

**THE
VIBRANT
CHURCH**

Strategies for Church Renewal

STAN TOLER

THE **VIBRANT** CHURCH

Structuring the Church for
Organizational Health & Outreach

STAN TOLER



© Copyright (2013) 2015 Stan Toler
Published by DustJacket Press
PO Box 721243
Oklahoma City, OK 73172
ISBN: 9781943140602

Graphic Design: Lyn Rayn

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®), Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked (NASB) taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from The Living Bible Paraphrased, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked (MSG) are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from The Holy Bible, King James Version.

Electronically Published by DustJacket Press at Smashwords

Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.



CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyrights Page](#)

[Chapter One - VISION](#)

A church with an inspiring vision

[Chapter Two - LEADERSHIP](#)

A church with a pastor who leads

[Chapter Three - GOALS](#)

A church with exciting goals

[Chapter Four - STRATEGIC PRIORITIES](#)

A church with a plan that works

[Chapter Five - PARTNERSHIP](#)

A church where every member is a minister

[Chapter Six – FRIENDSHIP](#)

A church with a dynamic outreach

[Chapter Seven – DISCIPLESHIP](#)

A church that is developing mature disciples

[Chapter Eight – INTENSIVE CARE](#)

A church that effectively cares for people

[Chapter Nine – WORSHIP](#)

A church that has meaningful worship

[Chapter Ten – STEWARDSHIP](#)

A church that is developing committed stewards

[Bibliography](#)

[About the Author](#)

Chapter One VISION

A Church with an Inspiring Vision

For a church to grow strong, it must begin with an inspiring vision.

*If you don't know where you're going, you're likely to
end up some place else.*

—YOGI BERRA

A tall building developed a crack on the 42nd floor. The manager of the building called an architect to investigate. When the architect arrived, the receptionist notified the manager, who took the elevator to the 42nd floor to meet the expert. When he arrived, the architect was not there.

A search of the building found the architect in the basement. The manager, steaming at being led on a wild goose chase, confronted the architect. “What are you doing down here? We have a serious crack on the 42nd floor that needs immediate investigation!”

The architect replied, “Sir, you may have a crack on the 42nd floor, but your problem is not on the 42nd floor. Your problem is here in the basement.”

A further investigation uncovered the source of the problem. It seems a security guard employed in the building wanted to build a garage onto his house, but he was short of both materials and money. So every day after work, he chiseled a brick out of the wall in the basement and smuggled it out of the building in his lunch pail. After five or six years of this activity, a crack appeared on the 42nd floor.¹

Could it be that a lack of vibrancy in our local churches may well be due to a poor foundation? In this case, I am talking about a poorly-defined, ill-stated, or even non-expressed vision for the church. What the foundation is to a building, a vision can be for a vibrant church.

It takes a long time to build a foundation. If you have ever been part of a building project, you know it seems like forever before you see any structure rise above the ground. Anxious for the walls to go up, you may impatiently check on the builders day after day. However, there's no point in building up if the foundation is not solid. Many pastors, anxious to win souls and get a church underway, have launched into multiple programs without ever thinking about whether they fit the vision of the church.

VISIONARY FOUNDATIONS

David McKenna observed that as late as the 1960s, builders in Seattle, Washington were limited in how high they could construct their buildings because of fear of earthquakes. Then engineers developed a system of vertical poles and cross beams capable of withstanding the shock of high magnitude earthquakes. Smith Tower had long been a landmark of thirty-six stories. But almost overnight, it seemed, scores of new buildings rising to fifty, sixty, and seventy stories or more dwarfed Smith Tower. A stronger, more reliable foundation made the difference.²

A well-defined, clearly-stated vision will make a difference in the kind of church we build.

By contrast, Ravi Zacharias tells about speaking on the campus of Ohio State University. As his host drove him to the lecture, they passed the Wexner Art Center. The driver said, “This is a new art building for the university. It is a fascinating building designed in the post-modernist view of reality.”

Zacharias asked him, “What is a post-modern building?”

The host said, “The architect said he designed the building with no design in mind. When someone asked him why he designed it that way, he answered, ‘If life is capricious, why should our buildings have any design or meaning?’”

So the staircases in the building go nowhere. The pillars support nothing.

Zacharias turned to his host and said, “Did they do the same thing with the foundation?”

The host laughed because obviously you cannot do that with the foundation. You might construct a building that is random and matches a worldview that makes no sense. But once you start cutting corners with the foundation, you are headed for trouble.³

Mission and Vision

Trying to build a church without first thinking through a vision for the kind of church you want to build is also a recipe for disappointment. We're not talking about the physical building, of course, but the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even more basic than a vision is the mission. What is the mission statement for your church? It may be stated any number of ways, but ultimately the mission statement must reflect the Great Commission. Following his crucifixion and resurrection, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said to his followers, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Reaching, discipling, baptizing, and teaching people to obey Christ is the basis for every mission statement. It must be, if we are going to be true to the clearly-stated mission Jesus gave us. If we are doing anything else, can we legitimately call ourselves the church? "Any church that is not seriously involved in helping to fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist."⁴ Certainly a vibrant church must bore into those priorities and make the mission statement fit the Great Commission.

