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# Case Study

## *Hope Community Church*

Rocky Pope is the thirty-five year old pastor of Hope Community Church. Hope Community is a church plant in the growing suburbs of a major metropolitan area. Rocky and his wife Sarah started Hope Community four years ago. Rocky had been the youth pastor and then the associate pastor of First Church in the city. Rocky had served First Church faithfully for eleven years. He felt privileged to have been mentored by Dr. Henry Sims the senior pastor of First Church. His ministry at First Church had been a wonderful learning experience. His relationship with Dr. Sims had been a good one until the day that he decided to plant a church. His relationship with Dr. Sims cooled quickly. Rocky decided that Dr. Sims must have been afraid that he would take some members of First Church with him when he planted the new church. Rocky wondered if Dr. Sims questioned his ability, also. First Church had decided to help the new plant financially, but Rocky had expected more from them that just money and a pat on the back.

Sarah had really wanted Rocky to become a senior Pastor. All of their friends in ministry were planting churches. Church planting seemed fun and exciting. In a new church you wouldn't have to deal with tradition. You could "do church" just the way you thought it ought to be done. With a clear vision, only the right people would join. Besides, all of the rapidly growing churches in the city were new "contemporary" churches. Sarah just knew that she and Rocky could grow a great church together. Sarah had really looked forward to the challenge of church planting. She had been excited about the idea of working closely together with Rocky in ministry.

Hope Community had started strong. Rocky wanted his core group to really catch the vision before they formally launched. He spent the first six months training his core group about the principles of "the Purpose Driven Church." Rocky was convinced that the "Saddleback" model was the one he wanted to follow. Two families came with him from First Church. Lasha and Marty Duke had been trained in "lay mobilization." The Duke's were anxious to get out from under the formal structure of a traditional church. The second couple was Clark and Nancy Harrison. Clark had become a close friend and confidant to Rocky. They had lunch together at least once a week. Clark had attended a Christian University and at one time had considered going into the ministry. He knew that he and Nancy would be great assets in the new church. In addition to the two couples from First Church, Rocky's parents decided to join the group as well. In all, there were sixteen adults that formed the core of Hope Community.

45 The core group was ecstatic when almost two hundred people attended  
46 their first public service on Easter Sunday. The group had rented a local middle  
47 school to meet for worship. Setting up and taking down the equipment was hard  
48 work, but with Sarah's help the teams were well organized. Sarah made sure  
49 everyone worked hard and that all the bases were covered. People seemed to  
50 really like the contemporary style of worship. The praise team was above  
51 average, especially for a new church. Sarah sure liked singing and leading the  
52 praise team. Rocky enjoyed being creative in his preaching. Using drama and  
53 power point presentations were things he had often longed for at First Church.  
54 Rocky loved speaking in front of such a young and enthusiastic congregation.  
55 Rocky's people skills and informal style were appealing to everyone, but  
56 especially to the unchurched. Hope Community's emphasis on quality, seeker  
57 targeted worship paid off. The church began to grow rapidly. It seemed like  
58 new families were joining every week. Within three years the church was  
59 averaging over three hundred in worship and were in two services. The  
60 excitement level was high. It didn't take long for Hope Community to become  
61 well known and for Rocky to gain recognition as a successful church planter.  
62 Rocky and Sarah often wondered what Dr. Sims thought about their new church.  
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64 Lasha Duke was incredible with the lay mobilization priority. She was  
65 offering a 301 class for all the new members and many were getting involved in  
66 ministry. Most of the people were encouraged to join a ministry team that  
67 supported the worship event. Lasha wanted to start some new ministries apart  
68 from Sunday morning but Rocky was hesitant. He didn't want to lose the focus  
69 of their vision, which was to reach the unchurched through worship. He and  
70 Lasha had had several discussions about the lay mobilization priority. Rocky  
71 knew that Lasha could be very strong willed. He and Sarah would take Marty  
72 and Lasha out to dinner any time Lasha got "too excited." This strategy seemed  
73 to be working to keep Lasha reigned in.  
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75 Clark Harrison led the small groups team. Clark had a real gift for small  
76 group discipleship. He really enjoyed the in-depth study. Clark was constantly  
77 talking with Rocky about taking the people deeper in their faith. Clark was a  
78 good listener with excellent pastoral skills. Clark was great as a small group  
79 facilitator, but he wasn't good as the team leader of the small groups ministry.  
80 Three years into the ministry of Hope Community, the church only had four  
81 small groups and one of them was floundering. Rocky and Clark both knew that  
82 more groups were needed, they just couldn't seem to get any more started.  
83 Consequently, the assimilation of new members and the discipleship of  
84 members were lagging far behind the growth of the church. Rocky's wonderful  
85 power of persuasion just didn't seem to work when it came to small groups.  
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87 A Wednesday evening service for believers was an integral component  
88 of the Hope strategy from the beginning. Rocky had planned for the Wednesday  
89 service would be a time for training and leadership development. However, he  
90 rarely seemed to get to that agenda. Rocky was so busy that he just didn't have

