



SATURATING AUSTIN



A STRATEGY AS BIG AS YOUR CITY

TIM HAWKS
JOHN HERRINGTON

Saturating Austin

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Tim Hawks and John Herrington

Saturating Austin: A Strategy as Big as Your City
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CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter 1

Becoming a City-Reaching Church

Chapter 2

11 Multiplication Tensions

Chapter 3

Top 5 Multiplication Lessons
We've Learned

About the Authors

INTRODUCTION

The buzz in Austin is almost palpable these days. Celebrities frequent downtown bars, millennials flock here to work at Google, Amazon and all manner of high-tech start-ups. Austin is a beautiful city at the eastern edge of a sprawling expanse of rolling limestone hills littered with cactus, live oak and cedar trees. The Colorado River runs through it, and the iconic Pennybacker Bridge spans the river, presenting a breathtaking vista of the rugged Central Texas beauty we call the Hill Country. We love this city—with or without the buzz.

In his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, best-selling author Richard Florida called Austin the “most creative city in America.” A music mecca that hosts a creative convocation of technology and the arts at its annual event South by Southwest, Austin is quickly becoming known as “The Live Music Capital of the World.” It also is the home of the University of Texas, whose slogan “What starts here changes the world” was crooned by Walter Cronkite for years. Like most cities of influence, we have a dynamic convergence of education, government, technology and the arts.

Nearly recession-proof, the economy in Austin is thriving, and the population is exploding—every day 130 people move here. That means the entire city of San Marcos, Texas (population 47,000), moved in on us last year, followed by another San Marcos moving in this year.

In many ways, Austin is an anomaly in Texas. Notoriously liberal politically, it is a Blue City in a Red State, and is less than 10 percent evangelical. In this context, how does the church gain significant traction, and what would it look like to see such a city of beauty and culture completely saturated and transformed by the gospel? Is the renewal and restoration of a city possible? Or are we just engaging in pipe dreams?

Christendom is on the fringe of Austin, so it’s less easy to be deceived into thinking we are successful because our church is growing. The statistics don’t lie: Most American church growth is about redistribution of “Christian-inclined market share” rather than reducing lostness in a city. The Millennials are in large part not coming to our churches, and professed atheism is statistically growing exponentially—as indicated by Gallup’s [“Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism.”](#)

The sad reality is that unless U.S. church leaders change our thinking, we are in danger of leaving a tragic legacy, becoming the generation of pastors who saw the steepest decline in the American church in all of history. We have a deep conviction that without a radical shift in what we value, how we define success, how we organize and how we spend our resources, the church in America is on the precipice of rapid decline.

In their book, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990*, authors Roger Finke and Rodney Stark write, “Religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a

market made up of a set of current and potential customers and a set of firms seeking to serve that market.”ⁱ

We’re well aware that such dire predictions have echoed for some time—that the “frog has been in the kettle” for a couple of decades—but the harsh reality is that the water is now at a full boil. In his book, *The Great Evangelical Recession*, CBS News Political Director John Dickerson provides us with statistical realities that can no longer be ignored. Dickerson writes:

“On this question of the actual size of the evangelical church, I discovered that four separate, credentialed researchers have recently used four separate methods to count U.S. evangelicals, in four completely independent studies. Interestingly, they all concluded that evangelical Christians are between 7 and 8.9 percent of the U.S. population.

“That figure will be contested, but I think the number is less important than the undeniable downgrade or recession in size and value. We still have some evangelical leaders claiming that ‘we’ are 1-in-3 or 1-in-2 Americans. That just doesn’t seem to be the reality.”ⁱⁱ That being said, we (Tim and John) believe there is hope! The Holy Spirit seems to be inspiring men across the nation to a similar dream, that our theology, particularly our ecclesiology, should be, as Ray Bakke called it, as “big as the city,”ⁱⁱⁱ and that missiology should not be a forgotten part of our theology. All over the nation, we’re meeting pastors who feel like it’s too small a thing to see yet another 1,000 added to their weekend attendance. In this short eBook, we want to highlight what’s happening spiritually in Austin, those who are making it happen and most importantly how you can adapt what you’re doing to multiply this strategy for *your* city!

Chapter 1

Becoming a City-Reaching Church

Acts 1:8 says we are to receive power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria ... all the way to the remotest part of the earth. Some take this geographic progression as a literary framework that serves as Luke's outline for the Book of Acts. We (Tim and John) believe this scripture serves as a valuable template for reaching the world, and therefore when thinking about the mission of our local churches, we dare not overlook the city.

As pastors, we came to ask life-changing, vision-altering questions: What if a church believed its mission was more than becoming bigger and better every year? What if a church believed its vision should encompass a responsibility for every single person in its city, taking complete responsibility for the lostness of the city? And what if a church believed that this would be impossible unless they lived out the high priestly prayer of Jesus who asked a radical thing of the church:

“...[21](#)that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. [22](#)The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; [23](#)I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:21-23).

The startling idea of this prayer first pressed in on me as I (Tim) moved to Austin as a 20-something pastor and discovered that few pastors were excited about seeing a new church added to the “small market share reality” of Austin. To my surprise, I was welcomed with open arms by Dan Davis, a local Foursquare pastor who thought there needed to be more great Pentecostal churches, more Baptist Churches, more Presbyterian churches, and yes, even more great Bible churches to reach this city for Christ.

Dan eventually birthed a citywide ministry called “Pastors In Covenant,” where pastors came together into small clusters of community and became friends rather than competitors! This is one of our city's best-kept secrets and has laid the relational foundation for gospel collaboration in Austin. It was the first great epiphany that shifted the foremost question in my mind from “How can this city help me become the leader of a great church,” to “How can my church help Austin become a great city?”

