

# Church Planting Lessons from the Eagles

By Lance Ford

The risk in this article is that it will date me. However, every good strategist, investor, and entrepreneur knows the vital principle of calculating risk and reward. I am an Eagles fan. I admit it. I can happily say also that my sixteen-year-old daughter, who loves Coldplay and Switchfoot, also loves the Eagles. So, maybe I am not totally out of touch. The tight harmonies and spot-on musicianship after almost 35 years of playing together still amazes me. Not to be overshadowed is the great song writing by these guys. From simple ballads to metaphoric wordplay, some great life lessons are contained within the lyrics of the Eagles songs menu. I have found some great church planting lessons from my favorite all-time band. See if you agree.

## Take It Easy

This should be lesson number one for every church planter. You are in for the ride of your life. It is going to be long and hard, but it is going to be the best fun you've ever had. If you don't plan on having fun, do something else. Be a good steward and work hard, but never forget that God gives the increase. The pressure is not on you for the crops to grow. You dig, plant, water, and tend to the plants. It is God, and him alone, that can cause fruit to come about. Trust him! And have fun along the way. One of the best pieces of advice I was given early on in the church I planted was, "Throw more parties!" Be a respectable leader that knows when it's time to work. At the same time, be a fun leader to follow.

## Life In The Fast Lane

"Life in the fast lane  
Surely make you lose your mind  
Life in the fast lane, everything all the time"

If you hope to have success as a church planter do not plan to be sightseeing, driving along at the speed of everyone else. Forty-hour workweeks will not get you where you want to go. Plan to work very hard, keeping a swift pace. Work by a schedule and know how you are using your time. As you do this it is vital that you raise your personal discipline to the highest level ever. The balance? Establish boundaries for your family. I highly recommend to all church planters that they create a "Family Day" from the very beginning. This is the one day a week that is all about you and your wife and kids. Don't let anything short of a life and death emergency infringe on this. The fact is, there will be very few genuine life and death emergencies. Talk about your family day to your leaders and members. When you do this you are modeling two very important lessons. One, you are teaching other men in your church to value their family. Two, you are declaring and proving to your wife and children that they are your number one ministry. If you make this part of your life your children will grow up loving the church.

### **After The Thrill Is Gone**

“What can you do when your dreams come true  
And it's not quite like you planned?”

No matter how well your ministry goes and your church grows there will be disappointments. People will let you down and they will usually be the last ones you expected to bail on you. There will be ideas and initiatives you pour yourself into that either fail altogether or just do not reach the level you hoped for. Some days you will wonder, “What have I gotten myself into? I can’t do this.” No, *you* can’t do this. None of us can. Thankfully, Jesus said HE will build the church. This is his job and his alone. Church planting is a roller coaster ride. At times it will be exhilarating beyond words. At other times you will feel like your stomach is fighting to come out of your head. Keep a thankful heart at all times and realize that all increase comes from God. The pressure is on him and the glory goes to him.

### **Get Over It**

Church planters are not unlike other people in that they can fall for the trap of blaming their shortfalls on someone else. This could be a leader that failed or dissed them somewhere along the way. It could be a ministry partner that turned his back and left the work. Or, it could be a budget shortfall in hoped for fund raising. Hey—Get over it! It is God who is in you. He is the creator of the Universe and Jesus has been made wisdom unto you. You have all the creativity and all the wisdom you need to move from this day forward. It doesn’t matter what happened yesterday or the day before. Nothing can change the fact of God in you. Bitterness and unforgiveness will choke the very life out of you. It will become a stumbling block and you will pass it on to others. Let it go and forgive, from your heart, anyone and everyone who you believe has wronged you or failed you.

### **Best Of My Love**

The most important thing you can establish is a church that is a loving community and that loves its community. This should be your first priority over and above growing to a large numeric size, etc. Be known for being lovers of people. Teach your leaders and your members how to love the community and the world. Adopt an unreached people group and give the life of your church to them. Love never fails. If your church is genuinely a community of love you will be a pure success. Period. Many church planters become so entangled with the details of strategy and development that they fail to fashion a culture of love within their churches. Don’t let that be your story. Make it your aim to quickly cause the surrounding community to be thankful that your church is there.

### **Lyin’ Eyes**

As a leader, it is extremely important that you view your integrity as a treasure. Proverbs tells us that a good name is like gold. Trust and respect is almost impossible to fully restore once you lose it. Integrity erodes at the seashore of lateness, missed appointments, exaggeration, and failed promises. A leader who is not fully respected will have a weakened ability to influence followers. If you are a chronically late person there is no other way to put this—change! Everyone finds themselves in situations of rare occasion

that causes them to be late. This is different than habitual lateness. Habitual lateness conveys disrespect for the person or persons waiting for you and will, in fact, develop into disrespect of the person being late. Another important issue is for leaders to be careful about what they say yes to. It is better to say “no” or “I will check on that” than it is to say, “I’ll do it” if you are not 100% sure you can make good on the promise.

### **New Kid In Town**

You are off on an adventure. You’re excited about what God has called you to do. You have vision in your heart, the wind in your sails, and you are ready to see this thing come about. Surely everyone will be excited for you and ready to help you along. Bummer dude, not so. Doubtless, there will be some area leaders that will not appreciate your enthusiasm, and sadly, will view you as an interloper, or threat. The first piece of advice here is to not be hurt or angry over this. These leaders may be frustrated themselves or they may simply be focused on the years they have worked in this field and now the “Johnny-come-lately” arrives just when the area has started growing. Bless these leaders with all your heart and prayers. The other piece of advice is to pray and seek relationship and mentoring from a veteran pastor in the area. God will lead you into these relationships and as you go to these leaders in a spirit of humility and in a learning posture they will be both flattered and excited to share their wisdom and experience with you.

### **Take It To The Limit**

What a privilege it is to be invited by the Lord of the Harvest to be a church planter. Especially in the day and age we are living in. Be a good steward of this opportunity. Stay healthy and disciplined. Make the most of every opportunity that God sends your way. Recognize the resources you have in the people on your team, the treasure of talent and networks represented there. As the lead planter you are the one that sets the pace. The old adage is, “Speed of the leader, speed of the team.” Be cognizant of your pace and make sure that you are stretching yourself enough to grow and take advantage of the opportunities, but not to the point of burning out yourself or burning your team out.

### **Learn To Be Still**

If your cup is not filled you will have nothing to give others. The most important commodity you have lies in knowing Him. The vitality that comes through an uncompromisingly, active relationship with the Lord, by listening and just *being with* him is the wellspring of your ministry. Proverbs 4:23 tells us, “Above all things, guard your heart, for from it all life springs forth.” Make it an absolute rule of life that each day you begin with worship, the word, and a journal. Dialogue with God. Love on Him and let him love on you; counseling and correcting you. Live this way and teach your leaders and people to do the same.

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