

God Gave Us All We Needed While We Started New Churches

Guidelines for *Self-supporting* Church Planters and Shepherds

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Contents

1. God wants me to serve him voluntarily
 - a. I pray for biblical wisdom about doing business or a trade
 - b. It is my duty as a leaders to mobilize many 'tentmakers'
 - c. I have joined the huge host of volunteer church planters that God desires
 - d. I embrace the Bible's bi-vocational church planting model.
 - e. I escaped my *caste* mentality and other cultural barriers to volunteer work
2. Easy steps to develop a small business or a trade
 - a. Step 1. Ask questions
 - b. Step 2. Planning
 - c. Step 3. Starting

1. God wants me to serve Him voluntarily.

"You know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not ... eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labour and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example." 2 Thess. 3:7-9

a. So I pray for biblical wisdom about doing business or a trade.

To start a business or work at a trade that will support you while you plant churches, ask God to teach to you his way of thinking about it.



- If you work at a trade, then ask the Lord to give you the same attitude that Jesus had when he made tables and **chairs** with Joseph in their Nazareth carpenter shop.
- If you mentor new leaders, then exhort them like Paul did the Ephesian shepherding elders. He met with them in Acts 20 to give them his last instructions. They were weeping because they knew that they would never see him again. His last instruction for them was to beg them tearfully to work with their hands to support themselves while they shepherded God's people:

"I commend you to God and to the word of His grace... I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus... 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" When [Paul] had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship. Acts 20:32-38.

- If you start a business it will probably be a small one. Ask the Lord to give you the same way of thinking that Aquila and Priscilla had when they made tents in Corinth and even enabled the Apostle Paul to earn a living by making tents while he planted churches. Robert Thiessen, a church planter in Mexico, introduced biblical bi-vocational work to believers a few years ago in the small, very poor and uneducated village of Yuviani. Recently he wrote:

"Everyone in Yuviani is doing well; the difference would amaze you. The dirt road entering the village now has six businesses, all started by poor believers. Alfonso has a carpentry shop; his brother has a welding shop; another believer has a woodworking shop; another, a tire repair shop; another, a variety store; and another, a hardware store. Two others believers are learning mechanics and car body repair. It spreads! This shows another aspect of the transforming power of the Gospel; it changes every part of our lives when we let it do so."

- Use Scripture to show that God wants many volunteer workers. The New Testament describes how God used many volunteers and a few paid leaders to expand His kingdom. Some travelling church planters, including some of the original twelve apostles, received financial help part of the time. Most of their financial help came from the new churches that they started. Paul himself worked with his hands when he had to do so. He even refused financial help, so he could serve as an example to lazy leaders in Thessalonica. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10)
- **Pray for godly 'entrepreneurial' wisdom.** James 1:5 tells us to ask God for wisdom. You need God's help to investigate what kind of small business or trade will enable you to travel where you evangelize and train shepherds. When you travel, listen carefully to discover what local people want, and what local stores do not offer, or that you could offer for a lower price. For example, a village church planter in Honduras heard people complain that they could not buy the kind of clothing they wanted at a reasonable price in their village. So he asked what they wanted and the next time he travelled to that village, he took a basket of clothing that he purchased at the wholesale price in the city, and sold at the retail price in the village. This soon supported his travels to several villages. Such examples abound.

b. It is my duty as a leader to mobilize ‘tentmakers’.

- Unpaid workers are called ‘tentmakers’, because Aquila, Priscilla and the Apostle Paul supported themselves by making tents while starting churches (Acts 18:1-3). In order to sustain a church planting movement in which large numbers of people learn to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, leaders must seek a high proportion of unpaid, volunteer workers from among the new churches’ members.



Paul, Aquila and Priscilla worked as tentmakers whilst they planted house churches at Corinth

- To keep churches reproducing normally, leaders must require that most church planters be volunteer ‘tentmakers’.

