

Ezekiel 40:4 *“And the man said to me, “Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you. Declare all that you see to the house of Israel.”*

“You guys are gonna make me cry,” Jessica said. Before I explain why let me tell you what led up to this. Five men set out on a journey to catch the vision God has for the city of Toronto. Two pastors, two church members and one God loving, sin fighting machine of a DOM. We had been told of the numbers: 7 million people, the most International city in North America, 96% of the people are unchurched, and 1 church per 103,319 people. How could a city be so lost? We heard even more terrifying information when we got there. It is better to have been born Catholic and never been to church than to claim to be a Christian. Let this sink in, most Millennials do not know one single verse of scripture. Their great grandparents were the last generation to be heavily involved in church attendance. That’s three generations that have been out of church. The fourth largest city in North America has a sin problem, but it also has a SEND problem.

We left High Point Baptist Church at 3am on Monday morning so when we arrived after 12pm we were ready to explore, but even more important, we were ready to eat. Our journey began by walking through some of cleanest and most kind neighborhoods I’ve ever seen. There was a mixture of historical buildings and brand new skyscrapers, but soon there became a common theme on our walk. There displayed in the windows, flying high above buildings, painted on the roads, and even on the road signs was the rainbow. We were hungry and yet completely surrounded in an area called, “the village.” During the tour it was pointed out that they have a month long celebration and about 2 million people come out for the parade the city has. God set the tone. You are surrounded by sinful people who have no light. Who will God SEND?

That evening we gathered together to go and meet 4 couples, church planters at the Toronto Blue Jays game. I know, we thought it too, a Ballgame? (Just to let you know, we paid to get to Toronto, but private donors paid to cover the expenses of the rest of the trip) They explained that we would be speed dating with church planters. That every two innings we will move seats and meet another set of planters. I saw very little of the game. Who could dare take their eyes and ears off of what we were hearing? The power of God was moving and stirring after we heard story after story of how God was moving in such a broken place. One such story was of how David and Jeana’s neighborhood had eight houses with everyone being of a different nationality. How their neighbors desire truth and love, but did not know the gospel. Stories of beginning a church and hoping for 15 or more only for God to send over 45 to the first service. Every story has it’s “but” to it, right? So I asked, “what do you need from us?” Here it comes, wait for it. Prayer, we need prayer. To know that we are not here alone. It would also be helpful if people could come up here and join with us for events, prayer walks, summer camps, etc. That night I was never asked for money. In fact, no church planter asked for money the whole trip. One said, “Money is great, but it doesn’t help encourage the church. They need support and relationships.”

7:30am, breakfast was going down fast. We were officially drinking out of the fire hydrant of information. We loaded up on a bus tour of the Greater Toronto Area. As a whole when traffic is good you can drive from one end to the other within two hours. NAMB has broken this area into 5 parts, Downtown, West, Midwest, East, North. There are 3 areas with what they called champions. A champion was described as someone who has all the tools and is using them well. They are churches that are

sustainable and are planting other churches. Downtown, West, and East has champions. The Midwest has a potential champion. He has all the tools and is putting it together but needs more time before reaching this description. The North has nothing. Not one church plant has survived this area. They have attempted many times, but none have yet to stick. Going through my mind was the idea of what is God leading us to do? Should we team with a champion? Hop on a horse that you know is a winner. A potential champion? When they reach champion level we know that we had a small part in it. Or partner with someone who is starting out new and a fresh? The great news is that there was no bad choice to make.

Our first stop was in Downtown, which is nearby where we wandered the rainbow streets the day before. Mike and Daniel -- by the way Mike's parents just moved to Little River -- of Trinity Life Church. These guys were deep thinkers. I loved hearing how they were looking for partnerships that matched with them in their methods, philosophy and theology. They meet in a middle school near a homeless men's shelter called the Seaton House or Satan's House. Once night time hits the parking lot is full of homeless people and prostitutes. Mike and Daniel love ministering to any and everyone. They explained the walls or barriers that they had to let down or tear down to be more effective without compromising their theology. Within the 80 attenders of their church they have over 15 different cultures represented. Those are 15 countries who are getting calls from Toronto telling them how Jesus is the king of kings and lord of lords. Their sending church is Providence Baptist in Raleigh, NC. Now I am wondering, "Should we be a Sending church?"

Stop two is in the Midwest area to meet planters from the West region. The West (Hamilton) region is described as being like Pittsburgh, hard working, factories, and lots of gentrification. This means the poor are being thrown out and their old homes turned into high rising condos. One church planter's home has doubled in value within 4 years. Due to the poverty level the church has become creative. Jason and Chandler begin to tell us about their church plants. What is a little different is that they have multiple meeting places. One is the bike shop church. Since they are poor most ride bicycles. These guys have befriended the lost bike shop owners that want to love everyone. They help repair bikes in order to meet people. Another church is the Beer shop church. It's not what you are thinking, because I asked. You can redeem your bottles for money in Toronto but only at the Beer store. So they prepare a small snack or meal and wait outside the store to minister to the poor who are recycling. Oh by the way, the bike shop let them clean out the back yard and use it as a meeting place for bible studies. The neighbors saw this and began cleaning their yards as well. Right beside the bike shop bible study is a smoking shop. Slowly over the past few weeks people have been leaving the smoking area to come and join the bible study. Have you bought your plane tickets yet? If not we still have 2 stops to go. I am still waiting on the "but" of this trip by the way and it's coming.

