

Hope in Crises among Western-European Church Planters

Research Report

**Marry Schoemaker, marryschoemaker@gmail.com
Siebrand Wierda, siebrand@siebrandwierda.nl**

Amsterdam, November 2016

CONTENTS

Summary	3
1 The Research	5
1.1 Background.....	5
1.2 Research Question and Focus	5
1.3 Methodology	5
1.4 Research Team	6
1.5 Thanks.....	6
2 Results I: Experiences of Crisis	8
2.1 Specific Challenges	8
2.2 Into the Wind.....	8
2.3 High but also unclear Expectations	9
2.4 Uncertainty about Finances and Facilities.....	9
2.5 Team.....	10
2.6 Relationships with Others	10
2.7 Faith Questions.....	11
2.8 Deconstruction and Incomprehension.....	12
2.9 Effect: Loneliness, Exhaustion	13
3 Results II: Guidelines for Resilience.....	14
3.1 Personal: Living in Confidence and Grace	14
3.1.1 Foundation of Grace.....	14
3.1.2 Knowing your own Potential and Pitfalls and Responding.....	15
3.1.3 Ease in Relationships with Others	17
3.2 Marriage and Family: Giving them Priority	17
3.3 Team: Trust in working together.....	18
3.4 Network: Friendship and Mentoring.....	20
3.5 Denomination: Support from the Heart.....	21
4 Reflections.....	23
4.1 Hope in Crises.....	23
4.2 Idolatries and Grace	23
5 Literature.....	26

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of the 21st century church planting has developed strongly in the Netherlands and Western Europe. For sustainability of this movement it is important that church planters continue to be resilient and full of hope even in times of disappointment and crises.

In 35 interviews and two focus groups research was done into how church planters in Amsterdam and other Western-European cities experience crisis and how they find the hope that helps them remain resilient. The starting point for this research was not the prevention of disappointment or crisis but the understanding that these crises are a part of life and that vulnerability and hope are actually important elements of the gospel that church planters seek to live out and share. The research focuses on church-planting initiatives that have been running for less than 10 years, that have been initiated by reformed (or related) churches, and are initiated by a pioneer from the country itself.

The research shows that great joy but also resistance to the gospel is felt strongly in pioneers' work. Expectations of pioneering are often high but also unclear. Many pioneers experience uncertainty concerning facilities and finances. Internal conflicts within teams are felt heavily and many feel there are not enough 'strong shoulders' for support. Another challenge are the many encounters with brokenness in the lives they meet. Throughout the interviews spiritual struggles are mentioned several times. Some pioneers start to question their faith and this can raise anxiety about losing their faith or support. It is evident that there is not always room to discuss such struggles openly. Typically pioneers look for new methods and think out of the box. In order to initiate something new, a process of disconnecting from church and other social groups is often needed. While the pioneer may be very loyal to the denomination, recognition and support from the older churches is often lacking. Some pioneers feel that the denomination doesn't find missionary work very important or feels threatened by the work of the pioneer. Uncertainty, guilt and pride can contribute to all of these experiences of crises, resulting in loneliness and exhaustion.

To remain resilient and hopeful in difficult times it is faith that is most important. This faith does not solve the experiences of crisis, but it does create some breathing space. Firstly it is the confidence in knowing that it is all God's work and His responsibility. This is seen as a calling to follow God and as an invitation to draw strength from Him. Various pioneers mentioned that the gospel gives the opportunity for a person's identity to be found in God's love and not in their own performance, activism or running projects.

In a culture of grace, vulnerability and failure are part of the church planting story. This provides space to truly experiment and learn from mistakes. God's grace gives room to acknowledge failure, emotions and possible wrong motivations. This self-awareness is essential for pioneers, as well as discovering a personal spirituality in order to live in connection to God. Enough rest and realistic job descriptions are equally important. Knowing that God is the source gives the opportunity of being more relaxed and patient amongst others. Besides caring for one's own wellbeing, it is essential to give priority to one's marriage and family (where applicable). Trust and safe relationships within the team are also a great source of strength. As are the support of a mentor, spiritual coach or a circle of friends who can contribute their thoughts and ask difficult questions. Finally, the trust and support of established churches is extremely important, especially in times of crisis.

The experience of many pioneers is that it is especially in these difficult or vulnerable situations, that the grace of God becomes more and more evident. They also feel that experiencing helplessness or

failure can break ground for a new sense of trust. What is needed are communities who live by the grace of God and hope, where one can find space to be honest about shame, loneliness and failure.

1 THE RESEARCH

1.1 BACKGROUND

In the Netherlands and Western Europe as a whole many new church initiatives are being planted. Since the beginning of the 21st century church planting has taken off. It has become a real movement of church renewal. Along with the great joy, pioneering also brings real disappointments. Work challenges, disappointing results and a lack of support can lead to personal or spiritual crises.

In order to ensure that new church plants are further developed and that the movement spreads, it is important that pioneers stay resilient. Where do pioneers find hope? And how can they be supported in positive ways, so that the movement of church renewal can be strengthened?

Siebrand Wierda initiated the research following his own church planting experiences from 2001 onwards, and from the hope and crises of that work. Marry Schoemaker contributed both as journalist and researcher, and from her experiences as a member of the church plant Via Nova in Amsterdam.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND FOCUS

The starting point for this research was not the prevention of disappointment or crisis but the understanding that these crises are a part of life and that vulnerability and hope are actually important elements of the gospel that church planters seek to live out and share. The research question is: In which ways do church planters in Amsterdam and other Western European cities experience crises and where do they draw hope that helps them to remain resilient? In the research into how crises are experienced, understandings of 'success' and 'failure' are also looked at.

The research focuses on plants that have been started within the past 10 years, are initiated by reformed (or related) churches in Amsterdam or other Western European cities, and have been initiated by a pioneer or pioneering married couple from the country itself. The focus is on cities as the movement of church planting and church renewal began in cities and because initiatives in dynamic urban contexts have often inspired initiatives in other places. Several pioneers from one city (Amsterdam) were interviewed so that experiences could be compared. Further to this, in order to broaden the perspective, pioneers from other Western-European cities were also interviewed. In this report the terms 'church planter' and 'pioneer' are used interchangeably.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

In 2015/2016 31 pioneers were interviewed. Of the interviewees 26 were men and 5 women (it is noticeable that church planters are mostly men.) 12 interviewees were, or are, involved in church planting in Amsterdam, including two married couples. 10 interviewees were or are involved in church planting in other cities in The Netherlands, including one married couple. The other interviewees work or worked in cities in Great Britain (6 people), Ireland (1 person), Czech Republic (1 person), Germany (1 person.) Amongst the interviewees there were also a few who coach other church planters from their own experience.

Four other people (2 men and 2 women) were not interviewed as church planters but in their role as close friend of a church planter, in order to include their perspective to the story. All four live in the Netherlands.

The interviewees were found using the 'snowball method.' The interviews were done face-to-face, by skype or telephone and lasted on average, an hour. After a short introduction to the research open questions were used to focus in on experiences of crisis and hope. All experiences have been made anonymous. The interviewees were all in different phases of the church planting process and had various experiences of crisis of whatever measure. At least eight of the pioneers interviewed had to stop working due to a crisis. Some became involved in other church planting initiatives at a later date.

The experiences were also shared in two meetings with church planters involved in the research. The first was held in Amsterdam in December 2015 and was presented as a focus group on hope in crises, for church planters. 10 Dutch pioneers who had been invited took part (7 men, 3 women). Of these, 5 were also interviewed. A pioneer who could not be present shared his experiences in depth in an email. This was incorporated into the research. Miranda Klaver (see 1.4) was also present during this meeting. The meeting was led by Marry Schoemaker and Siebrand Wierda. The second meeting was a workshop during the City to City Conference in Lisbon in April 2014, entitled 'When Ministry is Wearing me out – Hope in Crises.' This session had 25 participants (14 women, 11 men) with an average age of 35 yrs old. They chose to participate in this workshop as one of their workshop options. Three participants were not involved in church planting at the time, three were present as spouse of a church planter the other participants were involved in church planting themselves. This workshop was led by Nienke Hofsink (Theology student) and Marry Schoemaker. In both meetings the research was explained, participants gave (anonymous) responses to statements on a flip chart, using stickers, and an open discussion followed in which experiences were shared. In the second meeting a number of subjects were further discussed in groups of twos and threes. In this meeting the participants filled in a short questionnaire, anonymously if desired.