Becoming a Church-Planting Church

Tim's story

For me, it all started in the early '90s when I found myself sitting in Mexico City with four lay pastors who led a congregation of about 80 people that met in a garage. These

pastors asked me a question that changed the trajectory of my own ministry: “How do we reach our city with the gospel?” I thought there must be something lost in translation. *Surely four blue-collar lay pastors with a relatively insignificant ministry would not be asking me how to reach 17 million souls in the fifth-largest city in the world.* But they were.

After seminary, my first assignment was as a church planter—it was in my blood! My current ministry at Hill Country Bible Church Austin was a thriving, fast-growing church on the growing edge of the city. But on the trip home from Mexico, I came to a profound conclusion: I realized that every serious mission agency in the world is mapping cities and strategizing to reach entire populations—except for the church in America, which generally does not. *If we were working for a missions agency, we’d be fired,* I concluded. And that was the day the elders of Hill Country Austin began to pray about a saturation evangelism strategy involving a serious commitment to church planting in Austin.

Our first strategic commitment was to plant 10 churches in 20 years. The first plant was north of us in Georgetown in 1996; the second was east of us in Pflugerville; the third in southwest Austin, and the fourth, at the city’s center near the University of Texas.

It took nine years for HCBC Austin to plant four churches. Perhaps we were on schedule to reach our 20-year goal, but we came to the conclusion that if the entire city was our responsibility, we needed to accelerate our efforts and reassess our strategy. We began to articulate our vision in a specific way:

“Every man, woman and child in Greater Austin has the chance to experience the life-changing reality of Jesus Christ because they hear the gospel from the lips of someone from a Hill Country Bible Church.”

The intent of this vision statement was to declare that we, as a body of believers, would take personal responsibility for seeking to saturate the city with the Good News. As pastor Dave Runyan said in *The Art of Neighboring*, “If everyone is my neighbor, then no one really is.”ⁱ

John’s story

When I first came to Hill Country nearly eight years ago, the church had already made this vision statement their mantra. The cynic in me just thought of it as yet another grandiose phrase tagged onto a church website. However, it didn’t take long to discover there was a tactical plan behind every rock at Hill Country.

For example, the plan to scale to that vision involved populating the city with strategically located, geographically dispersed churches that would actually enfold 10 percent of the population in a Hill Country church. We knew that if one in 10 people of the city’s population were a multiplying disciple of Jesus Christ, we could see our vision become a reality in our lifetime. We went on to say, strategically, that we must intentionally do three things:

- make disciples that make disciples that make disciples;

- plant churches that plant churches that plant churches;
- partner with likeminded ministries in the city.

Even as I write this chapter, these goals and initiatives all sound terribly idealistic. Nevertheless, they have forced us to make incremental plans that could conceivably scale to such aspirations.

Expanding influence

In 2007 three significant things happened with Hill Country churches to establish and develop HCBC as a church-planting church. First, we established the Hill Country Church Plant Training Center, and went all in on church planting, allocating funds for a staff pastor—an experienced lead pastor and church planter (John) who was hired to serve as a disruptive sending/recruiting force in our church. Second, Danny Box, pastor of Hill Country Pflugerville, had the audacious faith to launch two churches that year sending out a couple hundred adults. And third, HCBC recruited its first class of five resident church planters, assessing, equipping and funding each one. The following year, one of the Pflugerville church plants, Keith Ferguson’s Cityview Church, funded a resident in the training center and planted a church. It was the first time in our history that a church planted a church that planted a church that planted a church.

As we began to take seriously the idea of partnering with others, we embraced the notion that Dan Davis, our Foursquare brother, had fostered years ago: We need more Baptist, more charismatic, more Presbyterian, more Methodist—more of every kind of gospel-centered churches—if we are to saturate Austin with the Good News. This was an eyebrow-raising idea for an Independent Bible Church board of elders to embrace, but to their credit, they did. Their passion to see the city reached trumped their sectarian roots.

Additionally, our influence expanded in a surprising way. We noticed that Austin seemed to attract a great many church planters who would march into the city, burn through their money and energy, and then crawl out of town under-resourced, disconnected and defeated. To say the least, this pattern was disheartening. It elevated the terrible casualty rate of young church planters, not to mention the unintended “gospel inoculation” that they often created. As these planters came and went, the cynicism in some of these neighborhoods grew exponentially. We knew something needed to be done. We invited other partners in the city to help us assess our church planters and also asked them to join in our training center for “Essentials Training,” the content of which came from our own experience, as well as the influence of Tim Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City, Hugh Halter, co-author of *The Tangible Kingdom*, and more specifically Glenn Smith of New Church Initiatives.

We have seen as many as 18 church planters from 12 different “tribes” (representing different theological perspectives) participate in these trainings in a given year. We invited subject matter experts to share their best practices, leaders who were currently engaged in our city in effective church plants, and we saw Free Methodists, United Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Charismatics, Evangelical Free, independent pastors, African-American pastors, Hispanic pastors, Korean pastors and many aspiring church

planters get much needed training. Something about this part of our story feels very important and very critical to the hope and prayer that our city would live totally awash in the Good News.

Within another six years, the Hill Country Association totaled 28 churches and had launched two multisite campuses, not to mention the numerous planters of other groups that we trained, encouraged and sometimes funded. As of September 2014, Hill Country Austin currently has 14 church plants, seven grandchildren plants and three great-grandchildren, and we have two more on the way! Only three of our total 28 churches planted have closed; two of those merged with another of our churches (see the next page for maps).