If leaders tie the expansion of God’s Kingdom to a limited source of finances, then there will never be enough workers. It would be a mistake to trust in material resources, rather than in God who promises to provide what workers need.

If leaders hinder normal outreach by voluntary workers, then many of their congregations will become sterile, failing to reproduce daughter churches, because they do not mobilize their members to reproduce in the normal way described in the New Testament.

c. I have joined the host of voluntary workers that God desires.

Almighty God has revealed His purpose to mobilize many volunteer leaders. He uses faithful workers, both volunteers and those who receive financial help, to spread Christ’s Kingdom on earth. God’s desire for volunteer church planters and shepherds is revealed in Scripture and confirmed by history. Here are some important facts:

God blesses any occupation that helps expand His Kingdom. Most volunteer Christian leaders are bi-vocational, that is, they have two jobs. Their paid occupation provides income to support them and their family; their unpaid vocation is to serve the community of believers.

Both vocations can be spiritual, because the added responsibilities of bi-vocational service require more power from the Holy Spirit than does paid service alone.

Satan tries to deceive bi-vocational workers with lies such as, “God’s workers should not dirty their hands by doing secular work.” He whispers into the ear of careless leaders:



Serious Christian work can be done only by paid, full-time, professional ministers!

- Many bi-vocational ‘tentmakers’ also serve Christ ‘full-time’ because they make disciples and mentor leaders while doing their ‘secular’ job. Bi-vocational workers should avoid jobs in factories with too much noise to be able to talk easily.

Rob Thiessen in Mexico trains village pastors to do woodworking. While they work on a table or some other article, he mentors them, talking about their flock, what it should be doing and about Bible passages that apply to their current needs and opportunities to serve. You can be sure that Paul discussed the Lord’s work while he worked alongside of Aquila and Priscilla making tents.



- Aquila and his wife Priscilla modelled bi-vocational work in five ways:
 - 1) Their secular vocation provided financial support not only for them but also for the Apostle Paul when he needed it.
 - 2) Their occupation gave them freedom to make disciples. Their small business allowed them freedom to move to where new churches were needed. There was an independent family business with low capital investment and a simple technology that did not isolate them from the rest of the world.
 - 3) They were hospitable. They hosted traveling evangelists like Paul, and they opened their house to the churches that they started in Rome and Ephesus (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19).
 - 4) They had the valuable skill of discipling novice leaders privately, in the background, as they did for Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).
 - 5) They worked as a team. The added responsibilities of bi-vocational work often make it hard for one person to both do pastoral work and run a business.

d. I embrace the Bible's bi-vocational church planting model.

- 1) Some church planters in the New Testament who travelled long distances received financial aid. Other church planters who worked only in their own region were normally volunteers. Silas, Barnabas, Peter, Paul and others had been commissioned to travel afar to the nations, which entailed greater expenses. Sometimes they received financial help from the new churches that they had started. Sometimes Paul refused financial help.
- 2) Explain to those whom you mentor or shepherd what God's calling to ministry is. If God has called a worker to do a ministry, then the worker will obey whether or not he receives pay. God's gifts and calling do not depend on money. Paul exclaimed, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward... What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge." 1 Corinthians 9:16-18.
- 3) In the Bible, only a few church planters received financial support. Normally, paid workers travelled long distances and started only the first churches in a region, with the help of unpaid local volunteers. Peter took six unpaid believers with him from Joppa to start a new congregation in Cesarea (Acts 11:12). After the apostles started the first few churches in a region, they moved on and let volunteer workers continue to start churches in the remaining cities and villages.
- 4) The New Testament method of mobilizing volunteer church planters requires rapid training of new leaders. After appointing shepherding elders to lead their new congregations, the travelling apostles that accepted financial help went on to other neglected places. Volunteer leaders, from the new churches, whom they had mentored, then carried on the task of starting other new congregations in the remaining cities and villages of their region.
- 5) In the New Testament, volunteer workers and supported workers co-operated well together, each doing what the other could not. Some church planting teams have two workers; one earns a living for both of them while the other spends most of his time doing evangelism and training leaders.
- 6) To serve as a volunteer, bi-vocational worker was considered an honour worth boasting about. After churches were started and their volunteer elders gained experience, some of them were counted worthy of receiving financial aid from those whom they served (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Paul told the Corinthians that he had the right to receive financial help from them, but had not exercised this right, to avoid hindering to the gospel. He commented that he would rather die than lose the right to boast that he was a voluntary, unpaid worker. (1 Corinthians 9:11-18)
- 7) The New Testament pattern works just as well today. God's work in different cultures follows the New Testament pattern of relying on volunteer, unpaid leaders to establish most of the new churches. This normally proves to be very effective to sustain church planting movements. Normally, after the initial penetration of the gospel into a people or region, in a sustained church planting movement, the majority of congregations are started by volunteer workers from new churches located nearby.

