**A Shepherd has a heart to care for the flock**

According to Preston Adams, III, pastor of Amazing Grace Christian Church in Indianapolis, Ind., a shepherd has a heart for sheep and really understands that God mandates that we care for the flock. “A shepherd understands that we feed the flock the Word of God, and we are there to encourage them,” he says.

This Disciples new church planter and certified pastoral leadership coach is describing the message he lives and gives to individuals who are aspiring to become pastors. “I want people who are thinking about starting a church to know that church planting is hard work. It takes great effort, praying and sometimes tears.”

Preston and wife Greta, a retired social worker, planted Amazing Grace Christian Church in September 2010. They are nesting in Geist Christian Church in Indianapolis, Ind. “We decided to plant Amazing Grace to honor the call of God on our lives,” says Preston. “We had served in a large congregation in Indianapolis, (Light of the World Christian Church) for 20 years and knew that we had a call on our lives to pastor a church.” However, that call didn’t manifest itself until he went through the new church training offered by Hope Partnership. It was during that process that he realized the call on his life to start something new. “So, after I learned all the dynamics of starting a new church, my wife and I planned it for almost five years before we launched,” he says. They started with a launch team of eight in 2009. By the time they had actually launched the church they had grown to 40 families, or more than 250 people. Now Amazing Grace maintains a solid core of nearly 300 members with an average Sunday worship of 150. “Today we are five and half years old and excited about what God has for us to do,” he adds.

Preston has coached new church pastors for many years through Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation. “I coach them through the whole project and one of the first questions that I have for new church planters is what is your plan,” he says. “It is not surprising to me that a number of them don’t have a plan.” According to Preston, they have a vision and a desire but they haven’t translated that into a written plan. “So, one of the things that I help people who are thinking about planting a church do is to think about their plan and to translate that desire and vision into a written plan.” He believes that is why the Hope Partnership Leadership Academy is so powerful. “It will give you the tools to translate your vision into a plan,” he says. “If you are thinking about being the lead planter, then you have to be the lead visionary and the lead fundraiser.” He adds, “you have to be prepared to do everything.”

Greta describes the journey of new church planting as exciting and free. “When you have vision in terms of how you believe God is leading you, then you are free to maximize that plan,” she says. “I was excited to be able to be free to do what God has called me to do.” She spoke specifically of inclusion. “That means making people feel welcome and making them feel like they are a part of the worship experience, no matter what walk of life they come from.”

Interestingly, the core of Amazing Grace’s ministry is young adults between the ages of 25 to 35 years. “We have been blessed to draw the younger generations and if you asked them why, they will say that the ministry is relevant,” says Preston. He describes the ministry as cutting edge with a great emphasis on technology and social media. This includes presentations, live streaming of services, online Bible studies, Periscope for Wednesday night Bible Study, Facebook, InstaGram and Twitter. “This is the generation that we live in,” adds Preston. With a background in technology, it is a natural fit for him to be drawn into this field. He also admitted that it helps that he and Greta have three young adult children, Patrice, Alaina and Quinn, all between the ages of 22 to 28 years. “So we are actually raising millennials,” he says. “We understand their mindset and we know how to relate to them.”

Preston and Greta Adams minister also extends into the community. “My wife and I started a nonprofit agency in 2009 called the Urban Initiative,” says Adams. They wanted to ministry outreach and community work outside of the walls of the church and outside of a religious-based setting. Through this initiative they are providing mentoring in central Indiana schools and in the community. They also started the High Five Movement in Indianapolis. “One of the things I thought would be good is to create a motivational way to reach our youth in the schools,” says Preston. “The whole idea was to galvanize men and then ultimately women, to meet at local schools, elementary, middle and high schools, greet the kids when they get off the bus, provide them with a high five, a word of encouragement and tell them that ‘we care, we love you and we are proud of you,’” he says. “Many young people don’t receive that kind of encouragement from their homes. Many of them don’t see a lot of positive role models in their homes.”

Preston adds a word of advice for new church planters. “I want people who are thinking about planting a church to know that it is hard work,” he says. “Most church planters have this vision that when we open the doors people are going to come. We just believe that God is going to send us hundreds or thousands of people.” According to Preston, in six years of ministry their ministry has experienced ebb and flow. “What God has helped me to see and what I share with others is that it is really God’s plan; it is God’s timing. And God has to know that He can trust you with all that you are given.”

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