Reproduction like this is an exciting development, offering the hope that multiplication in the American church is a possibility. Conventional wisdom says, “You don’t have a movement until you have a fourth generation.” I (John) have often heard Tim say, “We are not just trying to plant a good church; we are trying to plant a church-planting church that’s part of a movement.”

We would not be so presumptuous as to say we have a movement on our hands. Movements are viral, and we’re certainly not that yet. However, we do have hope that there is enough “multiplication mantra” buzzing about our planters that something more than simple addition is at play in Austin.

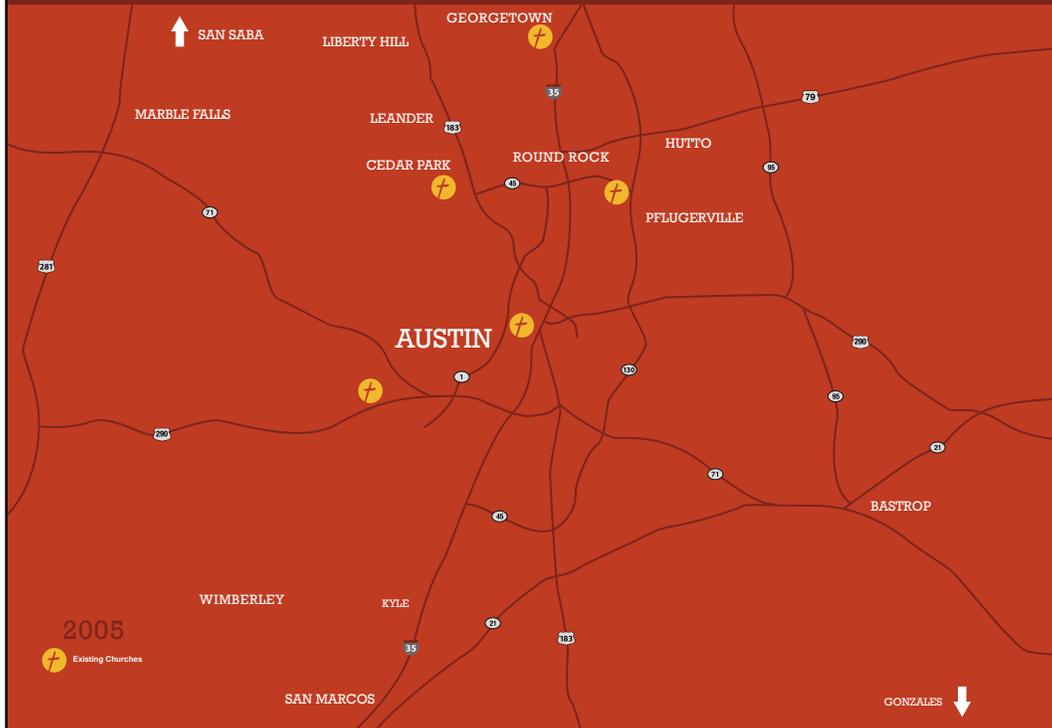
Churches that are part of a movement are not just really good churches with superstar lead pastors; movement churches require a willingness to check one’s ego at the door and use the term “we” rather than “I.” Movement makers are doing more than building a doctrinally solid local church that’s getting bigger and better every year. Movement makers see our mandate as reaching the world for Christ, and that would include taking responsibility for our cities by planting strategically located, contextually sensitive, gospel-centered churches that would saturate our cities with the Good News.

Last Easter, the total attendance at all churches in the Greater Austin area was more than 23,000, much of which was not “ours.” And we didn’t have to build their buildings, recruit and train their leaders, or run their ministries! Bigger, better, faster is unwisely tagged to how many we have in “our house.” There is a grander narrative that is a “movement narrative.”

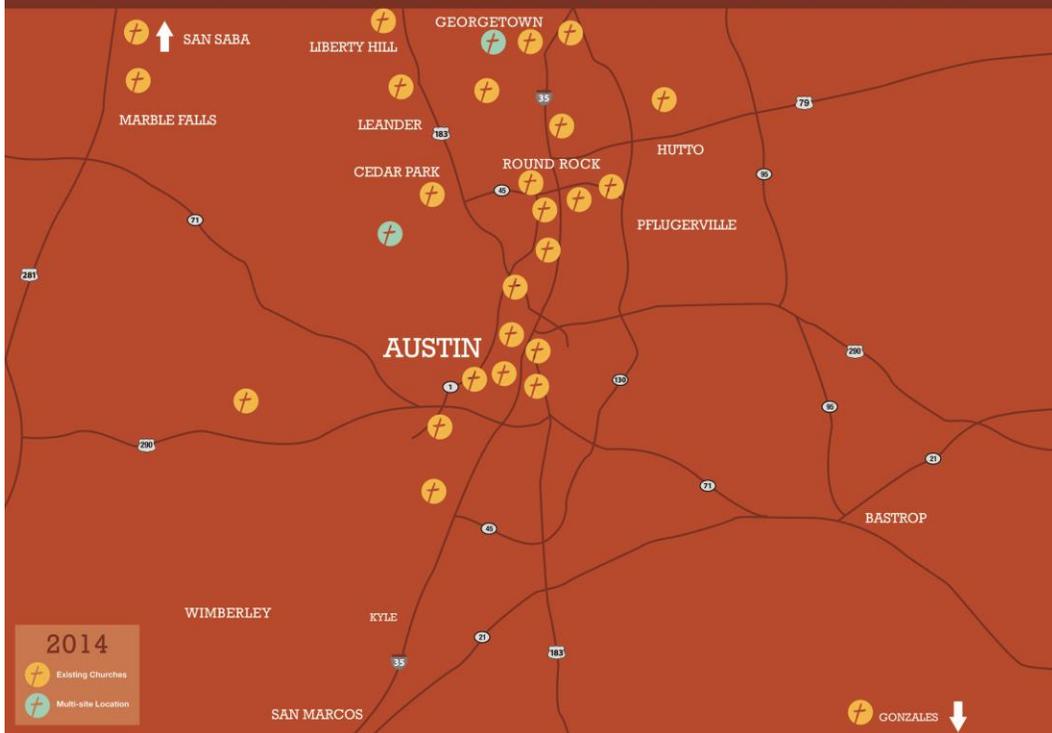
There’s an old story about a gentleman in 19th century London who noticed three bricklayers laboring day after day along the way in downtown London. One in particular had great joy in his work. The man asked all three the same question: “What are you doing?” One of the bricklayers haplessly replied: “laying bricks,” the second with equal dejection said, “building a wall,” but the third replied with great joy, “I’m building a grand cathedral to the glory of God (Westminster)!” This radical shift in thinking is what transcendence looks like! This kind of shift was an important step in our journey, where every one of Hill Country’s church plants—regardless of size or context—experience transcendence as part of a vision to see the entire city reached for Christ.