e. I escaped my caste mentality and other barriers to volunteer work.

Satan whispers lies to believers to deter them from learning a trade or business:

"You were born into an elite social class. It is shameful for you to do manual labour."

Or... "You are of a low social class; nobody will do business with you."

"You have never started a project. Let others worry about such things!"

"You are too new as a believer to do anything important."

“You have no experience in any trade.”

“You are not educated well enough and you lack intelligence.”

“You have no money to invest.”



*“God’s forgiveness surpasses ‘karma’ or any other fatalistic view of life.
God’s grace is greater than all our sin! Let us pray for God to heal your doubtful mind.”*

Satan whispers lies to believers to deter them from learning a trade or business:

Have you let any of these things discourage you from doing secular work along with the Lord’s ministry, or from combining the two? If so, then pray now for God to replace such doubts with His wisdom, to help you take the initiative in learning a trade or starting a small business.

You are God’s child. Take advantage of the economic opportunities that he puts in abundance in your world! Why be content to live in poverty?

Your Creator wants you to be creative, too. He says to you, “I made you in my image. You can create also, by learning a trade or starting a business, like Jesus did, as well as Abraham, and Paul. The world around you is filled with opportunities and resources. Use them! Plan for your future! Start now!”

The Lord is not gratified by your suffering and deprivation. He may sometimes use pain to help you grow in faith, but He never simply wants to make you miserable. Humans and their sin are the source of what is wrong in this world, not God. Do not let Satan lead you into painful poverty or into greedy affluence.

Some businessmen abuse their God-given creativity and become greedy, causing misery to many. When we use God’s gift of creativity and initiative the way He intends, then we receive His blessing, along with our families and fellow believers.

Although caste is strong in India, other kinds of class prejudice are universal and also hinder folks becoming leaders and deter bi-vocational work. Believers are sons of God, a royal priesthood, and should rise above class discrimination, paralyzing fatalism and extreme poverty.

One way in which some Christian workers have escaped the stigma of low social class is to move to a region where people do not know their background. Even though a Christian leader has faith and does all things correctly, he is still often limited by prejudice and unbelief of his local society. Almost all

leaders in the Bible came from communities that did not recognize their potential, and they had to move to another community to get a fresh start and serve God effectively. Examples include Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, Ezra, Jesus, the apostles including Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. This does not apply to new believers.

Here are more recommendations, taken from a message from Cdr. Thomas Mathew:

The caste system of India is based on a strict division of trade and occupation of various strata of the society. The four castes are “Brahmins” (priestly class), “Kshatriyas” (soldiers and rulers), “Vyshyas” (business men), and “Shudras” (labourers doing menial jobs). Even though, due to social evolution, the dividing line separating the last three castes has weakened, the Priestly tribe (Brahmins) continues to defend their exclusive right to the office of priests and custody of religious institutions. Efforts of the lower castes to share a more active role in religious matters have been successfully thwarted by the Brahmins in most parts of India to this day.