If every church's mission statement will be some expression of the Great Commission, what is the vision statement? *The vision statement is what the Great Commission looks like in your particular community, lived through the vibrancy of your church.* Vision is all about seeing. How do you see the Great Commission coming alive through your church?

When you close your eyes and imagine your church at its most vibrant state, what do you see? Flesh that out. What kind of people will you reach? How will you disciple them? What kind of impact will they make on your community?

It may be stated any number of ways, but ultimately the mission statement must reflect the Great Commission.

What will worship look like in your vibrant church? What will it sound like? These questions and many more will help you to visualize your vibrant church and you will soon have a vision you can express in concrete terms.

A Specific Vision

As Phil Stevenson says, "If you are unable to articulate the vision in a few sentences you do not understand it."⁵ While you are at it, write it down. If you cannot put your vision into written form, you need to do more research, more analysis, more creative thinking. Don't be afraid to think great thoughts. Benjamin Disraeli declared, "Nurture great thoughts for you will never go higher than your thoughts."⁶

BIBLICAL VISIONARIES

Visionary people pack the pages of the Bible.

- God spoke to Abram in a vision (Genesis 15:1).
- God also addressed Jacob in a nighttime vision in which he saw the angels of the Lord ascending and descending a stairway to heaven (Genesis 28:12ff.).
- Joseph had visions as a young man and later became an interpreter of visions or dreams, as they were often called (Genesis 37:5ff; 41:25ff.).
- Young Samuel saw a vision that he was afraid to relate to the priest Eli.
- Isaiah saw a vision he described as "dire" (Isaiah 21:2) and another that involved "tumult and trampling and terror" (Isaiah 22:5).

- Ezekiel saw a vision involving creatures, faces, multiple eyes, and a “wheel intersecting a wheel” (Ezekiel 1:16).
- Daniel, like Joseph, became a great interpreter of dreams (Daniel 2:27ff.).

Visionary Pastors

While these biblical incidents are intriguing, we are not talking about exactly the same thing when we describe someone as a visionary pastor. Most pastors, I venture to guess, have never had a vision like Ezekiel’s in which the creatures he saw would nearly scare one out of his wits. Nor have they had a vision like John’s in the Book of Revelation with seals and bowls and trumpets.

Yet being a person of vision is a desirable thing, even though it’s difficult to describe. As Alan Nelson says, “Vision, like leadership, is one of those things that you recognize when you see it, but to describe it is very messy. It’s an intangible. Great leaders seem to exude vision, but for most pastors and other leaders charged with shepherding flocks, vision is a far more difficult process. We leave the pastor conference enthused, only to return home to mire in our ministry mud.”⁷

A New Testament Visionary

A desirable vision for the pastor might be more akin to what Saul (later Paul) experienced on the road to Damascus. He described it to King Agrippa, when he said, “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19). Preferably, when God gives you a vision for your church, he will not also knock you to the ground and blind you for three days with a dazzling light, as he did to Paul. However, we can only hope your vision is as clear and specific as his was.

“Now get up and stand on your feet,” the Lord told him. “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16-18).

There was more to God’s plan for Paul. Instead of communicating it directly to him, the Lord told Ananias, “Go! This man (Paul) is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:15-16, parentheses added).

When Ananias went to see Paul, he added, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17).

Through Paul and Ananias, God communicated the full picture: Paul would be filled with the Spirit and would become a messenger to his own people (the Israelites), but also to the Gentiles. God would rescue him from both groups. His purpose in sending Paul was to open the eyes of those who heard him, with the goal of turning them from darkness to light, freeing them from the power of Satan, giving them forgiveness of sins, and transferring their allegiance to God. Further, Paul would carry God’s name before Gentile kings.

God knows how much we can handle at one time and may well fill in the details and refinements as we go along.

Oh, and one more thing, he would suffer for the Lord’s name. I doubt that the apostle would choose that as a part of his preferred vision for the future. Yet, doubtlessly speaking from experience, Paul said, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Note also that the vision was open-ended: God not only wanted Paul to be “a witness of what you have seen of me,” but also, “what I will show you” (Acts 26:16). God reserves the right to expand the vision as he sees best. God knows how much we can handle at one time, and may well fill in the details and refinements as we go along.

Paul's vision is similar to the Great Commission, but it is more specific: make disciples among the Israelites and the Gentiles, even among kings.