This research also makes use of findings from a literature study.

1.4 RESEARCH TEAM

The research project was led by Dr. Siebrand Wierda. He has much experience as a church planter in Amsterdam and also in other cities and works presently as a social entrepreneur. The research was conducted by Marry Schoemaker. She has a Master in Social and Cultural Anthropology and in Christian Studies of Science and Society and has experience in research and journalism.

In designing the research plan the following people were involved: Dr. Miranda Klaver, lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at VU Amsterdam; Prof. Stefan Paas, Professor of Church Planting and Church Renewal at VU Amsterdam and Professor of Missiology at the Theological University of Kampen and Prof. Joke van Saane, Professor of Education Theology and Religious Studies at VU Amsterdam.

Paas, Wierda and Schoemaker are members of Via Nova in Amsterdam. Via Nova is one of the recently planted churches in the denomination of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands; Via Nova supported this research.

1.5 THANKS

The researchers would like to thank all the interviewees for their time and openness. It was an honour to listen to your sincere stories about hope in crises. Financial support was given by deputaatschap Aanvullende Steun Missionaire Projecten van de Gereformeerde kerken (vrijgemaakt) (Additional Support for Missionary Project Fund by Reformed Churches), the Foundation Pro Religione et Liberate and a number of individual donors. We are especially grateful to them. We are

grateful to Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas and Joke van Saane for their support. Thank you Via Nova for facilitating the research. We would like to thank Annemarie van Donselaar and Laurens van Lavieren for reading the initial research report. Thank you Naomi Bouma for the beautiful translation of the text into English.

2 RESULTS I: EXPERIENCES OF CRISIS

The work of a pioneer has many of the same challenges as the work of a pastor (for challenges of a pastor see for example Van Rhenen et al. 2015), but has an additional uncertainty in entrepreneurship. The first paragraph of this chapter looks at the specific nature of challenges for pioneers. Furthermore, the various sorts of experiences of crisis will be described.

2.1 SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

In comparison to the work of regular pastors the work of pioneering often has extra demands on finances and resources. This emerged from the interviews and workshops. Growth and change is also expected and the pioneer often operates in an environment where structure and like-mindedness are lacking – definitely in areas of Western-Europe where there are few church planters.

“Working in an established church is like rowing on a river, but church planting is like being on an ocean; it gives a disorientating feeling,” according to one of the church planters, (A). Also the work is often under a spotlight. “You see when something’s going wrong more quickly, but you also see the blessing more quickly,” said a church planter who had previously been a pastor of an established church, (B). There is rarely a strong team so the pioneer does many various tasks. On top of this, pioneers are frequently extrovert personalities who are more than averagely attractive to other people. The interplay of desire and needs of the pioneer and other people can lead to unhealthy relationships. This can be augmented by the fact that boundaries in voluntary organisations such as churches, suggested (C), are often less clear, and because existential desires and fears are dealt with in religious contexts (see Van Saane 2012: 69).

If we compare the work of church planters to the work of other entrepreneurs we see that the church planter often experiences his or her mission as existential. They are involved in their mission with their whole life. If church planters speak about their motivation for their work the following three points are usually mentioned. Firstly the experience of feeling called or compelled by the love of Christ. Then a longing for people to come to faith and to get to know God, and this is often coupled with sadness if that is not the present situation. And finally the sense that the work fits well with their own personality. This last point is expressed such as: “I was made for this,” “..to be a part of creating new forms of the church is a great privilege...” and “I would get bored if I wasn’t pioneering.” Exploring new paths and ‘working on the frontline’ gives pioneers energy and joy. (See also Van der Molen 2008: 64.)

2.2 INTO THE WIND

It is in pioneering that the joy but also resistance to the gospel is strongly felt. One of the church planters, (D), told of the hope and love that she experiences in her work but also said, “It is never simple or clear in this world, the message of the kingdom is controversial and sometimes hard to swallow.” If there is little response to the gospel or if new faith appears to be lost, the pioneer can feel sad, start to struggle and feel they are ‘plodding.’ It’s not illogical that the title of a book about ‘new ways of being church’ is called *Plodding and Pioneering* (Ploeteren & Pionieren, Vellekoop & Van Loo, 2009). “It is work demanding high investment and low yield,” according to one of the pioneers, (E). (D) described it as “Cycling into the wind. It’s unknown paths demanding endurance. You have to be crazy to do it.”

2.3 HIGH BUT ALSO UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS

The expectations pioneers have, may be linked to their personality and background; for some they are really idealistic and visionary, for others more uncertain. Some pioneers have grown up in a family where missions have played a major role. These experiences can provide a good foundation for the work, but a close friend of one of these church planters, (F), said that a need to “please the parents” possibly played a role in choosing the vocation. Another church planter, (A), said that due to the entrepreneurial background of his family, he feared failing as an ‘entrepreneur’.

The predominant image of the typical pioneer also plays a role. The role is seen as male, expressive, outgoing, brave, good on stage, ‘possibly with a wife standing beside him.’ Female pioneers or those with different personality types may feel they cannot live up to these expectations (see Crown in 2013 and Van Saane 2012: 58-61).

Furthermore, there are expectations from a team and any supporters, about the particular lifestyle of the pioneer and the way he or she relates to church frameworks. Pioneers may be required to remain accountable for these. Expectations can be divided; one person may think that the church plant isn’t innovative or creative enough while the other thinks it is close to the limits. The pioneer needs to steer a path through all this.

Also, there are often expectations about the success of the work. These expectations are often high (see also Rust 2013: 4), but criteria for success, often unclear. The number of people that come to services is regularly taken as a measure, and brings a sense of failure if church plants don’t grow. However, this demands the question whether a larger community, by definition, is a better community. And whether it is possible to make a church. “You can give it everything, but ultimately the church community is a grace-gift of God,” said one of the pioneers, (G). Experiences of reality not being consistent with plans previously made, can cause stress.

2.4 UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FINANCES AND FACILITIES

Pioneers who began their work at the beginning of the 21st century seem to have started quite independently of existing churches. They often had fewer examples and made the space to start something new. Nowadays there is much more space, coaching and financial support for church planters from within the church. Some compare the established church to a university hospital where there is much theological and financial capital and people who want to take part. And the pioneer initiatives are compared to field hospitals which find connections more easily in various locations, but remain in relationship with the university hospital.

And yet for church planters there is still a lot of uncertainty about finances and facilities, such as a suitable venue. (D), “A pioneer faces constant financial pressure.” Insufficient training, a lack of good working conditions and support following the expiry of a temporary contract were all mentioned. Some pioneers suggested that this situation is often worse than for regular pastors and missionaries sent by church denominations. (B), “A pioneer has to work it out himself.” Sometimes financial support is conditional on success, and this can result in pressure that some pioneers don’t function well under.

If a team is small, the church planter often has to do many various activities themselves. “I copy, make flyers, keep the website up. You don’t have a whole group of people who are willing to do all sorts of jobs,” said (B). If these tasks don’t fit well with the pioneer and they are taken on for long periods of time, or if the pioneer does not take sufficient rest, fatigue will almost inevitably be the consequence.

The feeling of dependence, however is expressed by some as a good experience. "You live closer to God. And because you're looking for support, you can always talk about and share the work and invite people to be involved," stated (H, spouse of B).

