

**BILL WOOLSEY**

**SEVEN  
STEPS  
TO  
START**

*A Sacramental Entrepreneur's Guide  
to Launching Startups that Thrive*



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# INTRODUCTION

Holy discontent creates incredible fires.

It kindled two of the ministries I lead: CrossPoint Community Church and FiveTwo Network.

CrossPoint birthed out of a frustration that most of the mainline churches in my denomination spoke a language long gone. While the US went informal in its conversation and writing, my church body stayed formal in speech and action, ignoring the change in the culture and in essence erected a holiness wall that kept Jesus' lost people from the things of Jesus. My desire in starting CrossPoint was to create a congregation that not only spoke the language of the local lost person but also loved that person so much we could not help but speak their language and love their music and adopt as many of their values as possible.

All so that we could introduce them to Jesus.

In the summer of 1996, I took that desire to the Texas District of my denomination, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Having come from a setting where we spent as much time fending off attacks from the Jesus side of Hell's gates as actually attacking Hell's gates, I knew that with the support of the district leaders the new ministry would flourish like a tree planted by a stream of water.

I asked the president of the district for three things: permission for the congregation to worship in a way that spoke to the lost people of west Houston, support for starting large with multiple-staff from the beginning, and financial support for land and facility.



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The district president responded, “How you worship is a congregational issue, you can have as many staff as you want if you figure out how to pay for them, and how much land are you thinking?”

I asked back, “How much land are you thinking?”

He answered, “10 acres?”

I countered, “40.”

“Well, we’ll see,” he thought out loud.

By the grace of God, the seven families joining us in the start already had a vision for the style of worship the community needed, God led us to a wonderful worship leader and an Energizer administrative assistant, and 46 acres came on the market in the area we wanted to be at an unbelievable price: \$.56/square foot, due to the fact that half of the property was in the 100 year floodplain.

As we started construction the Civil Corp of engineers resurveyed the property and decided none of it was in the floodplain any longer. This act of God blessed us financially over the next decade, allowing us to sell 17 acres that paid off the majority of the land and facility debt. God’s sovereignty reigned again.

The largest financial blessing, however, arrived in the form of a district and its Church Extension Fund who believed in what we were doing to the extent they backed us financially by not only loaning \$3MM to this startup congregation of 100 worshipers, but also by paying the interest on an additional \$1.6MM line of credit.

I felt a little like Esther; it seemed that He had created me for a time such as this, entrusting me with experience and location and favor that not everyone receives. Since then, I have worked hard to steward that trust so that more and more people might come to be included in His Family.

That stewarding met a similar discontent and formed FiveTwo.

In 1998, the mission executive in Texas gathered some of us Texas church planters for a time of prayer and encouragement. It so struck me, this one in authority over me actually caring for me, that I was determined to replicate it for other planters around the country. With the generous funding of a mission group out of California, I took the Texas model and added a large dose of fun. For the next eight years, a group of 20+ planters gathered annually, growing in camaraderie and courage on retreats in Phoenix, Arkansas, and Texas.

Throughout those years it became obvious my situation was foreign: most planters were asked to start new wineskin ministries with little support or know-how. No one in their immediate system had a clue about how difficult the task was, nor how to support a planter who was trying to create a new culture in an old system. Many of them were in districts who spoke of reaching the lost but lacked the courage to protect the new ministry and planter, especially when the ministry sought to break out of the old wineskin.

In March 2009, after a few years of grouching about it, I invited 12 church planters to Katy to see what God might bring from our common discontent. We knew well the loneliness of planting coupled with the lack of experience and mentoring.

We didn't know where we were going so we brought in Will Mancini to guide our 24 hour journey. We wanted to do, not just talk. To act, not just dream.

After 24 hours of praying and debating and cigar smoking (not the entire time), we arrived at FiveTwo. Actually, the name careened out from the doctored brain of Scott Rische who deftly explained the community impact of the feeding of the five thousand, that everything the planter needs to feed his community is already in the community. It just needs to be brought to Jesus for blessing.

We all sat in silent awe.

Silence led to lightbulbs and a quick pregnancy happened: we would launch a church planting network specializing in the “personal how.” When it came to planting churches—immigrant, suburban, high cost, low cost, more traditional, crazily progressive—this crew knew how.

And we were sticklers for personal. To a man, we had all been encouraged, inspired and coached by someone. We each had a guy we could pick up the phone and call when we were disappointed or confused.

Great consensus broke out, and we white-boarded the steps to launch a network that brought “personal” and “how” together for those front-line harvesters in the US and around the world. Our goal? Grow FiveTwo from our little group to a local presence in all 29 metro areas in the US, helping lead our denomination's goal of 2000 new starts by 2017. Five years later, in 2014, we have 40 FiveTwo Locals in 37 cities in the US, with requests to bring it to four other countries.