VISION PLANNING STAGES

A vision seldom arrives full-blown, elaborate in every detail, ready to communicate, once you come down from the mountaintop. A friend said his denominational supervisor did encourage the pastors in his area to find the highest hill in the county, stand on it, looking across the land and asking God to give a vision for reaching the people who lived there.

But whether your mountain is literal or figurative, you will do well to plan your vision in stages.

Searching: Why are we here?

Someone said there are two ways to climb to the top of an oak tree. One involves a ladder, climbing shoes, rugged clothing, and perhaps some gloves. The other way is to place an acorn on the ground, sit squarely on top of it, and wait 'til it grows to maturity. But either one includes a direction and a destination.

One of the most basic questions of all is "Why are we here?" I'm not thinking so much about the philosophical question of "why human beings are on planet earth" at this point. Rather I am wondering why your church is located in its precise location in your precise community. What did the founders have in mind? Is that still a viable vision?

What do your leaders understand to be the mission of the church? The vision? Do you have a clear-cut mission/vision statement? Do your people know what it is?

If you were to ask your leadership team to state your mission/vision, they would probably say something like, "We're here to win souls" or "We're here to preach the gospel." But are they winning souls? Are they seeing people come to Christ on a regular basis? What people say they believe is important, but what they do about what they believe is even more important.

John Ruskin observed, "What we think or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only thing of consequence is what we do."⁸

So in this searching stage, it will be good to come to an agreement on the mission/vision statement, and be sure it lines up with reality.

Defining: What do we want to accomplish?

In this stage of planning, we are moving from searching to defining. We are going from the general to the specific. In fact, mission is general (like the Great Commission) and vision is specific (what does it look like in your church, your constituency, your neighborhood?).

This stage is where you can begin to look at the various groups in your constituency. What will our vision look like as it relates to families? To young married couples with no children? To young, single adults? To seniors? To teens? To children? Does it say anything to single parents? To divorcees?

What does our vision look like as it relates to the people who live within three to five miles of the church? What kinds of people live there? Is the neighborhood changing or is it stable? Are there ethnic groups to consider? If so, how does your vision relate to reaching them and ministering to them?

Mission is general (like the Great Commission) and vision is specific (what does it look like in your church, your constituency, your neighborhood?).

How does your church's vision relate to your facilities? Does your vision look far enough into the future to imagine running out of room? For worship? For office space? For educational facilities? For recreational facilities?

How does the vision relate to staff? Will you need to add staff? How many? When?

Identifying: What is our common goal?

Next you will want to move to the identifying stage, which includes finding your common goals. What goals will inspire your congregation to buy into the vision, get behind it, and support it?

Your vision should be big enough that you cannot accomplish it all at once. So how can you break it down into “bitesize” pieces? What are the things you can accomplish in one year? Five years? Ten years or more. Remember that we tend to overestimate what we can do in one year and underestimate what we can do in five years.

Your vision should be big enough that you cannot accomplish it all at once.

Try to be as realistic as you can in your goal-setting, both in your timelines and in your financial commitments. Yet, don't worry if you have to adjust your timeline as you move forward. After all, these goals are not chiseled in stone; they are written on paper. You can tear up paper, throw it away, and redo it. Or if you are totally electronic, you can, with a few strokes of a keyboard, make major adjustments in your timeline, financial commitments, or specific goals.

Just be sure to keep faith with your people. Practice perseverance. Don't give up easily if you cannot reach your initial goals within your original timeline. Remember that astronauts who went to the moon had to make several mid-course corrections to keep from missing it altogether.

Processing: Is our ministry effective?

Before you get too far into your vision planning, you will want to evaluate your church's effectiveness. This kind of evaluation can help you determine what needs to be changed or what needs to be adjusted. But first, you need to clarify just how effective you have been. Consider the following questions:

1. Are your board members' lives in line with what the pastor preaches week after week?
2. Do you periodically “count the cost” and make a conscious decision to do the right thing, no matter what?
3. Are you as a church aware of your surrounding community? Are your ministries touching the community in any meaningful, effective way?
4. Do you and your vision team evaluate your ministries from time to time in order to determine whether you are keeping “the main thing the main thing”?
5. Do you and your board spend more time reminiscing about the good things of the past or dreaming about what you can do to be more effective in the future?
6. Are you equipping people in your congregation to “go where no man has gone before” in ministering to your community?
7. Are you challenging your congregation to go beyond mediocrity and find a way to reach your community for Christ?⁹

Reforming: What adjustments need to be made?

Based on what you have learned in your effectiveness evaluation, you can begin to determine what adjustments need to be made. This, of course, means change. But if your vision was already driving your church to be all it can be, you would not be considering adjustments to the way things are.

