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Know Your Mission

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Dear Titus,

I hope this letter finds you well, brother. I was so encouraged when I heard that you were planting a church. What a marvelous and much-needed task! I know these early years of church planting can be very challenging, but it is a good work that you've committed yourself to. I'm also keenly aware that this endeavor isn't just about you; Elizabeth and the kids have also been thrown into the mix. It's an all-consuming, whole-family business. At times, it can seem like your life, your family, and your household are indistinguishable from "the church plant." Take heart, brother. It won't be like this forever.

But I wanted to write you this letter to help you keep your focus. I've also asked several other friends to write you as well—men who have wisdom and experience with church planting, revitalization, and pastoral ministry. I

pray that their letters serve both to encourage you and instruct you. Many of them have helped me throughout the years.

As you may already know, I led a small team to plant Harvest Bible Church in rural New Hampshire in 2013. At the time, it was Jess and me (and our young son, Jack), along with three other families. In preparing to plant our church, I had gorged myself on every kind of resource I could find and soon became overwhelmed. No two books seemed to agree on methodology, and every church planting expert had their own trademarked strategy. Before we even had our first regular service, my head was so jam-packed full of formulas, values, processes, guidelines, and mandates—all coated with confusing church-planting jargon—that I could barely understand.

Maybe you have experienced this. Even today, there seems to be an endless stream of church planting resources, everything from articles and books to conferences to entire ministries—all devoted to multiplying churches around the globe. I remember thinking: *I knew that church planting would be difficult, but did it really have to be so confusing?*

In God's providence, I had done a fair amount of personal study in the book of Titus and had grown attached to it. Every time I put down a church planting book exhausted, I took up reading Titus and found refreshment. One commentary I read on the short epistle called it "An

Apostolic Manual for Church Planting.” The author noted that it is “a blueprint for planting and building churches that will survive and thrive for the glory of God.”¹ More than a decade into our church plant, I still couldn’t agree more! Far above any other resource, Paul’s epistle to Titus has proven most helpful at every step of our church planting process.

In seeking to help you with your ministry, my goal is to encourage you from Paul’s short letter as well as from the rest of the Scriptures. One thing I’ve learned along the way is that church planting is a lot more about *church* than it is about *planting*. The task becomes easier to grasp with a robust ecclesiology and a devotion to Scripture. Through the years, it has become apparent that what I needed most was not a stack of church planting books but a well-worn Bible.

Know the Mission

In my letter to you, brother, I want to help you remember *why* you planted a church. As I’m sure you have already experienced, there are a million things tugging at you and trying to lure you away from your first principles. In these early years, the main goal seems to be simply survival! However, in an effort to keep the church plant afloat,

1. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 226.

many earnest planters have been tempted to compromise the mission and chase anything that promises success.

One of the first things church planters do early in the process is develop a mission statement. This helps focus your efforts and set the tone for what you will be doing moving forward. However, the true purpose of a mission statement is to answer the question: *What are you called to do?* Why are you there? Why did you give up everything and step out in faith? Why did you quit your job and move your family? These are the questions I want to help you settle in your mind and heart.

If you open your Bible to the first few verses of Paul's letter to Titus, you will notice that Paul's opening greeting sets the tone of the letter by calling attention to his own apostolic ministry. With all the things that could busy a first-century apostle, what did Paul consider to be the most important things?

He notes that he is ministering "for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:1b–2a). Bible commentators have noted Paul's three-pronged approach to ministry: *faith*, *knowledge*, and *hope*. These are not just empty words. In fact, I believe they are the keys to understanding Paul's mission. And because all pastors love alliteration, please permit me to help you think through the three-fold mission in these terms: *evangelism*, *edification*, and *encouragement*.

Evangelism

At the root of our English word “evangelism” is the Greek word *euangelion*. It’s where we get our word “gospel,” which means “good news.” And what is that good news? In the simplest terms, it is the message that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners by dying on the cross and resurrecting unto new life. This message is at the core of our ministry work. As Paul says, “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). In short, this good news message is how sinners are redeemed by God.

I have no doubt that you already know this, but I’m rehearsing it to remind you that it is the only way anyone is going to come into the church. Due to the ease of modern travel coupled with the fussiness of human beings, people these days frequently “church hop,” and as soon as they hear that there’s a new church in town, many are going to check it out. I don’t write this to disparage tourists or thumb my nose at transfer growth. But that is not ultimately why we plant churches. We’re not simply trying to carve out our own slice of the spiritual market share. Rather, we’re seeking to advance the kingdom of God by establishing a gospel witness where Jesus Christ is not yet named. We want to take new ground.

In order to do that, the gospel must be preached so that those whom God has chosen to come into His kingdom will hear it and respond with faith (Acts 13:48). This is why Paul says that one key goal of his ministry is “for the

faith of those chosen of God” (Titus 1:1). He is laboring so that lost sinners will hear the message of the gospel and be found in Christ. Mark 16:15 records that the church is to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” After all, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The only way anyone comes into the Christian faith and, thereby, into the church, is by turning from his sin in repentance and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the start, the work is so very hard! Brother, I understand. There’s so much to do and too few people to do it. Not only are you preaching every week, but you’re also running the service. Perhaps you’re leading the music, printing and folding bulletins, setting up chairs, goofing around with the church website, doing advertising, and so on. Often times you get to Saturday night and think, “Tomorrow is Sunday, *already?!?*”

But as you get swept up in the daily grind of tasks, don’t forget that one of the primary reasons that you’re there is to lead people to Christ. The apostle Paul understood this, which is why he reminded his young disciple, Timothy, amid all the other tasks, to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). However, don’t forget that this includes teaching your church members to do it as well. Develop the regular habit of emphasizing the gospel to your people. Share the gospel in every sermon. Talk about it with the members. Keep it fresh in your mind. Remember, you are there “for the faith of those chosen of God.”