Stop number 3. Have you ever eaten shawarma? Great Day, that stuff is good. Our next stop is with the Latino church planters. They had a saying, "The homeruns of Yesterday don't count in the game today." Their vision began in 2014. They want to plant 20 churches by 2020. The first pastor, Francisco spoke with such conviction and passion that I put down my shawarma and started calling for him to keep on preaching. He said he had 2 sermons, the long one and the short one. Except he wasn't preaching, he was just introducing the other pastors that were with him. You see they've already planted 5 new churches since he cast that vision. Did I leave out the fact that Francisco is 70 years old and had decided to retire to Toronto. That's when he learned that there were no Latino churches and that the 500,000 Latino's in Toronto were all scattered out. Most people groups were gathered in pockets throughout the

city, but not the Latino community. No matter how many homeruns he had already hit, they didn't matter in the present. People need Jesus. Each guy began to share his story of how God saved him and now he is responsible to go and plant new churches in order to reach new people for Jesus. Each service they shared is in both English (by headphones) and Spanish. They have partnered up with a Spanish Bible Institute to help raise up the next wave of church planters. Why do we have to leave here? This place is hopping for Jesus!

The last stop, number 4. Four years ago he went down to his basement and began to cry out to God. Matt had been through all the training, read the books, and took the test. Now he was in the real world where theory wasn't working. God laid on his heart to get up and go door to door. Matt called a supporting friend and shared what God was leading him to do. The friend's reply, "Matt, that only works in the south. Don't do it." Matt did it anyway. The first door he knocked on belonged to James Greaves. That knock changed James forever. Shortly after James became a follower of Christ and faithful church member. From that point on Matt kept championing all the other church planters in his network, The Fellowship. Kesavan, Rob, Jared, Sebastian and Matt were leaders in several different church plants within their network. They loved one another and each other church. Matt described how each was gifted by God and they used those gifts to help each church. Get this, Jared is a gifted evangelist. When one church needs help with evangelism they ask Jared to come and help. The wall of competition is not there. Kesavan helps with developing people's character, Sebastian is a disciple making machine, Rob discerns gifts and helps to create teams and Matt leads. This network has had over 70 baptisms in the last 3 years. Jared has baptized 20 people in the last 4 months. His church officially kicked off last month. What are some of their methods? Sports Camps, Prayer walks, After School clubs, door to door evangelism, and building relationships at the park or wherever they go. Another great nugget about this network, they require each church to give 10% back to the Cooperative Program and 5% back to the network. Why? So they can support other church plants and live it, not just teach it. Wouldn't it be great to have an evangelism guru come teach your church? You can. This network and all the church planters are willing to not just have you come to them, but also to have you bring them back to your church for a reverse mission trip.

Finally, a debriefing session with the NAMB leaders to close out the trip. So in a nutshell what are they looking for?

Prayer

Participation – you physically come and help

Provision

There it is, the "BIG BUT." I knew it was coming. How much? While they would love a cool \$100,000 a month, they actually told story after story of how their best partners only give \$200, \$100, or \$50 dollars a month. Well what do we get? My church has heard it preached constantly that we are trying to reach the world for Christ. Now they can tangibly see how we are going to do that. There is a revival stirring in Toronto and we want to be a part of it. How? By committing to Pray, Participate, and Provide.

After two hours to gushing about the power of God and His clear leading us to not make this our last trip we decided it would be nice to eat before 8pm. 12 hours of going and yet God had revived our

Spirits in such a way that we invited a NAMB official to go and eat with us. Tell us more. That's where we met our waitress at a restaurant with a giant rainbow flag flying over it. "So Jessica, tell me what you think of when you hear the word, church?" For the next 20+ minutes she told us how she was born Catholic but had not been since she was a small child. We told her that we were there because God wanted to plant churches to love on the people of Toronto. That our God is glorified by saving, caring for, and transforming people. In fact, the God that she is too busy for is not too busy for her. The Spirit was so present that she told us, "I'm getting goosebumps, you guys are gonna make me cry." Intently she listened as we told her of a church plant nearby. She was so interested and that she took down the church's name and address. We feared that it was too far away, but when we checked the address it was only a couple of blocks from where we sat. Here is what I saw and heard, God is working in Toronto and the people, who are looking for truth and love. They are longing for God. They just need people to give them the truth/Jesus and Love/God. Isaiah 65:1 "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name." Will you go with me or allow me to go with you to reach the people of Toronto? Will we end the sin problem by first ending the SEND problem?

Oh there was one last "but," Romans 5:8 "*But*" *God demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*