2.5 TEAM

In addition to performance pressure and uncertainty regarding facilities and finances, relationships can also cause difficulties. Several pioneers mentioned how painful conflicts within a team can be. One pioneer, (C), explained what he found most difficult, "When people who you feel are close to you, who you expect to cover your back, stab you in the back. They desert you. That is the worst; head and shoulders above everything else."

Sometimes it is difficult to put a good team together. (I), "One minute someone wants to be secretary of the church, three months later, they are no longer in the church. Team members also have strong boundaries, 'No, I can't then, I don't want to then.' Sometimes it feels like we have to do everything alone." (Y), "In the city especially, it is difficult to find people who are able to commit for longer periods of time. So you can start to feel responsible and do things that you shouldn't have to do, that's how people burn out." Delegating activities can also be difficult if the pioneer is uncertain about the vision and skills of others.

Sometimes team members leave due to moving house, or illness, or sometimes due to a difference in vision. (B), "You're dependent on the people you're working with, you work with volunteers, a group of Christians who want to be involved. If two or three people give up because of something trivial, or going in a different direction, a project can completely flop."

In a church planting initiative supported by two Reformed churches, the pioneer, (K), also found it difficult to get a good team together. "Of the thousand members of the two churches, there are eight people who really wanted to put their weight behind this. Maybe there aren't many people who like leaving familiarity behind, not knowing what will happen, or whether it will succeed." Growing churches can sometimes experience this very thing, that more people want to be involved, but it can also be people who do not feel at home in existing churches who out of their frustration are looking for something new. This is a frequent source of problems and conflict. (See also Van der Molen 2008: 191.) Being very patient in choosing the right people who will contribute their talents and commitment to the initiative was mentioned several times.

2.6 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Pioneers experienced much joy in relationships with other people. But what is difficult is coming into contact with the brokenness in the lives of others. This came up in about a quarter of the interviews. It can be physical, mental or emotional health, living circumstances and choices. "In deprived neighbourhoods the problems overwhelm you. And the commitment of pioneers is often so high that to stop often feels like being a traitor," according to a coach of pioneers in the Netherlands, (L). Some church planters feel that they should be available day and night to help others, to compensate for their struggles somehow, and this easily results in unhealthy relationships. Sometimes this combines with a pioneer's personality or personal background or the need to be appreciated.

It can also be difficult to give concerns about other people to God. (M), "My spiritual crisis last week was that I could see in a pastoral situation how someone was really taking the wrong decisions. I then tend to call, and explain it again one more time." Scepticism among people with whom the

church planter comes in contact, can also cause real doubts. The experience of people dropping out can do this too.

In situations where the pioneer has children and a lot of people come to the home worries can arise about the impact of vulnerable or damaged people on the children. Also from a broader perspective the family may be put under pressure by the impact of the work. In interviews some older pioneers said that they look back with regret on the years when they had given too little time and attention to their spouse and / or children. During the workshop in Amsterdam various people (anonymously) responded affirmatively to the statement 'My marriage is under pressure from work or the way I deal with it.' The statement 'I suffer from sexual temptation,' was recognised by several people in both workshops.

2.7 FAITH QUESTIONS

Several pioneers mentioned spiritual struggles which were manifested in for example disease, discontent, gossip and conflicts. Pioneer (B), "The reality is that if you are going to extend the kingdom of God there will be trouble and disappointment. But there is also a trust that God works through crises and that right there maybe something good might happen." A church planter who had to stop working after a crisis, (A), described how he felt that God was against him. "The brutality of the spiritual attacks (diseases, depression, people dropping out,) under which we suffered was terrible. One time at three o'clock in the morning I was lying on the floor holding the hand of our daughter who could not sleep. For an hour I had this feeling that God is terrible. But after two hours came the feeling, 'I trust in God.' I went through all the emotions. That takes time, and you can see that even in people in the Bible. I am not a special case. It changed my faith." "We do not always see this," said another pioneer, (N). "Prayer is very important."

Things can also change in the area of faith. In the questionnaire during the Lisbon workshop (see 1.3) eight people responded that they find it hard to find trust in God rather than become sceptical, cynical or discouraged. This also came out in some of the interviews. Some, however, expressed how the faith of new Christians or Christians with different cultural backgrounds can provide new perspectives. Others said that 'peripheral issues' became less important and that Jesus had taken a more central position. Or that they experienced more space to ask questions from an understanding that God is bigger than the image that they had had of Him.

In the same survey six people reported that their convictions had changed in the field of creation and the beginning of the world, this also came out in two interviews. Eight people indicated in the questionnaire that their beliefs in heaven and hell and God's judgment changed and four people stated this in the interview. In interviews some pioneers explained that they got stuck trying to make the connection between theology and the practice of everyday life. For example, they could not reconcile their previous ideas about hell and heaven with the experience that many people lead a good life without God, trying to talk sin on them to make it clear that they need Jesus. Or they didn't want to consider all the good and beauty in the life of non-Christians as 'not being from God.' One pioneer, (O), described his difficulty in continually evaluating the faith and behaviour of others in order to assess if their eternal destiny was in danger. Some had difficulty relating an eternal hell to God's love.

(O) said he has come to believe that there will ultimately be no hell. Others believe that choosing for or against Jesus really does matter and that it is also possible to reject God altogether. And that God will fight for those who are oppressed. But they believe it is important that people do not go to God out of a fear of hell but discover the love of God as seen completely in Jesus. Some pioneers said that they do not see it as their task to convince others, but to live according to God's kingdom or to work

for the prosperity of the city as in Jeremiah 29. In this way they hope to bring people into contact with the gospel. They want to trust that God also works among people who are not Christians, and assume that conversion is not done by man but by God's Spirit and that judgment is also up to God. Some pioneers disclosed that they had become more aware of God's love and grace. Their beliefs about right and wrong had become less 'black and white.' Furthermore, some pioneers spoke about a process of releasing 'religious ideas about how things should be done' in order to reach out to others. This process can be costly. (BB), "Church planters here in the UK have very clear ideas about many things, but the job and life are often complex. Some of them develop a more mature view of God; that not all prayers are answered, that God can sometimes seem far away and that there is no explanation for some things that happen. But some personalities are unable to be flexible. They want to stick strictly to their doctrines. Those who are successful say that God blesses you if you stick to the correct doctrines. For those who are not successful, it is difficult."

Questions of faith can be accompanied by anxiety. (L), "I find it difficult to be interested in others. It feels like a threat to my identity and faith, the fear that there is some truth in that. I see it in others too, the fear of losing the true faith or the gospel." (P) described seeking a connection between faith and other people as a no man's land. "When you find new forms, you do not know exactly how you will find Christ. I am sometimes really worried that I'm doing it wrong." In the questionnaire completed during the workshop in Lisbon, eleven people indicated that they find it difficult to believe or do things in a way that differs from their (church) background and eight people indicated that they find it hard to believe or do things differently than the rest of the team or the community. This was also said in a few interviews.

If the pioneer's faith changes along the way and if he or she has struggles in their faith, there is not always room to discuss it openly. This is also relevant to pastors in general.¹ (Q), "It happened very gradually for me. On the outside, I gave the same answers, but inside there was friction. It's a bit of a taboo, you're the one who's supposed to teach faith, but you're doubting." Wife (R), "This phase is doing me good, but the people in our community need clear answers." (O) described when he said that he had come to believe in another way as 'coming out.'

2.8 DECONSTRUCTION AND INCOMPREHENSION

"Pioneers have to deal with massive deconstruction," said a coach of pioneers in the Netherlands, (L). "In order to build, a serious demolition needs to take place first as we also often see in the Bible. It's painful. A pioneer breaks away from the church and other social groups, to start something new. This is something you need to undergo together as a team. The trick is to be in that place, being open-minded and trusting. And here, you need the recognition and support of the established church. There is often tremendous loyalty from the pioneers to the church, and the pioneer wants to build the church. But recognition is often lacking from the church."