I remember the week I sat in one of our plants that was at the time running less than a hundred, but the pastor encouraged his congregation to see what they, and we as a larger association, were doing in the city. He was casting a transcendent vision for his church that gave their people a larger narrative. In this context, we are no longer planting a church, preaching sermons or trying to make our church grow bigger and better. We are no longer reducing our passion to an idol or to an object of insatiable greed.

SATURATING AUSTIN WITH THE GOSPEL



SATURATING AUSTIN WITH THE GOSPEL



Partnering in the City

As rewarding as it may seem to have planted this many churches in our city, it has become increasingly clear that the real breakthrough in reaching our city must come through the most challenging task of all: partnering with other churches! Partnering with other movements and other groups, even when they are equally committed to reaching people for Christ, is indeed not only like herding stray cats; worse yet, it's like one cat having the audacity to ask other cats to go in any particular direction!

The first barrier is simply the theological one and the long-entrenched sectarianism that characterizes the church and keeps it divided and fractured. As part of the Independent Bible Church movement, we have seen firsthand the fruit of a culture that divides over doctrinal nuance, and then churches criticizing each other into further alienation. The fear of many doctrinally oriented churches lies in the idea that they will somehow compromise themselves into tired old ecumenism. As the old saying goes, "If you don't stand for anything, you will fall for everything." Partnering is not like ecumenism where everyone surrenders his or her theology. Partnering simply requires us to agree that people need the Lord and that lostness will be reduced, even if everyone in the city does not adopt our theological perspective. Consider what Paul passed on as "first importance":

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sin according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Every church has its own agenda, its own calendar and annual goals, and the more aggressive they are at growing bigger, and the larger the congregation, the less inclined they are to stop and have a cross-denominational conversation about collaborating. To find people who will actually carve out time in their calendar is an amazing act of God. However, I (Tim) have found several brothers in the city that have all committed to tithing their time to Austin. For pastors, tithing time is often as much of a challenge as tithing money! This is a revolutionary commitment!

We often feel like we're terribly under-resourced in terms of time, that we don't have time to take care of our own ministry much less give time to something that's not going to directly advance our church. Tithing time means we have built into our monthly schedule a series of commitments to advance the cause of reaching our city in terms of four quadrants of "externally focused" activity.

Collaborating for Multiplication: Four Quadrants for Reaching a City:

As we continue to mature in our thoughts about city reaching, we have continued to relentlessly pursue collaboration with likeminded gospel-centered churches in the city. After years of lead pastors meeting to pray for each other and love each other, we identified a logical next step: What if we got pastors to cooperate in an intentional way to reach their city with the gospel?

We have begun to articulate our city-reaching strategy by dividing it into four “quadrants” of redemptive work.



Quadrant 1: Spiritual Awareness

We define spiritual awareness as any activity that engages the people of God to have conversations about the person of God in a unified effort.

What if every Christ-follower prioritized engaging in spiritual conversations with people throughout our city in a unified way? What if these spiritual conversations were taking place during a heightened time of spiritual attention, either coordinated by church leaders or prompted by some other event or circumstance?

We first observed the phenomenon of spiritual awareness during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami crisis, where the church of Austin came together as a powerful witness to a watching city. It happened again in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina, the deadliest and most destructive tropical cyclone of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. It is the costliest natural disaster, as well as one of the five deadliest hurricanes, in the history of the United States. The church in Austin stepped up (as it did in many cities)!

We experienced the same heightened spiritual attention when the church mobilized to come to the aid of Haitians in the Haiti earthquake of 2008.

Spiritual awareness is not simply about churches doing good works during a crisis. Some 377 churches in Austin combined to mobilize an all-out citywide campaign with billboards and extensive social media and internet coverage, as thousands of spiritual conversations happened as a result of the Explore God Campaign.

Our current spiritual awareness initiative reflects what all missionally thinking people ascribe to: learning to say to the city, “We want what you want; we care about what you care about.” One of the easiest “common ground” issues has to do with creating a culture of neighbors. In the spirit of Jesus’ call to “love your neighbor as yourself,” we are mobilizing the church in the city over the ideas promulgated in Jay Pathak and Dave Runyan’s book, *The Art of Neighboring*. We asked the provocative question: What if, when Jesus said, “love your neighbor as yourself,” He meant the people next door to us? This conversation has created a great new buzz in the city, and we hope it culminates in even more people in the city experiencing the life-changing reality of Jesus Christ.