In most forms of Indian religions, the priestly tribe remains exclusively focused on religious matters, and even those not holding any religious office are forced to confine themselves to supporting roles in religious rituals, or to teaching, in order to earn a living. This has, over the centuries, created a firm belief that those who lead religious activities should pursue no secular career.

Full-time Christian church planters have been seen as a Christian equivalent of the Brahminic priests and, hence, society has frowned upon any effort by them to earn an income through secular work. Earning a living with one’s hands has been viewed as motivated by greed for material possessions. The ascetic monks of India spread the idea that austerity is an evidence of godliness.

Many Christian workers would gladly use some of their talents to supplement their income, but do not do so because of the social stigma attached to it. Therefore, it is necessary that we destroy these pagan cultural edifices and lead people to the freedom offered by the Gospel of Jesus. However, it has to be done quietly, lest a backlash occur, defeating the entire effort.

2. Easy steps to develop a small business or a trade

God provides many ways to earn a living for yourself and your family. Here are some small, easy steps to take, to develop a trade or small business. When a new business or a project to improve one’s economic condition fails, it is usually because people try to jump over hurdles that are too high. Those folks simply take steps that are too big for them.

An unwise leader is quick to blame others for failure when he has given them too much to do too soon:

“Their new business failed because they are lazy and stupid!”



“No, no! You made them take steps too big and too soon.”

Help those that you train, with whom you already have a good relationship, to take these steps to investigate how goods and money flow in the city or villages where they work, and to plan accordingly. Make this a part of your mentoring or discipling and ask your trainees to pass on the information to those whom they mentor. Every shepherd needs to understand these steps.

Step  Ask Questions.

Ask the right questions about economic factors where you live and where you work

- To develop a bi-vocational ministry, you should understand the local economy, by asking the right questions while chatting with friends and co-workers, riding a bus or train or at the market.



- An interest in economic factors should be an important part of every believer's concern. Jesus and the apostles mentioned economic matters often, and they praised those who were industrious. A believer's economic concern should not come from greed, but from love for God's work and for his people. Not everyone needs to become a powerful businessman, just as not all believers become powerful evangelists. However, all believers must evangelize and, likewise, all family men must engage in business of some kind, even if only to sell their own time and services.



QUESTIONS TO ASK

Every leader at every level needs to ask some of these questions at least some of the time. Regional coordinators should make sure of this. Please modify these sample questions to adjust to your local culture and economic conditions, and skip question that do not apply. The Creator's Holy Spirit will help you to deal in a prayerful, godly way with these economic questions. Do this questioning and planning as much as possible with your mentor, with those that you train, and with your wife if she participates.



Ask questions about where goods and services are bought and sold in the city and villages where you work.

- How much is bought and sold of a product, and at what prices? Notice the difference in prices in different places where you travel.
- Examples of goods: school supplies (pen, paper, etc), hardware (nails, tools, string), newspapers, clothing, sandals, hats, belts, umbrellas).
- Examples of foods: eggs, vegetables, grains, meat, fruit.

- Examples of services: labourers, photographers, carpentry, plumbing, appliance repair, bicycle repair, shoe shine, garbage pickup, electrical, transport, clerking.

Activities to Do

- ▶ Pray. Ask God daily to help you to deal wisely with this information, to develop your 'tent making' vocation, so that you can travel to plant churches, have more time to shepherd your flock, and provide for your family.



CAUTION! The demon "GREED" will tempt you to focus only on the business and forget to plant churches, if you fail to pray daily for God to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your heart (Galatians 5:19-25). Many shepherds have fallen into the trap of greed and ruined their ministry.