This experience was shared widely. Some church planters have the feeling that evangelism is seen as less important by the church or that the church feels threatened by pioneering work. Co-operating well then becomes difficult or even impossible. In the run-up to a pioneering project that was being supported by two existing churches, (K), felt sadness and frustration. "It took months. I was asked, 'Suppose you get ill, then you wouldn't be able to do the job and we'd be left with the costs.' The whole project costs one euro a month per church member. So much self-centeredness and lack of

¹ For pastors' doubts of faith, see the report of Jan Muddé who researched pastors' doubts in the Dutch Reformed Church in the 'Information Book 2014' from the denomination.

faith frustrated me enormously.” According to (L), situations like this can cause the pioneer to start communicating less clearly about his or her ideas. This comes from a fear of being misunderstood or rejected and only increases the lack of understanding.

Pioneer (P) described how complicated it is to connect in new fields from the Christian faith. “As a pioneer you represent the church in society; praying, sharing Bible stories, leading funerals and other rituals. And that means something to a lot of people, even if they do not believe. Even if this is very difficult, with various conflicting interests, I won’t give up this role as representative of the church.” She says that this approach has cost a lot and that she has often felt lonely and unsupported by the wider church.

2.9 EFFECT: LONELINESS, EXHAUSTION

Crisis experiences as described above can lead to experiences of loneliness and exhaustion. Pioneers are known to like working solo. Many of them think ‘out of the box’ and find new ways of sharing the gospel that connect with the culture. But if they don’t find recognition, feelings of being misunderstood and loneliness can rear their heads.

Alongside the nagging feeling of disappointment the idea, ‘I should be doing it better’ arises. When comparing themselves to more successful pioneers they are faced with doubts about their own suitability (see also Van der Molen 2008: 61). (K), “Then I read again about the numerous baptisms in another church and get the feeling we’re lagging behind here.” The entrepreneurial element appears to play a role. “The idea of having to be the best in your industry.”

Guilt, fear and also pride can become significant motivational bases. These bases can easily result in the church planter not really being open to God and other people any more. (S), “You’ve now turned forty, have a family, have a surer sense of yourself and feel a bit lazy. You think, ‘We’ve made it, we’ve become influential.’ Maybe because people flatter you or like your church. But then you get proud. And that prevents you from learning more, because you think you already know it. And you won’t grow anymore.” Fear of arrogance sometimes manifests itself in uncertainty. (N), said he was completely blown away after a compliment, because he felt that the work depended on him. Van Saane (2012) writes that an ambivalent combination of humility and arrogance is characteristic of religious leaders and can be caused by a strong sense of vocation. “On the one hand, the religious leader has access to secrets that are hidden from ‘the people,’ and yet the leader is constantly being confronted with their own shortcomings” (p. 54). The personality and personal situation of the pioneer also play a part in this.

In addition to this two people who coach pioneers said that pioneers are often reluctant to ask for help. (L), “Mainly, they look at the square meter of ground in front of them and do not ask for coaching or guidance that may be available.” Exhaustion is a major risk for pioneers. During the workshop in Lisbon (see 1.3) 18 of the 25 participants indicated that they often feel tired or find it hard to relax. Half said that they frequently feel exhausted. It was also mentioned in some of the interviews. The questionnaire asked participants to give a grade on a scale of 1 – 10 about their own well-being. 21 people filled this in: of these 14 people gave the well-being (6, 7 or 8), seven people gave a 2, 3, 4 or 5. The impact of this is most probably felt both at home and in the team.

Church planter (T), “I have always worked in pioneer situations, and I think that's my calling, I thrive on it.” But he added, “It also has a price. Sometimes you feel exhausted, alone or misunderstood.” The interviews and workshops show that many pioneers recognise these experiences.

3 Results II: Guidelines for Resilience

The research also gives advice about how to stand strong in times of crisis. In order to remain resilient and hopeful in unsettling times, trust is the most important element. First and foremost this is the confidence that it is all God's work and responsibility. In addition, trust is important in close relationships; one's team, network and supporters. This confidence does not solve the crisis experiences as described in Chapter 2 but creates some breathing space.

3.1 PERSONAL: LIVING IN CONFIDENCE AND GRACE

Several pioneers shared that they experienced more space through an awareness that God's grace is the source of missionary work and that God is responsible for the mission. An effect of this can be seen in one's personal identity and spirituality when facing difficult issues or opportunities, and a greater ease in relationships with others.

3.1.1 Foundation of Grace

In discussions it was said that such an understanding that responsibility for the mission lies with God is experienced as a call to follow God and as an invitation to find strength in Him. Pioneer (V), "The power isn't found in your capacities or efficiency, but in Jesus Christ through the Spirit." Pioneer (N) remembered advice he had received from a member of the church when his congregation grew, "Beware of experience, continue to ask the Lord how to do things." Pioneer (T) defined hope as "the confidence that God will be active in my future." It allows them to see their own work in perspective. (E): "Missionary workers are often huge doers with high ideals, who try to organize, instead of letting it happen. But if you live in peace, trust and relationship with God, you can accept yourself and learn from others. Then you can connect to what God is already doing and move together with the work of the Holy Spirit. That's a world of difference." (J), "You realize that the kingdom of God is much greater than your place, your church or even the greater church. God started it and we can follow Him. Then you can let go of it and have peace." (G), "If you really make time, space and devote attention to seek God, the reality of God and also of his absence is a huge source providing energy, which can help us rise above ourselves." During the workshop in Amsterdam (see 1.3) many agreed with the statement: 'I find it very reassuring that this work is ultimately God's work and experience that too.'

Several pioneers mentioned that the gospel allows you to find your personal identity in God's love and not in performance, activism or managing projects. "If God's grace has sunk into not only the mind but also the will and the heart of the pioneer, you'll see that he or she loses anxiety, fear and anger. This generates more peace," said a supervisor of pioneers (U). (See also Patrick 2010). Meeting with people who live by grace, inspired him. His advice to church planters is to find such people, "people who you love to be around." "It does you good."

In his book, *Fail: Finding hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure*, Briggs (2014) states that a "robust theology of failure" is extremely important, paying attention to grace and the recognition of Jesus as the foundation of mission and life. In a culture of grace, vulnerability and failure become part of the church planting story and mistakes are seen as something to learn from. A confrontation with vulnerability can be quite painful, but also offer some new freedom. For example, in order not to fall back on the familiar, such as a 'flashy Sunday service,' or project plans, but to actually experiment to find appropriate ways in relevant contexts. Then it is important to be realistic: "An average pioneer work grows to 50 or 60 people and remains vulnerable. Let's be honest about it,"

said supervisor (J). Several pioneers spoke of the book *Strangers and Priests* by Paas (2015), that it helped them to be realistic about missionary work in a post-Christian environment. It is important to realise that working in missions is a learning process. The outcome is uncertain and some things won't work. With sufficient self-reflection and capacities to learn something can really be learnt here, noted (EE). Supervisor (X), "If all our pioneer places only succeeded either heaven has come to earth, or we haven't been experimental enough, and probably the last. In my opinion we should be doing new things, doing things that aren't proven to be effective, that we sometimes after some time have to conclude: 'It's not working, we need to stop.'" The idea that it can 'fail,' even if money's been given for it, is like a breath of fresh air. In a culture of grace others don't get scared by crises of the pioneer. (Z), "If you are really in a crisis, you feel very small, insignificant and worthless. What has helped me is that people were not scared, were not angry, did not say: 'That's what I'd been saying for a long time,' but gave me the feeling that I could speak about everything and that they wouldn't judge me."

3.1.2 Knowing your own Potential and Pitfalls and Responding

God's grace also allows the space and opportunity to face personal weaknesses. It is essential that pioneers are self-aware in this area. Church planting triggers all the weaknesses of a person, noted supervisor (W). Different pitfalls present themselves at different stages. Being aware of this and the general welfare of the pioneer is essential, says (U), "Often we first ask how many people are coming to the meetings, and whether the church plant is financially independent yet. That is important, but secondary. How the pioneer is really doing is the primary question." (AA) stated that it is important to make pioneers aware in advance of the potential temptations that come with the job, like too much work, addictions or unhealthy relationships. "Then people can be alert to the signs and not hide them."