We realized in year two, however, that while we were planters, most people were not. Too many churches tuned out our message. Before we could see large numbers of new congregations in the US, we would need to help congregations learn to start, to embrace their communities and learn new ways of talking and engaging. To take baby steps before they birthed the baby of an entirely new congregation.

We threw open the tent and invited leaders from a variety of stages and a variety of sacramental denominations to join us in learning how to marry our sacramental passion and missional fervor and reach our local communities with the Gospel of Jesus. To not only love the lost people overseas but especially reach the lost people next door.

## **TIME TO START NEW**

We believe that the church must start new to reach new.

The mainline, historical, sacramental church — a small slice of which I belong — has been stumbling to the bottom since the 1960s. As I pen this book, my denomination has not experienced net numerical growth in membership for over 50 years.

This lack of effectiveness in reaching Jesus' lost people in the US, coupled with a fear of the culture in which the Church now finds itself, has produced a discouraging effect. Rather than propel us into more purposeful and creative ways of engaging those who do not know Jesus, we have lost our apostolic, entrepreneurial will. We are afraid to risk, afraid to fail. We have become so focused on doing doctrine right that we shirk doing new.



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Thus this book on starting well. A book that will help us understand why we should start new and practically how to start new.

Throughout the book you will encounter a two-word term infrequently found together: ***sacramental entrepreneur.***

Let me explain the phrase by breaking them apart and then reuniting them like two long-lost lovers, for I believe the historical, sacramental church must realize the strength they provide when united as one.

Sacramental churches are churches that embrace a sacred view of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In my denomination’s lexicon, sacramental applies specifically to these two sacraments. They are sacraments because they deliver Jesus’ forgiveness through physical means at Jesus’ instigation. They are the vehicle that delivers God’s forgiveness. They do not replace the work of Jesus; they amplify it. They are physical and mysterious all at the same time; the promises of God played out in our physical reality.

When I use sacramental I certainly mean the traditional understanding of the sacraments. A sacramental person embraces these mysterious rituals as a grace experience. He will include them in worship experiences because to neglect such life-giving celebrations would be derelict. Sacramental churches are those who hold these views as well, opting for the mysterious, divine working of God rather than simply man moving through some faith motions.



But sacramental expands beyond worship, beyond water, and beyond bread and wine.

The word also describes our existence as the Church. You and I who follow Jesus are sacramental. The presence of Christ lives in us. Collectively we are His Body; individually we are His ambassadors. We emit His odor--a decay of death to those who deny him but a fragrance of life for those who trust His claims.

We are the means through whom God desires to bless our neighbors.

The single mom might not experience His grace if I didn't mow her lawn. My sales manager might think God merely a demanding deity had I not invited him to dinner with my family. While the real presence of Jesus is offered us in food elements in worship, the real presence of Jesus is also offered to my neighbor in real people elements every day: in the baptized body of believers known as The Church.

A sacramental entrepreneur is a Christ-follower who desires to start new in order to connect new people to Jesus and His Church. The title applies to church planters, small business owners, young college graduates, and even stay-at-home moms. Start new to bring the presence of Jesus to new people.

If you believe the Spirit of Jesus is at work in you, seeking to bring Jesus to your world, and you desire to start a new creation that helps others discover this life-giving truth, then this book is for you.

The following flows from decades of conversations and contemplations about starting. Whether on a corporate level — small groups, youth servant events, new ways of preaching,

and new congregations — or individual — perennial flower gardening, losing 30 lbs, or learning how to swim at the age of 53 — I discovered that regardless of the start, each start had common ingredients that unfolded in a similar order; seven key steps that I now consciously follow.

My goal is very simple: to help you to start sacramental communities that connect people with Jesus and usher those people into His baptized body of believers on earth. If sacramental speaks to the mysterious working of God through tangible means, then be God's sacrament in your communities so that people encounter the presence of Jesus.

## **PRESENCE BEFORE STARTING**

*“To think that you must abandon conversation with God in order to deal with the world is erroneous.”*

*-- Brother Lawrence*

If you read the table of contents, you might have noted the absence of prayer. For a book about starting sacramental communities that connect people to Jesus, one would think prayer an essential ingredient. And you would be correct.

Rather than include prayer in a step, however, I want to discuss it as presence.

Prayer as presence entails living life certain that Christ is really present in you and certain His ear continually turns your way. Prayer flows from a divine relationship gifted to you from your Creator, through His Son, and indwelled by His Spirit.

Prayer belongs before you begin and after you end, sometimes loud, other times soft, but never silent.

The work you are attempting, bringing the Kingdom of Heaven into Satan's realm, rescuing Jesus' people from Satan's grip, is a sacramental work. Jesus is doing his work in the world in, with, and through you. Prayer isn't a one-time exercise to be checked off the list, but an ongoing purposeful conversation with the One who will decide whether or not your desire becomes a reality.

