders of multiplying churches share their journey of creating a sending culture of multiplication.

These eBooks are in addition to 60+ existing free eBooks in Exponential's resource library. Check out exponential.org/resource-ebooks to download these books.

Exponential Conferences

Don't miss the opportunity to gather with like-minded church multiplication leaders at Exponential's 2017 events:

Exponential East (April 24-27 | Orlando) and Exponential West (October 2-6 | Los Angeles) convene thousands of leaders and feature 100+ speakers, 100+ workshops, and nine focused workshop tracks.

Exponential Regionals bring the full punch of the national event theme in a more intimate gathering that helps leaders save travel expenses. 2017 Regionals will take place in Washington, D.C., Chicago and Houston, Texas.

Visit exponential.org/events to learn more.

FREE Online Multiplication Assessment

Discover your church's level and pattern of multiplication via our free online tool. It only takes 20 minutes to complete and is available at becomingfive.org

FREE Online Multiplication Course

The Becoming Five Course is designed to delve deeper into the practical elements of church multiplication. Leaders wanting to multiply their church will find valuable training in the form of audio, video, and written content supplied by dozens of multiplying practitioners, with the ability to work at their own pace. Visit exponential.org/register/b5-course/ to register.

Digital Access Passes (Training Videos)

Exponential offers downloadable content from all 10 main stage sessions via our Digital Access Pass (a separate pass for each conference theme) at exponential.org/digital-access-pass/:

2015: "SPARK: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication"

2016: "Becoming Five"

2017: “Dream Big: Discover Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication”

Connect with Exponential on:

Twitter - @churchplanting

Facebook - Facebook.com/churchplanting

RSS - <http://feeds.feedburner.com/exponential>



EXPONENTIAL⁷

RESOURCING CHURCH PLANTERS

- 20+ new FREE eBooks
- Largest annual church planting conference in the world (Orlando & Los Angeles)
- Regional Conferences - DC, Chicago, Houston (new)
- FREE Online Multiplication Assessment
- FREE Online Multiplication Course
- Conference content available via Digital Access Pass (Training Videos)
- Social Media

exponential.org >

[@churchplanting](https://twitter.com/churchplanting)

info@exponential.org

[Facebook.com/churchplanting](https://www.facebook.com/churchplanting)

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/exponential>



EXPONENTIAL 2017

DREAM

BIG

BE A PART OF THE LARGEST
ANNUAL GATHERING
OF CHURCH MULTIPLICATION
LEADERS ON THE PLANET!



EXPONENTIAL EAST
ORLANDO, FL
April 24-27, 2017



EXPONENTIAL WEST
LOS ANGELES, CA
October 2-5, 2017



2017 REGIONALS
Washington, D.C.
September 11 + 12, 2017

Chicago, IL
November 7 + 8, 2017

Houston, TX
November 29 + 30, 2017



exponential.org/events