Quadrant 2: Acts of Service

God has been inspiring local churches and individuals in Greater Austin to bring justice and mercy to the city through “acts of service.” Though we affirm, bless and even participate in these various acts of service, we seek to promote and lead an effort that requests a massive involvement of the “Big C” church to solve a systemic problem in our city that will not be fixed without the church in Austin unified and engaged. We also believe that the greatest resource of the church is her relational capital; therefore, we seek to address problems that involve relational investments.

We went to city leaders and asked them to identify a systemic problem that we could engage by mobilizing the massive volunteer force of the church. Our city leaders suggested third-grade literacy. Educators have explained to us that for the first three years, children learn to read, and then they read to learn. If they never learn to read, all is lost as the shift in learning occurs. So we deployed more than 400 volunteers in every school in two large school districts to help children improve their reading.

Quadrant 3: Circles of Accountability

We were recently speaking with a bishop from the Anglican Church and as we described our “circles of accountability,” he smiled and said, “You are describing a curate.” He went on to say that a curate (derived from the Latin word *curare* meaning “to heal”) was the Curer of Souls in a particular geography. He was commissioned to be the curate of any injustice or any sin sickness in his geography. Solomon was right; there is nothing new under the sun. There are just things that are rediscovered and renewed.

So as we have rediscovered the value of the “parish,” we began to ask, “What could happen if the churches in an area of the city came together to ensure that every person in that area was given an opportunity to see, hear and respond to the gospel?”

Circles of Accountability are simply that—groups of pastors coming together in a specific geographic region to mobilize their congregations to reach every man, woman and child in their circle of influence.

Currently, we have divided our city into 19 “circles,” including 18 active circles where pastors are meeting, praying and working together to share the love of Jesus with all the

people in their circle through ongoing, active relationships. Each circle is approaching this differently based on how they sense God's leading for their area.

Our prayer is that over the next year, God will continue to unite these groups and raise up additional leaders for new circles.

Quadrant 4: Church Planting

Despite our heart for the city, our combined ministry efforts are hardly putting a dent in the enormous task of sharing the gospel with every man, woman and child in Greater Austin. We agree that the need for church planting in our area is undeniably staggering. We have seen that one of the most effective ways to reduce the lostness of our area is to plant new churches, while at the same time refreshing existing churches.

We recognize that many local organizations are currently involved in church planting, and we celebrate those who are sending and supporting church planters. We also want to advance the gospel through a coordinated effort.

Currently we're witnessing a groundbreaking development – churches from different tribes collaborating to plant a church. This is not a new idea. For example, The Chapel in Buffalo, New York, has already done this several times. However, it is an encouraging aspect of multiplication that gives us hope for reaching our entire city.

Additionally, we're currently organizing Saturate Austin Church Planting to create a citywide training center to better equip planters with needed skills and knowledge.

We've used these four quadrants to organize and focus our efforts for collaborating with churches and ministries, often times for only one quadrant of "commonness."

Chapter 2

11 Multiplication Tensions

The Tensions:

Tension #1 Here or There (Addition or Multiplication)

Should we focus on growing our attendance, or starting new places of growth?

Of course, in our opinion, the answer to this tension is “yes.” (Which wing of the airplane is more essential?) The reality is that if you don’t keep adding, you won’t keep multiplying.

Sending people forces us to keep training leaders to backfill the holes all the way down the leadership pipeline. If you’re not training leaders for the backfill, then your multiplication efforts will eventually collapse under your own weight. Multiplication must invade every strata of the church, or it breaks down.

We had to figure out how to keep sending without bleeding out all our best leaders or more dangerously, bleeding out all our young leaders! After all, who is more nimble, more idealistic, more energetic and the least obligated than young leaders? They have yet to buy a home or start a family. Many of our plants have had a surprisingly multi-generational demographic, but in our experience the young are always most mobile.

Pastors have often made much about stewardship and generosity, but somehow when it comes to people, we find this idea less appealing. And of course, the challenge is not limited to pastors. Many people don’t want to disrupt their relationships, but the challenge is still the same. The Holy Spirit can trump what we’d prefer to do or not to do, especially when it comes to transitioning people.

Tension #2 Facility acquisition vs. Facility sacrifice

Should we focus on a church building that will establish us in the community, or invest those resources in planting?

We just experienced a ground-shift in this area. Despite all of our efforts at sending people, we hit a space crisis that created a fork in the road—either to spend \$30 million on building out our campus; or to have a lesser campaign that would mitigate the space issues and still advance our mission. We raised around \$11 million for purchasing land for three campuses, staffing for the campuses and establishing a Saturate Austin Leaders city-reaching organization that will provide second-level leader training for lay people, church planters and Hispanic pastors and planters.

Raising the \$30 million for tangible improvement that our people could see, feel and touch might have been easier. But we felt it may have stalled our vision, getting us stuck in “addition” mode. We knew we had a winning formula for reaching people in our

immediate area, and with more space, we could reach more of them. However, the notion of pushing outward is riskier, yet more on target with our mission.

Tension #3 New campus vs. New plant

Should we start a multisite campus, or plant a new church?

Again, the answer is yes. However, admittedly, the energy of launching three campuses has slowed our planting in the near term. But we feel it's an appropriate pause that will allow for more churches to get into the game as we build out the more city-focused church-planting system. If we continue to be the prime mover in planting in the city, we will find ourselves in danger of falling into yet more addition thinking, and hinder the multiplication we believe creates true movement.

What we hoped for seems to be happening, as five of our younger churches are collaborating and not using our church-planting system. Rather, they are inviting the national church-planting organization Stadia to broker a Memorandum of Understanding between the churches. Like a wise parent who needs to give their kids room to fly, we think this is a great idea as we discover ways to not intrude into their business.