Before you start, embrace the presence of Christ in you as a reminder of the need for constant, conversational prayer.

## **SPEAK YOUR HEART**

*“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4 (ESV)*

Inherent in this verse lies the chicken or the egg question, “Which comes first?” The Psalmist describes an if/then clause: if you delight in the Lord, then he will give you the desires of your heart. Undoubtedly this is a developmental verse for your heart: As I seek joy by doing God's will, my heart grows to love the delights of its creator.

Allow this verse to move beyond your heart to also develop your prayer life. Speak to Jesus about your deep desires like you would to a dear friend. And pray that the delights of your Creator would also become your delights.

One core delight of our Creator is “...not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9 ESV). If that is your heart’s desires, then pray through your plan and desire to keep people from perishing. And if it is not your heart’s desire, pray that God would give you a heart that desires “...to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10 ESV). Pray for your start. Pray for the desires of your heart as the sacramental entrepreneur. Pray for the people you want God to send. Even spend time focusing on the details in your prayers; pray for specific numbers, names, and even particular times of the day.

Keep these desires in your conversations with your Creator constantly, starting immediately.



## STEP 1 KNOW YOUR PASSION

*“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”*

*--G.K. Chesterton*

I recently visited with a new church planter. His was the complete outfit: slightly ripped jeans, plaid shirt, and cool, thick-framed glasses. The GQ of church planters.

When I asked him why he was starting his church, his answers spoke of great logical and spiritual truths. People were going to hell without Jesus and local churches were out of touch with the unchurched in the community. But while the answers rang true, they failed to reveal why he was starting a church. What inside of him was driving him to make this sacrifice, to redirect his family, and take such a risk?

His wrappings looked sharp but I longed to hear his heart.

I was waiting to hear a story.

I wanted a compelling call that pulled me in. I wanted the story of a co-worker who came to faith because of a slow-building relationship. The testimony of a father, on his death bed, rejecting Jesus with his final breath. I wanted to hear about the

divine discontent with the congregational status quo that gave voice to his childhood experience. What was the story behind the story that compelled him to move to a new community and pursue bi-vocational ministry?

## **YOUR WHY**

The first step in starting new is to grasp the “why.” Why start new? Why open a new coffee shop? Why start the leadership development class for teens? Why learn to swim? Why plant a church or begin the preschool?

‘Why?’ is a values question.

Values and passion are closely related; when you see one you are given a glimpse of the other. When people become passionate, they reveal their values. If you want to know your values, find out what makes you excited or angry.

The ‘why’ flows from passion. The why is a part of how you’ve been wired. It’s a part of the way God has formed your community.

## **THE ‘WHY’ BEHIND APPLE**

In the book *Start With Why*, Simon Sinek describes the values of Apple, Inc. At first thought, you might think that the ‘why’ of Apple is to make great, beautiful, user-friendly computers. But that’s not the ‘why’ that flows deep within Apple.

Simon Sinek describes what Apple's 'why' actually looks like:

*Everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently. The way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautifully designed, simple to use and user-friendly. And we happen to make great computers.*

*Wanna buy one?*

The 'why' actually has nothing to do with what they do. And yet it has everything to do with what they do. The products, the design, the retail stores, the pricing structures, and the innovation might all be important, but they are not the 'why.'

The 'why' is what makes Apple different.

## **COMMON PASSION**

As sacramental entrepreneurs, we share a passion for Jesus and His sacramental presence. He wraps His divine mystery in our physical mundane bodies. The business you start, non-profit you launch, the church you plant, or leadership classes you offer provide opportunities for people to experience Jesus through you. God is at work in very mysterious, yet ordinary ways as we do our work.

This common passion drives everything we do.

As sacramental entrepreneurs, Jesus resides at the center of 'why,' His love, His work, and His glory compel us to action.

Often when asked “Why?”, we fail to go deep to the passion-source. We answer in terms of head instead of heart, logically instead of emotionally, corporately instead of personally. We deal in facts instead of stories.

But passion has a story.



***“Passion  
has a  
story.”***

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Tell me about your internal struggle. Paint me a picture of the phoenix rising from the ashes that led you to form the non-profit where you took out loans on your credit cards because you believed in something so deeply. Connect the dots so that I see the why behind your life-changing journey.

Tell me your story. Show me your heart so that I understand your sacrifice and so that I want to sacrifice. Tell me your passion, not just our common passion but your unique passion.

## **GROWING GROUPS OF PEOPLE**

I discovered my passion in about year seven of public ministry. Through a course called Network that interwove passion, spiritual gifts, and personal style, I discovered the passion that drove me and vision that drew me in. For the first time I realized my passion was to “grow groups of Christians, the larger the better.”

I love to watch people gather around a cause and be transformed by a calling. I live for seeing the light bulb turn on in the head previously living in darkness. And one now-lit head is not enough for me, I want to see lots of people experience that. The more the merrier.