An awareness of grace can give courage to see one's own emotions (including anger) or possible doubts, and to go to God with them 'and keep that in tension.' "Going with all the rubbish in your heart and soul, to God," said one of the church planters during the workshop in Amsterdam. In order to do this the pioneer needs to have developed their own personal spirituality and needs to live out of this relationship with God. Chandler (2009) writes that spiritual dryness is the first sign of emotional exhaustion for church leaders and that a continual, renewing relationship with God is essential (p. 283). Sometimes the pioneer needs other forms of spirituality than those with which he or she has grown up. It can be meaningful to draw on the breadth of spirituality within the Christian tradition.² In relationship with God it's important to take time to look for rest and wisdom and not only looking for insights to share with others, especially as the faith of the pioneer is often so public.

It can be difficult. In the workshop in Lisbon (see 1.3) 19 of the 25 responded that they think personal prayer / meditation or silence is essential. At the same time 17 people responded that they find it hard to find the time (13 people indicated that they spend 0-2 hours per week, 10 people 2-4 hours and two people more than 7 hours). Yet prayer is essential to be able to focus on God, said several pioneers in the interviews. (M), "Then you discover that your desires are actually a desire to meet with him, and that it is not the 'created' that is most important. And you do not work for yourself but 'for the sake of Jesus.'" Others said that when there's connection with God an abundance can be felt, rather than the scarcity or shortage which is often experienced. (I), "You do not have to live off your left overs." From experiences gained in Urban Expression, a church planting movement in deprived

² In the Master Missional Leadership at Springdale College a whole module is dedicated to this exploration, 'Spiritual Health – Soulcare' (2014).

neighbourhoods, Blok and Vlaardingerbroek (2016) write, "It's because we're living in these neighbourhoods that we have to rely on God and feel the urgency to pray. It's not applied Christian spirituality, but about a source and inspiration in the things we do. We need to be able to see what God is doing. We ourselves need to be filled again and again with wisdom, love, patience, forgiveness. It means, naturally that we have to look to the Father more often" (p. 14).

If the pioneer gets to know himself, he will know when it's time to take rest and recharge spiritually. The interviewees appeared to have found various ways; a monthly retreat day, sports, finding time to be alone or with a few close friends, an annual visit to a monastery for a week, music, writing, studying, various forms of fasting, focusing on their own neighbourhood and minimising networking events, keeping every morning free until nine o'clock for breakfasting together and seeking God, five times a year going on a midweek retreat, keeping one day a week free. It is not so much the frequency and duration of these experiences, but their quality, says Chandler (2009). One supervisor (U), stressed that it is important that pioneers are not encouraged to "be a hero." Insufficient sleep and too much work are indicators that something needs to change quickly, he said.³

It's important to have a realistic job description for this, according to (J). The pioneer needs to know what he or she is good at, perhaps from the feedback of others if necessary. Practically speaking it's important to have a good balance between work that demands energy and work that gives energy. During the workshops and interviews, many pioneers expressed that they find administrative tasks and routine work difficult. Sometimes ways are found to share these tasks with others. Grace creates space to honestly acknowledge what your capacities are and to accept that you cannot do everything you may want to. A work space out of the home but in contact with others seemed to help some pioneers.

It important to have insight into one's motivation for the work. Risks are that the pioneer may feel the need to be a 'rescuer,' 'hero,' or 'mother,' may need the appraisal of other people or may misuse people in order to realize their own goals. Baggage from the past can also play a role here. Getting feedback from others is really important in this area, but it can be difficult for the pioneer to be open to such criticism. Sometimes a practical solution can present itself. Pioneer (W), who himself knew that he always wanted to be the best, looked for a sport which he could excel in. In this way he didn't need to be the best in his work as church planter.

Self-awareness is also necessary in order to know when it is time to stop a certain project or hand it on. A few pioneers described how, when their pioneering project got into a different phase, they started to miss some connection and began to feel tired or bored. (Q), "I love starting new things. But if it becomes a church that goes into maintenance mode, I have nothing more to offer and I don't have the energy for it." And (Z), "I went from pioneer to manager but those weren't my capacities and I became tired." This was recognised by various pioneers. The interviews showed that there can be all sort of reasons why the pioneer does not hand the work on. They may have become devoted to the church group, get asked to stay, don't dare to hand it over, haven't seen any good working

³ The importance of self-awareness and attention to spirituality and the 'inner-world' are clearly discussed (as well as practical tips about pastor's tasks and use of time) in the issue 'Between Passion and Burn-Out,' of *Handelingen*, a magazine about practical theology and the science of religion (2015). In this issue the case studies of three pastors (not pioneers) are described. In the reflection it is suggested, "They went from a more externally focussed attitude of doing, thinking and planning to a more internal of letting go, experiencing and being. Their originally high self-ideal developed to a more realistic self-image in which they were able to see their weaknesses and darker sides. From the new attitude they rediscovered pleasure in the work and were able to recommit to the work" (Bisschops 2015:28).

examples of work being passed on, feel financially dependent on the work or have a spouse who wants to stay. But experience shows that handing it on at the right time and starting again elsewhere can bring renewed strength.

3.1.3 Ease in Relationships with Others

The knowledge that God is the source offers the potential to be more relaxed in contact with other people and to be more open. Pioneer (D) described the following experience following a difficult period. "When I was able to see my work in the context of God's work, I realised that I didn't need to do it alone anymore. That I was being carried on the path that God takes with people." She experienced God alongside her. This gave her the opportunity to really go with people on their paths, she said. Pioneer (K) discovered that the gospel offers the opportunity to value other people's growth process. Two pioneers mentioned that in the church community it is not about who is inside or outside the boundaries but about Jesus as the centre. And that each person moves from their own position towards the centre. And pioneer (L) discovered that with the acknowledgement that God is the source, he felt less threatened by the ideas of others. (M), "I have to let go, God is doing his thing with people. He has grace and patience for me, so also for and with the people I am working with." (H), "It's important to give time to seekers. You can get impatient, but God takes a journey with each one. And He promises that He will continue with what He has begun. If we thank him our eyes will be open to this." That process can take generations, suggested (L). Church planter (Z) described how during a period of depression and wrong decisions, he discovered that God was more gracious than he thought. Because of this he judges others less quickly. "I've discovered that a person can only live by grace. And therefore I'm not bigger or smaller than anyone else. I want to be open to the stories of others."

Three pioneers mentioned the principle of everything in the world growing at the same time and not always knowing what is good or not good, not in teams and not in contacts with others. As an example they state that Jesus says to the disciples that those who are not against Him are for Him. That the wheat and the weeds grow together. And that in Corinth the rich and poor sat together at the communion table. (G), "We shouldn't try to force the two apart. We'll see at harvesttime." (K), "Whether people come to faith is up to God alone." This counteracts pride and self-righteousness, or an unbearable feeling of duty. (P), "You aren't the bread yourself. You give yourself to others but you can't keep on sharing yourself. I realised that when I went over my own boundaries. Jesus is the bread."

3.2 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: GIVING THEM PRIORITY

Alongside the concern for one's own welfare, it is essential that marriage and family (if applicable) are prioritised above the work. The work can bring much pressure on a marriage and family. Sometimes this insight is born from within a time of crisis; that from the basis of a relationship with God it is essential to give enough time and attention to each other.

The spouse often sees the struggles of the pioneer and can support him or her, to possibly pray with them and gives insight into character and behaviour and to help make sensible decisions. It's important to get to know and understand each other well for this. If there are signs that distance is growing or that communication is not going so well, it's important to ask for help on time, said (AA.) It can be taboo to talk about it, said (D) and others. It was said that in preparation time, it would be helpful to discuss with couples what the challenges might be.⁴ Within the church community it is also

⁴ Christine Hoover (2013) wrote a book especially for the wives of church planters (in the American setting): *The Church Planting Wife: Help and Hope for Heart*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

important that the spouse and his or her contribution is recognised. It seems best not to see the spouse as a sort of coach. One participant at the Lisbon workshop (see 1.3) said that discussing all sorts of situations with your spouse was risky. “Often you tell them about the problem but not about the next steps, your wife holds on to it and can suffer.”

