

## The Power of the Gospel

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)*

No one will ever be disappointed with the gospel. The sinner who believes in Christ and receives Him, will not be disappointed with the outcome. Jesus said *“He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24)*. And the one who preaches the gospel will never be disappointed with the result, for *“it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16)*.

The Scriptures are designed to bring people to faith in Christ (John 20:31; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:15). It is our job to get people into the Scriptures and Scripture into people so it can do its work. As we give out His word, the God who makes the seeds to grow in ways we cannot see or understand will be at work in the hearts of men.

*“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

*In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecclesiastes 11:4-6)*. We don't always know what the soil is like in the hearts of people around us, so we need to be sowing the seed of the gospel

everywhere we go.

In the places where churches need to be planted, the work is doubtless going to be difficult. This writer has visited church planters all over the continent, and quite often the words are heard: *“This is a hard place.”* No one ever said that where they were laboring the

work was easy. We live in a society in which lives are in upheaval. People are scarred by sin and living in a tangled web of past history and present hurts.

As church planters, our tendency is to target people we view as likely prospects for the church. We must resist that temptation and follow the example of our Savior who himself set a pattern for how we should do ministry.

*“And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:16-17)*. The ones who followed Christ were not always the most likely candidates. But He knew something – He knew the power of the gospel! He knew what can happen when the Spirit of God comes into a life.

Yes, church planting is hard everywhere. The enemy is strong. People are enslaved to sin and content to leave it that way. They are following *“the course of this world”* and *“fulfilling the desires*

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### Muti-Ethnic Church Planting

In an increasingly urban and ethnically diverse world, the most effective way to advance the Gospel in the twenty-first century may be through planting strong and vital multiethnic churches. This is the growing conviction of many North American church planters, confirmed by a growing body of research.



The multicultural church matches an urgent need in a fractured North American society which often seeks unity in superficial solutions. In a day of rising immigration (both legal and illegal), we live in a world often characterized by fear, suspicion and mistrust. Sometimes outright racism raises its ugly head, even

in church. The multiethnic church which models well the reconciling power of the Gospel and the oneness Christ followers have in Him will be attractive to many of the younger generation who are fed up with the racial discord and division in our land.

North American evangelicals must face two massive demographic challenges: continuing urbanization and rapid ethnic diversification. Over 85% of Americans live in cities today. With both immigration and

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intermarriage increasing, our total ethnic population now numbers over 110 million. One out of three Americans are "people of color"! Our streets teem with over 500 ethnic groups speaking more than 600 languages.

Clearly, a sovereign God has brought the mission fields of the world to our urban doorstep!

North America will not be won to Christ by establishing more churches like the majority of those we now have. It will take new intentionally multiethnic churches to reach all these new "people groups." The passion for planting multi-ethnic churches must, however, be driven not primarily by a desire for racial reconciliation in our society or by other demographic and pragmatic realities. It must ultimately be driven by a biblical conviction, that this is God's purpose, passion and plan for the church in this age.

The biblical basis for multicultural congregations begins with God's creation of ethnic diversity (Genesis 1 – 11), and enlarges with Jehovah's promise to Abraham to bless all earth's "peoples" through his future seed (Genesis 12:1-3). This unveiling of God's global plan to reach all "people groups" is then ratified for NT believers in Christ's Great Commission. The church in this age is to "make disciples of all nations" (*ethne* = ethnic people groups).

Multiethnic churches are microcosms that simultaneously reflect a fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and foreshadow the reality of heaven (see Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-10; 14:6-7; 15:4; 21:3). The multicultural church prepares us for a picture of eternity. "And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). God is drawing people of every tribe and language and people and nation together in multiethnic church bodies to worship Him both now and for all eternity.

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of the flesh" (Ephesians 2:2-3).

They are in bondage and spiritual darkness. But even though "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ ... should shine unto them," still we "preach ... Christ Jesus the Lord." And when we do, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" still shines in the hearts of men "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4-6).

God is still in the soul saving business, and even the hardest of cases cannot frustrate the power of the gospel. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

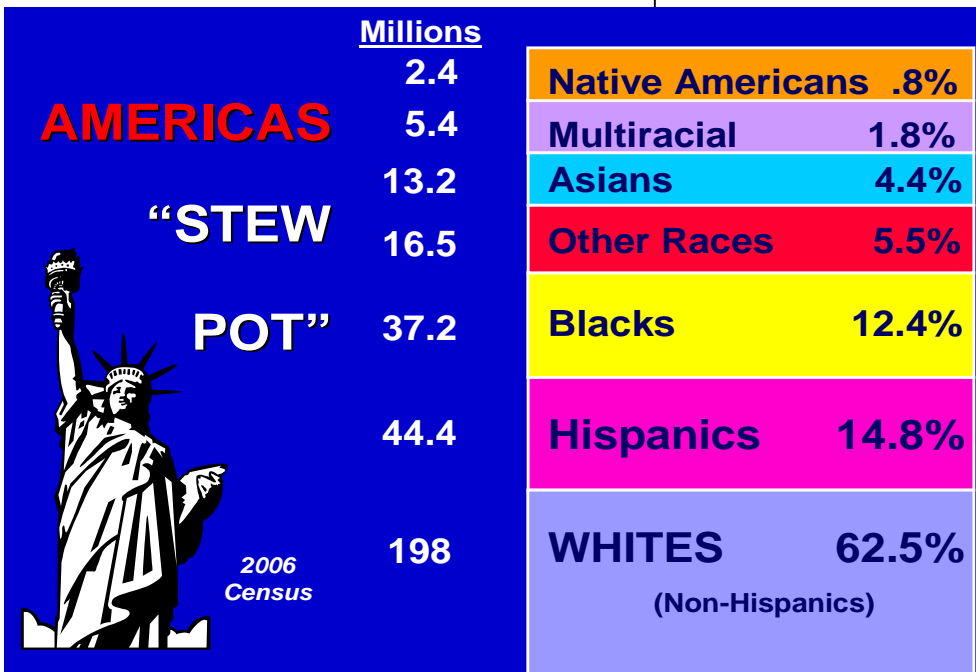
Let us trust the God of salvation and move out in obedience to His command. Let us keep on wielding the Spirit's Sword, knowing that it is sufficient for the need. Let us make the gospel message known – it will never disappoint us. **Let us never underestimate the power of the gospel!**

# Good News - Bad News

The good news is that more churches are being planted now than during the last decade of the twentieth century. Research indicates 4,009 new churches were started every year between 2000-2005 compared to just 3,660 starts per year between 1990-2000.

The bad news is that the closure rate has also increased from 3,200 per year to 3,707. This means the net gain in the total number of churches is actually slowing down. Moreover, to keep up with the population growth, 2,900 additional churches need to be started every year.

The increase in planting is partly responsible for the increase in closures. New churches have a closure rate ranging from 10 to 50 percent depending on the group being surveyed. Mainline churches have the lowest closure rates (they start fewer churches) while evangelical churches have the highest closure rates (they start a lot more churches). Bible-believing churches plant nine times as many new churches as mainline denominations.



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