This passion existed in me before the discovery, but since then it purposefully informs everything I do. My passion is to reach God's lost people now; to change what needs to be changed and risk what needs risking now.

And to do that in ways that reach lots of lost people.<sup>1</sup>

## THE INNER YOU

While passion may generate negative images, and certainly can be used for evil, I use the term to speak of the driving desires and unique wiring the Creator embedded in you. These are the gifts spoken of in the First Article of the Apostles' Creed when we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

They are what Luther speaks of when he says, "God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses..."

It's the me spoken of in Psalm 139 when it says, "You knit me together in my mother's womb."

Your First Article realities speak to why you love swimming, gravitate to racing, and salivate when steaks sear on the grill. Your First Article realities entail your abilities to compute numbers quickly, understand languages easily and pilot a boat with confidence regardless of the size.

Passions flow from your natural, God-given abilities. God placed them in you so that those loves would be lived out in the world. When we allow our Christian faith to envelop them, they become a natural driver for reaching people who do not know Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> One of the best tools that helped me discover this was APEST.  
[www.apesttest.com](http://www.apesttest.com)

## THE 'WHY' BEHIND SWIM PRACTICE

In the summer of 2014, at the age of 53, I learned how to swim. I vaguely remember a bad swimming experience when I was six. Since then, I could do a modified dog paddle at best. I was afraid to put my face underwater. I hated how water went up my nose and had come to the conclusion something physiologically hindered me from “blowing bubbles” effectively. “I can’t do it,” was my response. “I must have a deviated septum.” I did not even know if a deviated septum could cause such an inability but it sounded official and stopped people from exploring deeper.

In the fall of 2013 I volunteered to lead the Boundary Waters trip for my son’s Boy Scout troop. Somehow I failed to read the fine print: since the trek would take us over 30 miles from base camp, on open water, all attendees were required to pass a 100 yard swim test. 75 yards of a strong stroke (free, breast or side), followed by 25 yards of a resting back stroke. I lived in denial until March. When I fully grasped this expectation, I began to come to grips with what I was going to have to do.

For six weeks in May and June, my daughter, then one of the elders at my church, and finally my wife and son all contributed to teaching me how to swim so that I could pass the test. Almost daily I angrily told my wife I did not think I was going to be able to do it. If I failed, the group would not be able to go into Canada since I was one of the required adults. My whole family suffered during that time.

On Sunday, June 15th, Father’s Day, I took the test...and passed!

This 53 year old man can now jump in the water, blow bubbles effectively, and swim the free style, with some side stroke help for 75 yards.

The day I completed the test was one of the most rewarding days of my life.

What drove me to daily practice and overcome my past fears? It was not the beauty of the Canadian Boundary Waters. And it certainly was not the desire to learn how to swim. Learning to swim was a means to an end, but not the end.

My love for my son and desire to experience this once-in-a-lifetime trip with him drove me to learn to swim. I learned not for me; I learned so that I could take the trip with him. He was my passion.

## **SENSED AND SEEN**

Your passion is critical in startups because the heart of the startup takes on the heart of the sacramental entrepreneur. What you value becomes what the group values. People will join your cause because of the culture created by your values.

Your passions produce atmospheric results; it will create a culture that is both sensed and seen. Your gatherings find their breath in your values. People might say, “I love how this feels” or “It has a great vibe.”

That sense only lasts a while, however, if not reinforced by what is seen. Values are only true if they are not only sensed, but lived out. A person’s experience will verify what they felt; their experience will give them a window to the passion and values of your startup.

Jesus spoke of a similar phenomena in Luke 6:45, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (ESV) .

Sacramental entrepreneurs grasp the connection between heart and hand, between passion and actions.



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## **IF THIS STEP NEEDS SHARPENING...**

Read the book of Acts, a chapter a day for the next month.  
Make a list of all of the risks taken by the apostles and leaders.

If you are unsure of the passion God has placed in you, try these exercises:

- i. If you could snap your fingers and do anything, with no money, failure, family or time limitations, what would you do?
- ii. Looking back over your life, where have you seen fruit produced at the greatest level?  
Where have your gifts been affirmed?
- iii. What events or experiences have brought you the most joy and satisfaction?

- iv. Gather two or three trusted friends and ask them to describe your particular gifts. “If I could only be used for one or two activities, how would you use me?”
- v. What vacations or hobbies have brought great satisfaction? List the ingredients of those times.

After completing the above, gather the responses. What common words did you use? What common themes and threads exist?

Can you state your passion in one sentence beginning with “My heart’s desire is to...”

## **SHARPEN TO START QUESTION**

What are you passionate about that could grow into a ministry or business which positions you to share Jesus with people? What love of your heart could earn you the right to speak into someone’s life because you are bringing value to their life?