Tension #4 Senior leader coasting vs. Senior leader climbing

Should I build systems that allow me to coast, or continue to ride uphill?

Movements are not led (for long) by “coasters.” If you find yourself in a church with a coasting senior leader, find another place and set sail, at all costs.

The senior leader has to recognize the reality that “the glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old” (Prov. 20:29). While neither of us will admit to having lost more than a couple of steps, the reality is that over time, we all lose more energy, and hopefully compensate with the profound wisdom to know that multiplication must pervade every strata of the church, including senior leadership. “Continuing to climb” means inviting others onto the ladder of succession. We are cognizant of the importance of succession planning, and we're working on replacing ourselves with younger leaders. We know that effective succession is critical to our success as a movement.

Tension #5 Staffing the mother church vs. Staffing the plants

Should we hang onto our best staff members, or send them out as church planters?

We would never hold onto an aspiring church planter. However, we have found that the skill set for being a pastor in a department of a megachurch does not tend to be the same entrepreneurial bent of a planter. Church planters require self-mastery, starting skills and sustaining skills. Self-mastery centers on self-awareness, emotional quotient and social skills. Starting skills relate to catalytic capacities that enable organizations to create new initiatives. Sustaining skills have to do with the ability to maintain systems and keep the ministry moving forward and functioning. Most pastors generally don't have all three. Those who do will not “let you” inappropriately hang onto them.

Tension #6 Mother's maturity vs. Baby's birth

Should we wait until we're mature enough to plant a church, or begin moving forward now in planting?

No one would have children if they had to have enough money, enough parenting skills and enough sleep to be a parent! In hindsight, I think John and I would agree that we wish we had started planting sooner. It's difficult to re-engineer DNA, and DNA tends to be laid in the first developmental years. However, we're proof that just like we believe people can repent and change, so can churches.

One of our first-year plants is collaborating with three other churches on a plant this year, and another of our churches, Cityview, planted in their second, third and fourth year, and they are collaborating this year. They have just bought and paid for a very fine piece of property. Don't wait! Just become a wise steward.

As a larger church with more resources, we had to overcome a unique multiplication barrier. Our planting model was so expensive and complicated that it gave some of our plants the idea that they had to wait to plant until they were over 1,000 in weekend attendance, and could launch their own church plant training center.

Tension #7 Volunteer talent retention vs. Release

Should we hang onto our best volunteers, or send them out as church planters or part of a launch team?

Again, this issue demands a balance between faith and wise stewardship. One of our church plants put a huge dent in the leadership team for our children's ministry, and it created some trauma. However, we backfilled the holes, survived the trauma, and currently have a vibrant children's ministry. Another of our churches put a drain on our already struggling young adults demographic. However, we have backfilled the holes with great talent, and are optimistic about our young adults ministry again.

Tension #8 Proximity protection vs. Proximity evangelism

Should the mother church protect our "turf" by sending the plant far away, or trust that working together will create greater Kingdom impact?

Proximity is always a delicate issue. The question we would ask: What is most strategic? The challenge when sending a planter to the other side of the city is finding people who have significant relational traction in that remote part of the city—a factor critical to any plant's success. We have succeeded in telescoping far away a couple of times, but it has always required great leadership and a committed core that went out and found the "person of peace" in that new neighborhood.

We currently plan to start a multisite campus fairly close to two of our plants. Additionally, one of our former plants is now planting a new church in our back yard. Theoretically, business models tell us that as long as there is enough distinction between

brands to reach a different kind of people, proximity should not be a problem. As Starbucks has discovered, oversaturation can be detrimental.

Proximity is also an issue for multisite campuses. At this point, we have chosen to launch multisite campuses closer to us, as a strategy for offloading congestion on our first campus. We aren't very far down the road on multisite campuses, but we do believe it's a legitimate tool that can extend our reach if we focus on reaching unchurched folks rather than siphoning off more church members from nearby congregations.

Tension #9 Highly educated planters vs. Spiritually empowered planters

Should our planters rely on accumulated knowledge or activated faith?

We don't believe these ideas should be mutually exclusive. However, if we have to choose, faith will always win. We have seen men come into our system who have read every book imaginable on church planting and church growth. But they're learners, not leaders.

Tension #10 Missional focus vs. Multiplication focus

Should we address the needs of our neighborhood before starting a church, or address the community's needs at the same time as planting?

As our friend John Burke of Gateway Church of Austin has said, "If it doesn't result in winning people to Christ, it isn't missional." Some of our church plants fell into what we would call the "missional ditch" and spent too much of their energy on social action. The fact that the clock was ticking on their building out a viable congregation—which would create the platform for ongoing social action—seemed to escape them. What was intended to give them favor in a less receptive geography became too central to their work; evangelism took second chair. Because their metrics were about serving rather than building out a prevailing church that would be present in the community for the next 20 years, they were fooled into thinking they were succeeding. Viability ensures that the plant has the means to bless the community even more in days to come.

Tension #11 Missions focus vs. Multiplication focus

Should we direct resources to global missions or to local church planting?

We have always embraced a "bifocal" vision—both a global and local focus—which we feel is absolutely necessary to be obedient to what God has called us to do. We have a global outreach staff that deploys more than 700 of our people every year in short-term missions around the globe, and specifically in our three focus areas. Additionally, we recruit, intern, train and send new mid- and long-term missionaries every year. Currently, 18 cents of every dollar is allocated for mission in one of three categories: global mission; local missional; and church planting.