- ▶ With your mentor, and with those whom you train, compare the prices of a commodity in different places. Eggs, for example may sell at a higher price in the city than where the chickens lay them in rural areas. Certain kinds of clothing, on the other hand, will sell for less in the cities than in the villages. Church planters can earn good income by taking with them different goods to and from the villages where they work.
- ▶ Keep an up-to-date list of commodities that you might deal with, and their prices.
- ▶ Find out if there are syndicates or mafias that will beat you up and steal your goods, unless you pay to them a portion of what you earn.

Ask questions about where sellers get their merchandise.

For each product and service on your list that **interests** you, find out...

- Is it brought in from outside? From which village or city?
- Through how many hands does it pass before it reaches the place where you live or work?
- What is its original source and price? Is it produced locally? By whom?
- What are the different prices for it each time it is handled?
- If a product is brought in from the outside...
- Can a product be produced locally, or obtained in a less expensive way?
- By what means is a product transported? (Truck, rail, ox cart, bicycle, walking, etc.)
- Who are the 'middle men' between the original supplier and the retailers?
- What is its history? Quantities? Problems? What laws apply to it? Etc.

Activities to Do

- ▶ Pray. Ask God to give you courage to consider how products are transported and provided, and to change any injustices.

Ask the Lord for wisdom to understand ways to earn a living while planting churches or shepherding a flock.

Ask the Lord to bring others to work along with you in a trade or business, or to help them to develop their own trade or business.

- ▶ Find out what 'middle men' do and how much they charge for their services. Middle men are necessary, although some are greedy and charge too much. Decide if you can serve as a middle man. Do you have enough money to invest to get started? Do you know the right people? If so, start with the least expensive items on your list.
- ▶ Some church planters have served wisely as middle men by simply taking such commodities as newspapers and clothing to village stores. Other church planters have used ox carts, burros or small trucks to transport commodities to retailers, while planting churches.
- ▶ Decide which products or services on your list can be made, or grown, locally.
 - Can you make a better or cheaper product locally from other materials?
 - Can you assemble it where you live from raw materials purchased elsewhere?
 - Can you get it in another, cheaper commercial centre or with cheaper transport?
 - Can the workers whom you mentor help to produce or distribute it?
- ▶ Again, start with the simplest and cheapest items on your list.

Step Plan.

Plan how you will develop a trade or business. You might choose simply to keep doing your regular work while you start churches or shepherd a flock.

- Decide with which product or service to begin. Do this with others that intend to work with you in the same trade or business. These may include your mentor, those whom you train and with your wife if she wants to participate.
- If you travel to different places to start churches, be sure that any business that you start can move with you to other places, like Aquila and Priscilla's tent making business that they took from Rome to Corinth, and from Corinth to Ephesus (in each place they started a house church).
- If you choose to learn a trade, make sure that it will enable you also to start churches or shepherd a flock while applying the trade.
- If you are a shepherding elder and choose to work for an employer in an office, factory or farm, be sure to get work that leaves you enough free time in the evenings to shepherd your flock.
- If you choose to start a business, choose a product or trade that is promising and simple enough to try with confidence. If in doubt, choose a simpler option. You may have to guess at this at first. Normally profits will be less at first than what inexperienced workers guess.

- If you start a business that involves buying and selling, calculate carefully the profit you can earn. Delete from your list any products that do not provide good profit, no matter where you buy them or how you make them. Pray for discernment and base your decision on facts that you have discovered, not on wishful dreams.

- Delete also any business or trade that requires what you do not have (money, relationships with certain people, knowledge, technique, etc.)

Delete also projects that violate good morals (alcohol abuse, injustice, unhealthy, etc).

- If you decide to work at a trade, find someone who is experienced and will teach it to you. You may have to serve this person as an apprentice for a few weeks or months.

Many churches have been started this way: a church planter teaches a trade such as woodworking, carpentry, some form of agriculture or plumbing, etc., to the new shepherds of daughter churches, and they pass the skill on to newer shepherds whom they train in granddaughter churches, and so forth, in a 'chain reaction' as seen in 2 Timothy 2:2.