The needs of a spouse need to be respected. “It is really easy to ignore your partner or take them for granted, but one day you realise that you’ve damaged something and that it’s difficult to put it right. You have to have enough time and attention for each other,” said (BB) from his experience. One of the church planters’ lessons as described in *Praten met pioniers (Talking to Pioneers)*, is “Value your partners. Start with your spouse, then your fellow church planter, your team, your friends in the neighbourhood and the churches who support you. You should be aware that they play an important role in your church doing well. Take care that you don’t get lax in maintaining those relationships” (De Jong & Blackmore 2015: 23). In the workshop many agreed with the comment that it sometimes felt as though everybody had access to the pioneers agenda apart from the spouse. (BB), “Often deep relationships develop with people of the other sex, but it is really important to give boundaries. If you have a meeting with someone of the opposite sex make sure it’s always in a public place.” Various pioneers had had crises due to wrong choices made in this area.

The needs of children (if applicable) are also important. There has to be time to relax and have fun together especially if the children get older and go to bed later. (R), “If I was reading for our daughter and someone came to the door I’d tell her, ‘Sorry sweetheart, you’ll have to wait.’ At a certain point I thought, ‘Hang on, this should be the other way round.’ I didn’t want people to get the feeling that I was rejecting them. But I really needed to choose for my children.” A number of pioneers also mentioned setting boundaries to protect their children from damaging behaviour of people in the church. (BB), looking back on a difficult time, said that it was also important to think about the children in the area of finances. “I didn’t want to be a financial burden to the church. So sometimes we had a really low income and now I regret that. The children paid the price for it.” Financial worries can also be a real pressure for a spouse.

(M) described how difficult he found it to be patient with people who weren’t as quick as himself, including his wife and children, “the people I love the most.” “But,” he said “you can’t separate your private life and your church planter’s life, they are connected in relationship to each other. If I am patient with my wife then I can be successful in my work. It’s a kind of magic link.”

Various practical solutions were found. (N), “In the early years I’d often respond to an urgent SMS in the middle of the night. Now I often react differently, turn the phone off at night. I work less evenings.” (K) and his wife often invited two couples to eat. These couples then get to know each other. (CC) and his wife asked a number of people to commit to the mission by getting alongside their family and regularly looking after the children. They also keep Saturdays free for family time. The culture of a church group plays a role here. (Z), “It’s important that the pioneer feels enough freedom to take a day off, to do something fun with his or her partner. That he’s not constantly thinking about the sermon that needs to be finished whilst he’s watching his children’s football match.”

3.3 TEAM: TRUST IN WORKING TOGETHER

Trust within a team is also a strong source of resilience. In a team something needs to have been learnt and experienced about being church in praying together and being able to talk vulnerably with each other, said a mentor, (X). (L), “You need a group of people who are on a journey of faith together and choose for a certain way of life because of this.”

It's important that team members have a healthy motivation for the work where love and not frustration plays the greatest part. It takes time to put a good team together but it's time that is necessary. Sometimes people are asked to stay at an established church and to keep committing into that and not to join the new church. It is exciting to let people who have recently come to faith to join the team and then not to think in terms of us and them, said (L). "We've experienced that God can pleasantly surprise you this way."

It takes time to build trust and safety and to share personal stories, for example in sharing meals together. "So you stay together if things get 'ugly' or it's no fun anymore," said (E). If there are problems it's good to pray for each other, not to be quick to judge but to stay calm and keep in conversation with each other, discovered (B). "It's not about the specific activities, strategy or opinions about it, but about sticking together and trusting the Holy Spirit and your relationship with each other. Praying and reading together and discovering what God reveals to you." (C), "In the bible it says that if a brother holds anything against you that you should first solve that before bringing your sacrifice. It's about someone holding something against you, not that you have a problem with someone else. If your relationships aren't OK your spiritual growth will be hindered. Then you have your foot on the accelerator and the brakes at the same time. Pioneers are often adventurous personalities and can be pretty straight. Saying sorry, being humble, wanting to be the least, doesn't often come naturally. It costs blood, sweat and tears. Sometimes you need to go through a struggle with God before He can use you in his kingdom. And often you need the experience more than once. You're being broken from your own honour, pride and strength. Then the evil one won't be able to make you fall. Because although it's not good to over-spiritualise everything, this is really a part of it." Noort et al. (2008) mentioned humility as "perhaps the most important characteristic church planters need," from an understanding that it's about God's mission and not ours (p. 329).

Having enough members in the team to share the work with, was also mentioned. Here, it's important that the pioneer really takes the lead in the first period of time, said several people. (Q), "You shouldn't be constantly trying to reach agreement." After an initial period it's important to hand it over on time. And things that are being organised need to be manageable. If nobody can be found for a certain task, you sometimes have to have the courage just to let it go. (E), "If, for example, the children's work isn't going well you can do everything to try to solve it. Or you don't fill the position, you don't avoid the pain and then wait to see if anything new starts. To see how God provides and where you should focus your attention. You can only discover that in stillness."

To assign somebody outside the team who the team can trust and who keeps up to date with the ins and outs of the team was seen as meaningful, they can advise and mediate if the team gets into difficulties together.

Sometimes two people work both part-time as pioneer alongside other work (see also Noort et al. 2008: 277, 298). This was seen as fruitful though of course not always easy, working in a team, for those who're used to going solo, said (J). "It actually generates much more creative energy. You can complement each other, with different personalities if for example one is an introvert and the other an extrovert." Paul and his friends were cited as examples and also Jesus sending the disciples out in twos. If both have a real pioneering spirit, it was added, competition can arise. One option could be to put a 'pioneer' and 'church-developer' together in a team. The pioneer leaves the church after a few years and starts elsewhere, the church developer continues with the church fellowship.

3.4 NETWORK: FRIENDSHIP AND MENTORING

The interviews showed that the trust and support of a mentor, spiritual director or a few friends is essential for hope and resilience – on top of the support of a potential spouse. (D), “The fact that I continued is down to the people who supported me spiritually and stood behind me. Somebody who could guide me through the uncertainty, the being measured and having no idea where to begin. He prayed with me. He didn’t see me as a project that needed to succeed in a year, but as a venture in God’s kingdom which gave it a far deeper dimension and became more hopeful.” This friend needs to be someone who can really understand the work but is outside the team, the church plant or organisation. Or, “a friend who doesn’t have all the answers, who has no personal interest or is in some board or other, but is on your side”, (D). In the workshops the majority said that they really need someone who listens to them and understands them, who’s not a colleague and isn’t involved in your employment. A few people said that they didn’t have a friend, mentor or coach who they can speak to openly. Other participants encouraged them to ask someone to do this for them.

Such a coach or friend embodies grace and truth for the pioneer in their practice by supporting, thinking together and asking the difficult questions when necessary: Why do you have bags under your eyes? How is your relationship with God, with your partner, your children, your team? How do you deal with temptation? What makes you feel discouraged or cynical? Of course you prefer not to talk about what’s not going well, but if there is sufficient trust the other can see through that, several church planters said. At the Lisbon workshop on the questionnaire participants were asked to indicate with a cross which of the subjects they would prefer not to answer honestly. The subjects which came out most highly were: Are you concerned that the work will be too much for you? (11 times) Have you had bad / angry feelings towards somebody else in the past month? (10 times) Have you recently thought about stopping? (9 times). Do you have sexual temptations? (7 times). Coach (L), “Men often want to sort everything out themselves and struggle with disappointment and shame. It is important to keep probing about the ideas that they have of what they have to achieve. It’s not always mentioned. And people need to be ready for it, it requires real courage to look your own sadness in the eyes.” Deciding which questions are going to be asked in advance helps. In a safe relationship the opportunity is there to discuss questions honestly, to look at causes and to pray together. Then you can speak of a ‘faith journey,’ which is important according to the *Survivalgids pionieren (Pioneer’s Survival Guide)* (Blok and Vlaardingerbroek 2016: 76,77).