Chapter 3

Top Five Multiplication Lessons We've Learned

1. Relentlessly pursue your vision and your values; beware of fads.

Chasing the latest trend that surfaced out of a successful leader's latest book poses a terrible danger. We have been pastors long enough to see at least a half dozen of these trends (more pejoratively called "fads") come and go.

The churches with a sustained impact have maintained a continuous narrative over many years. Hill Country has not always been immune to being influenced by popular trends, but we have consistently articulated a city-reaching dream, of one day presenting our city to Jesus and of having been faithful to share the gospel with every man, woman and child in our city. One of the mitigating factors against chasing fads has been our governing board of lay elders, godly businessmen who don't generally read what pastors read. As you probably know, pastors tend to get together and start dreaming up new things to chase after rather than focusing on grinding out good solid ministry that focuses on multiplication and discipleship.

When I (John) was candidating for the Hill Country Church Plant Training Center director position, I was treated like a celebrity. I thought I might be perceived as the guy who was going to siphon off the best leaders. Instead, it wasn't uncommon for me to hear, "Oh, we need you! We have been praying that God would provide us with someone to help us plant churches."

Additionally, I was invited onto the executive team, the directional team of four pastors that oversaw the execution of our strategic plan, which meant that church planting wasn't buried in the third-level basement of the organization. It got high visibility. I spoke on Sunday mornings, I was featured in videos about our vision and our progress, I engaged with staff, and I influenced our direction as a church. When budget time came around, we sacrificed staff positions that would accelerate our "addition" growth. The church paid full-time salaries for me and up to five church-planting residents, as well as an administrator—all for the sake of multiplication. Those salaries could've made a huge difference in our growth at home. And nobody blinked!

The upshot is this: What gets celebrated gets done. When a new church plant has done the heavy lifting of missional groundwork, has recruited a team, achieved critical mass, and has seen people come to faith as a result of their efforts, we have them stand on the stage on Sunday morning, light candles and march out of the building singing songs of victory. In turn, everyone watching who has the Holy Spirit living within him or her has to think about when it will be their turn to march out the doors, candle in hand, on the same mission!

Vision statements and core values are trumped by the culture you create and nurture. Vision statements are often aspirational, but what you do every day of your life and how you prioritize the various areas of ministry indicates what you truly value. Everything else is just talk!

2. When it comes to leaders, “shop local.”

In Austin, a strong culture of radical individualism launched the saying, “Keep Austin Weird.” Essentially, the slogan sends the message that local culture should not be sacrificed for commercialization that strips away creativity and degrades human uniqueness. The tagline “Shop local” came out of this cultural phenomenon, yet there is something true and right in this when it comes to multiplication. “Shop local” could also refer to leadership and engaging culture as a church.

In the 19th century, Henry Venn and Hudson Taylor wrote about it, and in the 20th century Roland Allen stated the obvious: Indigenous people would be most effective in contextualizing the gospel for their own people. In other words, the best missionaries will be sent from across the street, not from Seattle or Southern California to Texas. Rick Warren is from Southern California. Bill Hybels hails from the upper Midwest. Tim Keller is a New Englander.

There is a limit to this logic. Otherwise, who would start a movement in Dubai? (By the way, Tim Hawks is from Michigan!) Nevertheless, we believe our results validate our theory. We did a thorough evaluation of the real effectiveness of our church plants and discovered some interesting things. About 15 percent of our church plants have either died or are struggling significantly. Another 15 percent are plateaued or what we would call “stalled.” The rest are thriving. Of those plants that are thriving, the vast majority are led by a local native—someone from Austin, breathes Austin and instinctively thinks Austin because it’s home. (Three of those leaders were in middle school in our student ministry; seven served on staff with us for years.) They know the culture, understand what we’re trying to do, embrace our approach, are raving fans of our city-reaching vision, and most importantly, have started with an extensive relational network. This local relationship puts a planter light years ahead of a parachute-dropped planter from Montana who has no cultural experience in our city.

I (John) discovered this firsthand when I planted a church in Nebraska before coming to Hill Country. People often asked, “What brings you up here?” I was an outsider, and outsiders have to figure out how to become an insider—which takes time. It took us a full decade to hit 1,000 attendees, which never would have happened without the patience and credibility of insiders who welcomed me in and accepted me as one of their own. For the longest time, I couldn’t figure out why it went so slowly. In hindsight, I realize it took a number of hard years to earn insider status.

In our work at Hill Country, despite having what we would consider a world-class assessment process, our best planters have mainly been local guys or at least Texans.

3. Build out a comprehensive leadership pipeline.

The “find and fund” strategy of accessing leaders assumes that somewhere out there exists a blue chip recruit that we didn’t disciple and don’t know! Due to our learning about shopping local for leaders, if we could do anything over, we would start cultivating our best and brightest when they’re in middle school.

We are currently in the process of that, which includes developing a profile; tagging in the database our “leaders” starting in middle school; and involving a leadership scope and sequence track in every age group, with an intentional handoff at every transition, including the “spiritual cliff” called the senior year in high school. We’re building this pipeline into every staff member’s annual Ministry Action Plan as a fundamental measure of success. This is also vital to our ongoing development of elders.

Additionally, we have established Saturate Austin Leaders. giving aspiring leaders of any age and in any church access to theological and leadership training. We want to prepare them for being deployed as leaders, elders, pastors, church planters and missionaries.

Our hope is to raise up leaders we win to Christ who, today, may be sleeping off a hangover, living with their girlfriend and are totally unacquainted with the gospel. Better yet, we identify leaders in middle school and never let them go until they’re multiplying disciples!

