

HOW CAN I KNOW IF I'M CALLED TO CHURCH PLANTING?

THESE THREE BRIEF PRINCIPLES WILL HELP ANYONE WRESTLING WITH A CALL TO ANY AREA OF MINISTRY.

It was the summer of 2008, while speaking at a student camp in West Texas, that conversations about church planting began to spark during midnight trips to Taco Bell. I was preaching the camp. My friend, Nick, was leading worship, and every night we'd make the drive to eat fast-food tacos and write all kinds of "what if" scenarios in our journals.

Little did we know that, two short years later, he and I, with a core team of 30 adults, would plant a church in the suburbs of Dallas. That church is now 11 years old, has baptized hundreds upon hundreds of people, witnessed countless stories of life-change and averaged planting a new church about every two years.

I had the awesome opportunity of being the lead pastor of that church plant for the first five years, where Jesus did unbelievable things, and the church grew rapidly. Then, the Lord transitioned me into a new assignment of leading evangelism for a state Baptist convention, then to leading Next Gen evangelism and ministry for the North American Mission Board.

The church still is doing incredibly well and a great friend of mine is serving as lead pastor.

While writing this, I can't help but reflect over those years of planting and pastoring that church. Those still are some of my favorite years of ministry. But, once again, it does raise a question — one I've probably been asked

no less than 200 times: "How can I know if I'm called to church planting"?

Of course, you could write a whole book to answer this question. In fact, some books have been written to answer this very question. However, with limited space and time, I want to share three brief principles that were given to me when I was wrestling with the call to church planting. Ironically, these three principles really apply to every area of ministry calling—whether it's pastoring an established church, replanting, revitalization, Next Gen ministries, worship ministry, missions and so on.

1. Internal calling

This calling can only come from the Holy Spirit. If the sovereign Lord is calling you to church planting, you will experience a holy angst and discontent that just won't go away. This internal passion to pursue church planting will be a Spirit-led aspiration for God's work that will morph any desire to do anything else. It feels similar to what the prophet Jeremiah said, "*His message becomes a fire burning in my heart, shut up in my bones. I become tired of holding it in, and I cannot prevail*" (Jeremiah 20:9). This internal passion for a new work, a particular place or a specific people will outweigh every other vocational option — and, no one will be able to talk you out of it. If you don't have an internal drive for planting, or if someone can talk you out of it, you're probably not called. Do you have an overwhelming internal desire for church planting?

2. External calling

This calling comes from the Holy Spirit through God's people and God's plans. Meaning, when a person is called to a plant a new ministry, the Lord will place giftings in their life that others recognize and affirm. Now, please don't misread this. You're not looking for people's approval, applause or permission to church plant. However, if the Holy Spirit is calling you to do something, then the Spirit in fellow believers should speak through them to confirm your calling. This is an external affirmation of the internal call. As we faithfully serve in the ministry opportunities God provides, His people will recognize our calling by the character they observe, the gifts that are evident and the ways He uses us to impact the lives of others. In the New Testament, you can see the apostle Paul doing this repeatedly with Timothy.

Do other people observe and confirm a calling on your life to church planting?

3. Opportunities to exercise calling

The Spirit provides opportunities to exercise calling. When I surrendered to the call of ministry on my life, my pastor at the time, said, "You don't have to chase ministry opportunities. If you're called, they will constantly present themselves." Another good friend always says, "God pays for what He orders." Meaning, if God has called you to church planting, then He will provide opportunities to make it happen and He will resource it. If you're not called, then He won't. Now, I am not talking about everything coming easy to us, or that there won't be roadblocks and barriers along the way,

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because there absolutely will be. Church planting is spiritual warfare and the enemy will try every tactic to disrupt God's calling.

Ephesians 6:12 took on a whole new and real life meaning for my family when we planted a church: *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”* However, every roadblock eventually would be turned into a mere speed bump, because the opportunities to plant this new church constantly arose. Personally, we saw this as another confirmation of God's calling.

Do you have God-given opportunities to exercise the call to church planting? [▶▶](#)



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