91 much time to prepare. Consequently, Wednesday nights became another Bible  
92 study for the key leaders of the church. Many nights, Rocky used the service to  
93 encourage the troops and to remind them of the vision. Without a permanent  
94 facility, it was difficult to maintain any momentum or consistency on  
95 Wednesday nights. Over the years they had changed locations several times.  
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97 Because of the church's rapid growth, Rocky soon had to hire staff. His  
98 first hire was a full-time worship leader. Sarah was doing a good job, but she  
99 couldn't do what a full-time trained musician could. Hope Community called  
100 Harold Slate and his wife Susan to join their staff. Harold and Susan were long  
101 time friends of Rocky and Sarah. They had often talked about the day when  
102 they would serve together. Harold stepped right in and immediately made a  
103 difference. The quality of worship at Hope Community went even higher.  
104 Everyone in the church quickly fell in love with Harold, Susan and their new  
105 baby Heather. Harold was a great blessing to Rocky. Finally, Rocky had a  
106 friend in ministry that he could talk to on a daily basis. Rocky didn't feel as  
107 alone and afraid as he had before.  
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109 By the end of the third year, Hope Community had also called a part-  
110 time minister of children and a full-time secretary. Rocky hadn't anticipated  
111 how little the new converts they were reaching, would give financially. The  
112 church's budget was stretched to the max. Rocky hadn't taken a raise in two  
113 years. Because of the tight budget at the church and at home, Sarah had to go  
114 back to work. The double income eased the Popes financial pressure, but Sarah  
115 soon felt disconnected from the ministry. The Popes wanted Sarah to be  
116 involved in the ministry, but they also enjoyed their suburban lifestyle. Living  
117 on a pastor's salary made it difficult to keep up with the affluence of their  
118 neighbors.  
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120 Rocky enjoyed the success and growth of Hope Community, but he was  
121 beginning to feel a little overwhelmed. Rocky loved to spend time with people,  
122 but the administrative side of the church was really beginning to get to him. He  
123 was preaching twice on Sundays, managing the staff and ministry teams,  
124 handling the evangelism and outreach, and teaching on Wednesday nights. And  
125 his "to-do" list was getting longer! His counseling load had almost tripled since  
126 he preached a sermon series on marriage. In addition, the church was in the  
127 middle of a fund-raising campaign. Hope Community was trying to buy some  
128 land and build a permanent facility. A stern, intense, stressed-out man had  
129 replaced the happy go-lucky, fun loving Rocky. A couple of church members  
130 had mentioned that Rocky just wasn't himself anymore. Several other members  
131 suggested that his preaching lacked the creativity and flair that it once had.  
132 Rocky hadn't realized how much difference there was in being a senior pastor,  
133 as compared to being an associate. He longed for simpler and quieter days.  
134 There were days when he wished someone else would lead for a while.  
135

136 About half way into their fourth year, Hope Community hit a wall. For  
137 the first time ever, some of the members began to express some dissatisfaction  
138 with the church. One or two complained about Rocky's leadership. Several  
139 others, including Clark Harrison, were concerned that they weren't being "fed"  
140 enough. The church was reaching plenty of new people, but their  
141 assimilation/discipleship process was seriously floundering. Lasha was  
142 continuing to do great work with ministry involvement and Rocky assessed his  
143 work with the 101 membership class as acceptable. However, the 201-maturity  
144 class was almost non-existent. Clark was very concerned.

146 Rocky was concerned about Clark and Nancy. Ever since the Slates had  
147 joined the staff, Rocky's relationship with Clark had grown cold. Clark quit  
148 calling to invite Rocky to lunch. Clark often questioned Rocky about the  
149 direction of the church in their leadership meetings. Rocky new that Clark was  
150 disgruntled but he didn't know how to restore their relationship. He tried to talk  
151 to Clark over supper one night but Clark just said the problem was with himself  
152 and that he would figure it out. Rocky decided to give Clark some space after  
153 that and the two rarely spoke. Still, Rocky was shocked when Clark and Nancy  
154 announced that they were leaving Hope Community to plant their own church.  
155 Two weeks after the announcement, Clark, Nancy and four other families left to  
156 start Lifeway Fellowship. Lifeway Fellowship was going to be built on the "cell  
157 church" model. Someone overheard Clark say that he was finally going to be  
158 free to truly disciple people.