Many pioneers said that it’s good to regularly schedule these times of meeting together into a rhythm that fits well with the pioneer. One pioneer who had to stop said, (DD), “If I look back, I was too lonely, too vulnerable, too solo. I know now that this is a pattern that I easily fall into; if I’m under pressure I pull back. You should really push yourself into a structure where you meet together with people at your level every week. Who you don’t have to guide or have responsibility for. I gave too much of myself and didn’t look after myself.” He suggested: “Write the seven life zones on a beer mat and look at each one.” (B), “The average nature of a pioneer’s character is that he or she is inclined to go alone. It is good to be forced to work together and to look for places where you can be coached.” And (M), “In the times that you get lots of criticism to deal with you want to hide away. That’s when things can go wrong. That’s when you need other people to push through with you and you need to get on your knees. And that happens to me sometimes. At critical times, God uses other people who have known how to push beyond my boundaries, because they always do that, and in those times, too.” Meeting informally is also necessary to build a strong friendship, so that you already know each other well before a potential crisis develops.

In the interviews some pioneers shared that they had been shocked when they had heard that a fellow pioneer had ‘messed up.’ Even if you’re in contact with someone a lot, it can be difficult to see

how someone is really doing. To ask the difficult questions and respond can require real courage. (Z), “Someone came to me and said that I was doing too much. I was angry with him. It really wasn’t going well then, otherwise I would never have been like that. He took it back, but the fact that I responded like that showed that he was right. You’re really powerfully driven. We often think, ‘What gives me the right to interfere?’ Or maybe we don’t have the skills to say it in the right loving way.” (U) experienced that intervention can sometimes be necessary. “My wife asked two of the church leaders to come along and tell me to take leave. They said, ‘You’re on leave and that’s as of now, no questions, no excuses.’ Just going on with what you have always done is often the path of least resistance. But through such an intervention the path to change is made easier than continuing. I didn’t have the energy to refuse them.”

Discussing issues in groups with other pioneers is also an option, but pioneer (Y) said that it was less suitable due to feelings of competition that may be present. However, (U) mentioned that he had found it beneficial meeting informally monthly at a meeting of several pioneers from various networks. And Godwin (2011) sees that alongside coaching from a mentor that informal networks of pioneers and their spouses, sharing knowledge and experience can also be beneficial. This is particularly true in contexts where there isn’t a church that can support the pioneer in their situation.

Having to stop

If a church planter has to stop working for some reason, friendship and mentoring become even more important. Pioneers who’ve had to stop describe having felt empty, doubted, unrecognised or alone. The feeling of having failed can be really difficult. (DD), who had to stop after an inappropriate relationship, “That year and a half was absolutely awful. You’re an outcast, that’s what you feel, lonely and depressed. The cause is your own fault, but you have to move on. The church you worked for with heart, soul and all your passion is suddenly a cold organisation that has a problem to sort out.” Several pioneers shared this experience. Feelings of shame and of ‘infecting’ the church or organisation can play a role. These kinds of responses of a church can be found very difficult by fellow pioneers and was shared in a couple of interviews.

Personal contact, enough time for reflection, recovery and grace, can really help a pioneer in this type of situation. It can sometimes be possible for someone else to jump into mediate or take the work over temporarily. (C), “Protestant churches often aren’t thinking at all strategically. There’s no structure with Bishops checking to see how pioneers are doing or how they can be helped further. Pioneers are often seen as strong people, but they’re just normal people of regular flesh and blood who have weaknesses. It would be good if there are people ready and anticipating. People who pioneers can go to with their questions.”

3.5 DENOMINATION: SUPPORT FROM THE HEART

Church planters said that the denomination and supporters play an important role. It’s important that they don’t focus on monitoring, project-plans and reports, but support from the heart and in faith. The starting point should be that the gospel invites us not to take control but to follow God.

(D), “As a pioneer you always have this area of tension. You often need the church for a certain amount of safety and minimum right of existence, but you also have to be prophetic to a certain

extent if you ask your church to focus on mission and proclaiming His Kingdom instead of money and possessions. People don't always like it if you say that in the church. Many people choose the safety of a church, a good job or a secure future for your children. My experience is that God's mission is often directly the opposite of this."

(EE), "Going against the flow is typical of pioneers." It is good if supporters recognise this and can set up a discussion group that's not there to make the pioneer accountable, but thinks along together and covers their backs. This is valuable when new paths are being explored and discovered that do not guarantee return for the future. If the pioneer goes through doubts the group can be there to support and think through issues together. The discussion group ensures that the work is healthily embedded and can help guide and, in situations of crisis with the pioneer, support the fellowship (see Noort et al. 2008: 49). It can be helpful to have a mediator as a sort of buffer between the pioneer and the existing church. The mediator can translate the work and expectations of the pioneer to the church and vice versa. According to (J) from his experiences, "If you leave them to their own devices it can be deadly for the pioneering work."

It is important that good support is given for a sustained period of time. It is better to support with less money for a longer period of time than with more money expecting a new church to be planted in three years, was said. One option is to support a team of volunteers well, so that there is a broad foundation. Alongside that, it's good if one or two people can contribute a substantial amount of time to the church plant. This can be paid or voluntary, possibly with another job or small business alongside. These people aren't always theologians. A network of house churches is also a possibility.

Realistic expectations play an essential part. "A small place can be really inspirational for other places or be like a laboratory where things are revealed about the gospel in modern context. Don't give up on the pioneer on issues that he shouldn't be given up on, or he'll burn out," said a mentor, (J). (BB), "You need to change your aims depending on your context and the well-being of the church planter. Then you reduce the chance of burn-out. And that helps to prevent church planters, who're so often activists, putting pressure on family and others to keep working until the desired success is achieved." Even if the person is doing the work well, the situation can be more complex, he explained. "In America, anyone can plant a church, but in Europe the climate of unbelief and secular humanism is really challenging, especially in the cities. The feeling that we don't need God and that the Christian church is weak, prevails."

So when can you speak of success? (Y), "If people in the new church plant feel they have their church family there and find pastoral care there. If the church has become part of the neighbourhood for local inhabitants even if they don't go there themselves. If people have got to know each other's mistakes and personality traits and found them irritating, but still stay, because the church has become their family."

4 REFLECTIONS

This chapter offers a short reflection on the results of the research on how Western-European church planters experience crisis and how they can remain resilient.

4.1 HOPE IN CRISES

Faith creating breathing space but not resolving all tensions was described in the previous chapter. As (G) said, “Within the church there is a kind of magnifying glass on life. Continually you see hope and crises. In the search for a new location, in leadership, illness, the choices people make. In the tension between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’. The kingdom breaks through, there is healing, recovery of relationships, beauty and wisdom. But in other areas not at all. You pray, but nothing happens. It seems God is absent. The tension remains. And within those tensions, there is space for questions and doubts. Space to find and to be found.” His wife (FF), “If you follow a new path which is not safe and known, you need faith and hope. That is scary, but you can also discover more of God in those situations.”

The experience of several pioneers has been that it is especially in these difficult or vulnerable situations, that the grace of God becomes more and more evident. They also feel that experiencing helplessness or failure can break ground for a new sense of trust. (J), “In our background culture many things were stipulated in confessions, doctrines etc. In the book of Acts we see that the Spirit leads the way. This brings with it all kinds of moments of crises, for example when Peter is asked to eat unclean animals, and Gentiles who suddenly receive the Spirit. The community is deceived from supposed securities. The same happens now. And we need to follow God in that.” (U), “Sometimes a crisis is the only means to make clear that you are not going the right way. That then is God’s grace.” During the workshop in Amsterdam, several pioneers agreed with the statement, ‘I needed a crisis to focus on the right things.’