4. Expect failure.

We’re convinced that if we’re never failing, then we’re probably trying too hard not to lose. Despite having a well-funded, well-trained and comprehensive strategy, we have discovered that church planting is accomplished in the context of opposition, both from spiritual warfare as well as cultural resistance.

Without exception, all of our church planters have experienced great hardship. We have seen a litany of choruses to the theme of “We didn’t expect...”

- To lose our house to foreclosure back home
- To miscarry
- To nearly die from a mysterious sinus infection gone bad
- To suffer from puzzling, undiagnosable medical conditions
- To see an elder commit adultery two months after launch
- To have to move five times in a year
- To find our community so unreceptive to the gospel
- To see our core group splinter and abandon us
- To discover a pastor’s wife involved in adultery
- To find a pastor’s children and wife often weeping at night
- To witness a pastor have a heart attack and die in our second year
- To suffer from harsh depression
- To have an unexpected pregnancy...with twins (and we already had three)

All of these things have been the unexpected circumstances of heroic men and women who have gone into battle and suffered great loss for the sake of the gospel. Jesus said, “No one goes into battle without first counting the cost.” We underestimated the costliness of church planting and the toll it would take—making us increasingly sober and cognizant of what we’re asking planters to do.

Without clarity of conviction and theological certainty, we would lose our resolve and lack the nerve to press into the difficulties.

5. Be relentless about the right outcomes.

In the early days, there was a strict adherence to a certain way of doing everything. Since then, we have lightened up for the sake of contextualization as we discovered nuances of culture within the city. However, we have stayed consistent with our doctrine and our elder polity, but just as consistently we have remained committed to certain agreed upon outcomes.

All of our church plants are coached for up to three years. Coaches hold the church planter and that church’s elders to a clearly defined “win”—that they become a self-sustaining, multiplying church that will prevail for the next 20 years. We used to call this “moving from daughter church to sister church” status. However, this maternal language fostered a maternal expectation that we’re supposed to take care of and nurture the plant, all of which implied extended financial support and sending additional people to the plant, etc. So we changed our language to define a maturing process from “church plant” to “church-planting church” status.

To become a church-planting church, we coach our plants toward five metrics:

1. the goal of having 200 adults in worship
2. two additional elders
3. one additional staff member
4. the capacity to give away 10 percent of their income toward missions
5. a church-planting initiative as part of their strategic planning.

These five metrics are indicators of healthy levels of critical mass, community, leadership development, financial stewardship and multiplication. Of course, there are many other indexes of health, but these are the five we coach toward.

If you have read this narrative through to the end, you may wonder whether your city could have a similar experience. If you are, in any sense, discouraged about your prospects for success, I urge you to instead turn your mental energy to developing your own strategy and most of all, to prayer. Our story is meant to provide you with lessons learned from both our successes and failures, and to encourage you that God has a redemptive plan for your city, just as He does for ours.

While not every city can expect to see similar results, we believe there is a fundamental principle that transcends the city in which you live, or the quality of the leaders you are able to discover and develop. The magnitude of the question you ask will determine the magnitude of what you attempt to accomplish. If the foremost question in your mind is “How can this city help me build a great church?” that is too small a question. The greater question, regardless of your limitations or opportunities, should be, “How can our church help our city become a great city?” When we ask that question, we can discover the joy of multiplication.

Endnotes

Introduction

ⁱ Roger Finke, Rodney Stark, [*The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*](#), p. 17

ⁱⁱ From an interview with Trevin Wax for his blog from the Gospel Coalition called, “The Great Evangelical Recession: A Conversation with John Dickerson (Jan. 10, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*.

Chapter 1

ⁱ Dave Runyan, [*The Art of Neighboring*](#) (Pathak and Runyon, Baker Books, 2012.)

About the Authors

Tim Hawks

Tim Hawks is lead pastor at Hill Country Bible Church Austin in Austin, Texas. He planted and pastored a church in Ruston, Louisiana, before coming to Hill Country in 1989. Tim's passion for church planting grew as he saw the need for more spiritually vibrant, missionally minded churches in the Austin area. Since 1996, the Association of Hill Country Churches has planted 28 churches throughout Greater Austin.

Tim is dedicated to partnering with like-minded churches to saturate the city with the gospel of Jesus Christ. By meeting monthly with area pastors and building relationships with other organizations that have a heart for the people of Austin, he has been instrumental in shaping a unified strategy for reaching the city.

He also serves as a member of the directional team for Christ Together, a national network that exists to inspire, galvanize, connect, resource and support the church in America to communicate and demonstrate the Good News of Jesus Christ to almost 315 million Americans.

Tim has been married to his wife, Cindy, for 30 years, and has four grown children. He enjoys hunting, having deep discussions with his kids, and planning strategies for just about anything.

John Herrington

John Herrington serves as the senior executive pastor of Hill Country Bible Church Austin. With almost 30 years of ministry experience, John most recently directed the Church Plant Training Center at Hill Country. During his seven years serving in that capacity, the church increased its number of plants in Greater Austin from three to 28. John's previous experience in campus ministry, church planting and as a lead pastor reflects his lifelong desire to engage people far from God.

John helps lead a thriving church community with the vision of reaching every man, woman and child in Greater Austin with the life-changing reality of Jesus Christ. He also serves as an associate with Christ Together Greater Austin, part of a national network of churches, which aims to reach the most heavily populated cities in the United States with the gospel.

John has been married to Angela, a university-level mathematics instructor, for 38 years. They have four grown children and three grandchildren dispersed between Omaha, Nebraska, Austin, Boston and Dallas. John considers himself a boring man who likes to read a lot but doesn't and hates to work out but does. He is older than he looks and smarter than he sounds.