- Determine how you may purchase an item, how you will transport it, and how much you should charge. If you grow it, what do you need to buy or do to start?

Example: Suppose that you find in a village that a store owner buys pencils in a large quantity at a certain price. Mainly school children buy them. You find out from your mentor that one can buy pencils in a large quantity in his city at a price far less than what the retailer pays his supplier. You plan for you and your mentor to serve as middle men, earning a reasonable amount and providing the pencils to the village store at a lower price.

Suppose that you do not have enough money to buy the large quantity of pencils at the low price. However, your mentor visits other new shepherds and church planters in nearby villages, and that they, too, have an opportunity to sell pencils. They plan to join you and your mentor in buying a large quantity, each one investing a smaller part of the price. Each worker then will have smaller packages of pencils to sell to store owners.

You would not compete with a store owner by selling pencils directly to the children. He would resent it if you took his business away, and you would have a bad testimony in the village.

- Consider each product or service that you listed, and think about which ones you could produce yourself, or do together with others.
- Find someone who has experience with the same product or trade who will advise you. In some areas the government provides information or training. Does the government or some other organization offer experimental farming programs with agents that give free instruction about techniques? (These programs differ in every country and region.)
- You might simply do what others are already doing, or modifying an existing practice.
- If you make or grow a product locally, find out what you need. If you grow vegetables, grain or other plants, can you supply what they need? (Water, land, seed, labour, manure, insect control, packaging, etc.)

If you manufacture the product, what raw materials do you need? Where do they come from? What tools or techniques will you need?

If you raise animals (for eggs, meat, etc), what processes will you need?

- Pray for a vocation that enables you to start or shepherd flocks. God might lead you to a trade or business that otherwise you would not think of. Examples...

A village church planter heard people say that they would like to have photographs of their family. He got a used, inexpensive instant camera and took it to the villages. Taking pictures paid for his travel.

Another church planter heard people complain in the city at the high price of chicken. He brought back chickens and other animals with him from the villages, and sold them at a good profit in the city, earning enough to pay for his travels.

Step  Start.

- You have taken the second step and decided which one product or service **to begin with. You have planned for all that you can see is needed. Now, do it.** Do what you have planned.
- Pray that God give you the courage to begin your business or trade, and discipline to follow through with it.
- Start small and build confidence. Later you can add additional products. As soon as possible, consider if the project produces enough profit for the effort required, and if you wish to continue.
- Consider how you might modify your efforts (change prices, find cheaper sources, sell to more storeowners, travel to other towns to buy or sell, etc.).
- Invest only what you can afford to lose.
- Try a project at least two times. Sometimes a project does not work out easily, right away. That is to be expected, and is why you should make an experimental attempt. You are learning in a practical way what works and what to avoid. Make new plans based on what you learned. Be sure that your calculations are correct in every detail.

Example: You observe that villagers where you live buy about 150 eggs each week. About 100 are brought in from outside, at a greater cost than what you could produce them locally. You plan to produce eggs in the village by getting laying hens, feeding them, housing them, and collecting the eggs. You ask others who raise chickens about details. They tell you that chicks cost a certain amount each, and need feed that costs a certain amount. You plan to raise them in the yard behind your house, so the cost of housing them is negligible.

You calculate what each hen will cost you to raise and feed. You include a small cost for medicine and vitamins. Once grown, the hens will lay an average of almost one egg a day; you can calculate the difference between everything will cost you and what you will receive for the eggs. You can also calculate how many hens you should keep. If the hens produce well, then you might raise your own grain to feed them. You also might add more chickens to sell eggs in other villages or cities. Your mentor and other Christian workers might also earn a little by taking eggs to other markets.

Sometimes a church planter or shepherd's wife manages a small business, like a small store in their house, while her husband shepherds God's flock. Such team work glorifies the Lord by harmonizing in love different gift-based ministries, as 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 13 require.