160 Shortly after the Harrisons left, Lasha Duke asked for an appointment  
161 with Rocky. Rocky smelled more trouble. His fears were justified. Lasha  
162 expressed her own concerns about the health of the church. She was concerned  
163 that Hope Community hadn't implemented its discipleship/assimilation process.  
164 She was afraid they were going to lose more people out the back door than they  
165 were gaining through the front. She accused Rocky of being more concerned  
166 about numbers than he was people. Rocky got defensive and lost his cool. He  
167 made his own verbal counterattack. Lasha left the meeting in a huff. Rocky felt  
168 better after having gotten some things off his chest. However, it didn't take long  
169 before he began to feel guilty about his outburst. He was worried that things  
170 were getting out of hand. He wanted to talk to Sarah about it but things were  
171 kind of tense at home also. He did confide in Harold who suggested that Rocky  
172 talk to one of the other senior pastors in the area. Harold felt like Rocky needed  
173 an outsider's perspective. He also thought that Rocky needed to talk with  
174 someone with more leadership experience.

176 Rocky didn't know any of the pastors in the area very well. He knew  
177 that there was a group of pastors that met regularly to pray together, but he had  
178 only attended one of their meetings. He just didn't have time for that sort of  
179 thing. He couldn't see how praying with a group of other pastors was going to  
180 help his church grow. Besides, most of the other pastors were jealous of his  
181 success. Rocky assumed that his young, growing church, threatened them.

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There was one pastor, however, who really impressed Rocky. Tommy Cramer was about his age and was doing an excellent job at Faithbridge Church. He and Tommy had met at the pastors' prayer meeting and felt instantly connected. They intended to get together for lunch but just hadn't gotten around to it. Rocky decided he would call Tommy and invite him to lunch.

Before Rocky could meet with Tommy, more trouble came. Tonya Davis, Hope Community's children's minister, confided to Sarah that Mac, her husband, was having an affair. Tonya was afraid that Mac was about to leave her and the two kids. When Rocky heard the news, he immediately called Mac to set up an appointment but Mac wouldn't talk to him. Mac sent Rocky an email saying that he was leaving Tonya and that he wouldn't be back to church. He told Rocky that he wouldn't be talking to anyone about the situation, his mind was made up. Rocky and Sarah spent every free moment for the next two weeks trying to minister to Tonya and the kids. Rocky knew that the issue was also a church matter, but he had no clue what to do or how to handle things.

Rocky wondered if maybe his dad might be right. Mr. Pope had frequently encouraged Rocky to develop a Constitution and By-laws. He had also encouraged Rocky to put together an elder team or a pastor's counsel. Rocky had been hesitant to act on either of these suggestions. Rocky had too much experience with people trying to run the church. Now he sure wished that he had some kind of official group with whom he could talk through this situation. He didn't want to talk it over with his dad because he didn't want to hear "I told you so." Rocky was worried that all of the negative stuff going on was going to impact worship attendance. He was beginning to feel like the entire church might fall apart. Everything felt so loosely tied together. No one had any real roots at Hope Community. He could see all of his hopes and dreams crumbling, and he was scared. Rocky called Tommy Cramer.

Rocky and Tommy met for over two hours. Rocky hadn't intended to, but he spilled his guts to Tommy. Tommy was a very patient and caring listener. Rocky was relieved to finally talk with someone who had actually "been there." Tommy made a couple of specific suggestions related to the problems at Hope Community. More importantly however, Tommy suggested that Rocky take some time off. Tommy counseled Rocky to get away for a few days and spend some time alone with God. Rocky took him up on the suggestion and booked a week at a nearby retreat center.

The week of Rocky's retreat finally came. He was extremely tired and was really looking forward to getting away. Rocky took a couple of books to read, along with his Bible. He had been wanting to read the book *Fresh Wind and Fresh Fire* by Jim Cymbala. In addition, Tommy had given him a book entitled *City Reaching* written by Jack Dennison. Tommy told him that several of the pastors in the community were reading the book together. Rocky decided

228 he would read the Cymbala book first. Wow, was he challenged! He began to  
229 reflect on his ministry and wondered how much of what they had accomplished  
230 was God's doing and how much of it was his doing. Rocky was convinced that  
231 Hope Community needed to be more of a praying church. Rocky determined to  
232 change some things when he got back from his retreat.  
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234 Later in the week, Rocky read the city-reaching book. The book  
235 challenged much of his thinking. All of his ministry life he had been trained to  
236 grow his church. Dennison was suggesting a new way of thinking. A "city  
237 church" and "community transformation were new ideas to Rocky. He wasn't  
238 sure he was ready to embrace all that Dennison had to say. He was intrigued  
239 however, by the idea of viewing ministry to the community as an integral part of  
240 spreading the gospel. He certainly was in favor of revival and spiritual  
241 awakening. His question was, "what does community transformation have to do  
242 with the problems I'm having at Hope Community?" Rocky headed back home  
243 refreshed and hopeful, but with more questions than answers.  
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