(D), “I found out that at moments when I thought nothing would come out of it, God became visible in some way. When I thought I had lost everything and felt at point zero, it was no longer about project plans, results or success, but about going together with Jesus.” Years ago, (T) experienced a crisis in which he was cut off by his team. Later he experienced a crisis in his family. “I believe God allowed this in a way. That I needed to die to some things. I believe God used the brokenness I experienced then, that I felt a wreck, to make me a more sensitive person, not wanting to be the visionary hero.” (See also Van der Molen 2008: 180-182.)

Sometimes there is only the pain in the midst of the crisis. (A), who had to quit his work some years ago, compares the experience to the transformation process of a caterpillar who turns into liquid in the cocoon. “This process is not gradual. I do not have answers to all the questions. Maybe I will say in 20 years this experience has been of help to me. Maybe I will fall ill and be dead in half a year without knowing the reason. I learn to trust God as a person, although I do not always understand Him.”

4.2 IDOLATRIES AND GRACE

The fear of loss can be great. The fear of failure, losing one’s faith, or not being strong enough. The temptation is to stick to an idolatry. In his doctoral thesis about the relevance of the gospel in our time and Western context theologian and pastor of the missional church Via Nova, Gert-Jan Roest (2016) writes about three idolatries of our time. This research also gives insight into the path of a church planter, as does the personal reflection of Roest that he later shared in Via Nova.

The first idolatry that Roest sees is our individual freedom and autonomy, resulting in the highest aim of self-development and fulfillment. Turning away from this means that you no longer project the ideal self-image to others around you. But being part of a Christian community means you don't have to hide your insecurities, loneliness and shame behind a mask. In this research with church planters it was made clear that it is really important to be honest about emotions, doubts and personal capacities and weaknesses.⁵

The second idolatry identified by Roest is human power that can be seen for example by putting one's trust in our intellectual capacities, will-power or feelings. It results in a fixation on our own successes and on our own blame if we fail. We don't want to be dependent and admit that there are powers in the world that we can't control. This great tension can clearly be seen in pioneering work. The longing to achieve something, book results and be strong and yet at the same time have the knowledge that you are dependent on God's grace. This paradox can cause serious struggles. Isn't burn-out just around the corner if you're continuously working for a result that you can have no influence on? (G), "Psychologically it's really difficult if, when things are going well, God gets all the glory. But if it's not going well, it's your fault, because God doesn't do things wrong. You're continuously inviting people to join in and you have to continuously let go and give it to God who's the one who will bring all things together in the end." The married couple (Q) and (R) experienced God's daily provision in a time that they were living from financial donations. But now they have their own income they feel greater freedom to have doubts or questions, through a feeling of independence from God.

It remains a paradox. It can therefore be most useful to take a look at enterprises in agriculture, if church planting is to be compared to any sort of business.⁶ You work hard but the growth process is not in your own hands. And the grain of wheat has to die before anything new can grow. (D), "I have also seen that God's power and his Holy Spirit can really work if you dare to surrender to your inadequacy. If you dare to give up your own ego." Roest suggests that prayer teaches us to live in dependency. (U) learnt this too, "An old catholic priest taught me to live by grace. I did believe in grace as the basis of my relationship with God. But I had never practiced grace in the area of prayer. My prayer life was based on the idea that I had to perform something. I learnt to pray in another way then." (F), co-worker with (O), remembered how in the middle of a burn-out and faith crisis which meant that (O) had to stop working he'd said: "Now I have a relationship with Him that is only and all about grace, what He does for me and not I for him."

The third idolatry is identified by Roest as prosperity and security. Opposite this we see a mission of passion and self-sacrificing love, from a hope that takes us further than death. (Y) described hope as the knowledge that there is something eternal that is above this reality and that because of this, it's more important to do things well than to be successful. Vellekoop and Van Loo (2009) write about the imitation of Christ in the expectation of a hopeful future, "...hope is definitely given by God and yet at the same time, we can work together now to see it become a reality. We, damaged and damaging people are inspired by the Spirit and given a role. It's in this tension of now against later, that pioneers find their hope." That gives them the ability to integrate celebration and misery in life

⁵ Briggs (2014) describes different masks in *Fail*: I am the strong one; I'm theologically educated; I'm spiritually mature; I'm not hurt; Do you know how much I put up with?; I'm just like everyone else; I am super busy; I only struggle with little, petty sins; See how vulnerable I am. Briggs suggests that when brokenness is recognised that grace is available (p. 90-96).

⁶ Van der Molen also uses fruit cultivation as the primary metaphor in his book (2008).

here on earth (p. 170). (M) said, of his experiences in a multi-cultural urban neighbourhood, “Everything we experience here on earth that is good, like drinking milk from your mother, playing with Lego, reading a good book or cycling through the forest, are small fulfillments of what is to come. Much of what I would like for myself or my children won’t happen here on earth. But in heaven I expect that there will be a large group of Moroccans singing praises to the Lamb. And I understand that I don’t need to worry about that.”

5 LITERATURE

- Bisschops, A. (2015). Verinnerlijking, toewijding en burn-out: Reflectie op drie cases. *Handelingen* 47(1): 23-31.
- Blok, O. & M. Vlaardingerbroek (2016). *Survivalgids pionieren: Praktijkverhalen van creatieve gemeentestichting*. V.O.F. Vindingrijk.
- Briggs, J.R. (2014). *Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Chandler, D.J. (2009). Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices. *Pastoral Psychology* 58(3): 273-287.
- Godwin, C. (2011). Indigenous Church Planting in Post Christian Europe: A Case Study of Belgian Pioneers. *Missiology* 39(3): 391-405.
- Jong, M. de & S. Blackmore (2015). *Praten met pioniers: Portretten en lessen van kerkplanters uit twaalf landen*. Driebergen: MissieNederland, Franeker/Zwolle: Uitgeverij van Wijnen.
- Kroon, N. (2013). *Vrouwelijke gemeentestichters: Verwachtingen over het functioneren van vrouwelijke gemeentestichters in Nederland*. Masterscriptie, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
Available at: <http://www.kerklab.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Vrouwelijke-gemeentestichters-Nadia-Kroon-2013-Masterscriptie-VU.pdf>
- Molen, R. van der (2008). *Plant een kerk: Visie en inspiratie voor creatieve gemeentestichting*. Amsterdam: Ark Media.
- Noort, G., S. Paas, H. de Roest & S. Stoppels (2008). *Als een kerk (opnieuw) begint: Handboek voor missionaire gemeenschapsvorming*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum.
- Van Rhenen, W., A.J. Stam & A. Weiland (2015). Bevlogenheid en burn-out onder predikanten. *Handelingen* 47(1): 46-57.
- Paas, S. (2015). *Vreemdelingen en priesters: Christelijke missie in een postchristelijke omgeving*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum. (English translation: *Strangers and Priests*.)
- Patrick, D. (2010). *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission*. Wheaton (Illinois): Crossway.
- Roest, G.J. (2016). *The Gospel in the Western context: A missiological reading of Christology in dialogue with Hendrikus Berkhof and Colin Gunton*. Phd thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Roest, H. de (2013). *Pionieren en lekepreken: Een praktisch-theologische analyse van de nieuwe missionaire dynamiek in de Nederlandse kerken, met name de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*. Rede.
Available at: <http://www.pthu.nl/actueel/nieuws/Nieuwspdf/DI%C3%8BSREDE%202013%20-%20HENK%20DE%20ROEST%20-%20PIONIEREN%20EN%20LEKEPREKEN.pdf>
- Saane, J. van (2012). *Geloofwaardig leiderschap*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema.
- Vellekoop, M. & N.D. van Loo (2009). *Ploeteren & pionieren: Nieuwe manieren van kerk zijn*. Amsterdam: Ark Media.