Those who cannot make these changes are doomed to remain mired in their present patterns, effective or not. The Swiss watch industry is an example of a group that once dominated the world in their industry but became obsolete. In the 1970s, Swiss watchmakers made 85 percent of all watches sold in the world. By the mid 1980s, they were down to 15 percent of the world market and had laid off 25,000 watchmakers. The quartz movement redefined what the world thinks and expects of watches. Old watchmakers were skeptical whether quartz was really a watch, since it had no mainspring and no knob to wind it up. Yet the world changed and upstart watchmakers became dominant in the industry, leaving the Swiss in the dust.¹⁰

So once you have analyzed your effectiveness, you can proceed with making the significant changes necessary to position your church for its maximum vibrancy.

DEVELOPING A VISION PLAN

How do we develop a vision plan? Consider these simple, but meaningful, steps.

It is based on your story.

Everyone has a story. Every church has a story. What is your story? Your story includes where you came from. It includes the details of how you came to be where you are now. The same is true for your church. How did your church begin? Who had a great vision for planting your church where it is? Maybe it wasn't so much the location that was important. Perhaps someone had a passion to reach a certain community, or a certain group of people, or a certain ethnic group.

How did you come to be involved with your church? What unique gifts do you bring to the leadership of your church? Often the vision picks up the story where we are now and carries it forward. Often the vision is based on your gifts and the gifts of the people around you. What has God uniquely qualified you to do? Whom has God uniquely qualified you to reach?

A colleague told me he used to be on the staff of a mid-sized church, along with two other pastors. Of the three pastors and their spouses, my friend was the only person who did not grow up in a Christian home. Because he came from an unchurched family, some people with similar backgrounds identified with him. His experiences uniquely qualified him to minister to them. So that became a part of the church's story as they moved forward.

What is the preferred next chapter of your church's story? As you think and dream about that, it may give you clues to the vision God has for you and your church.

It begins with leadership.

John C. Maxwell is famous for saying, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." So we should not be surprised to conclude that a church's vision begins with leadership. I know of no instance in the Bible in which God gave a great vision to a committee. God tends to work through leaders who make themselves available to him.

God did not appear to the whole nation of Israel through a burning bush. He appeared to Moses, the reluctant leader, on the far side of a desert, when Moses saw a bush that was on fire, but was not being consumed. He turned aside to investigate and God met with him there. And God made a great leader out of him.

God tends to work through leaders who make themselves available to him.

God did not meet with the tribe of Manasseh when he wanted to save the Israelites from the marauding Midianites. He appeared to Gideon, even though this man who threshed wheat in a winepress to conceal his activity from the Midianites did not think of himself as a leader. In fact, he considered his clan to be the weakest in Manasseh, and he thought of himself as the least in his family (Judges 6:11-15). God saw in him the makings of a leader and motivated Gideon to do great things.

God wants to work through you as well. Whatever leadership skills you have, he will enable you to enhance them and maximize them in his service. He will give you a challenging vision for a brighter future for your church.

It must always focus on the needs of others.

Years ago, Robert Schuller said, "The secret of success is to find a need and fill it."¹¹ Later he added, "Find a hurt and heal it." There is no shortage of needs, and the world abounds with hurts.

Some of those needs and hurts exist in your neighborhood. They reside within the reach of your church. Often we think of "needy" people as poor people. But the world is full of "up-and-outers" as well as "down-and-outers." Behind the successful images, behind the award-winning smiles, behind the attractive facade lie deep needs and even deeper hurts. As you begin to dream and then put feet on your dreams and reach out to your community, you will find ways to meet needs and heal hurts.

It must include biblical priorities.

What are the biblical priorities? The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) helps us narrow them down to the essentials. “Go and make disciples of all nations,” Jesus said. This implies both evangelism and discipleship. In addition, we are to baptize these disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Further, we are to teach “them to obey everything I (Jesus) have commanded you.”

“*Going*” implies a dynamic outreach ministry, which ultimately results in evangelism, turning people away from the wrong path to become dynamic Christ-followers.

“*Making disciples*” means just what it says – discipleship, which is helping Christ-followers become more and more like Jesus Christ.

“*Baptizing*,” in addition to being an act of obedience, is a way of identifying with the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We take people into partnership as we join hands in growing together and reach others.

“*Teaching them*” everything Christ taught will involve them in learning how to worship from the heart, how to become givers with great patterns of stewardship, and how to serve Christ and others.

THE GREATEST ENTERPRISE

As we said at the beginning of the chapter, foundations take time. But they are worth it. A good foundation is necessary for a building to stand the storms that come. In a similar way, taking the time to find God’s vision for your church is well-spent. With an inspiring vision, built on solid biblical priorities, based on your story and the story of your church, and especially one that focuses on meeting needs, your church has a bright future with a vibrant ministry.

ACTION STEPS

1. Plan a vision Sunday in which you will reveal your God given vision for the church.
2. Distribute your vision statement.
3. Plan opportunities to repeat the vision.

Chapter Two LEADERSHIP

A Church with a Pastor who Leads

A vibrant church is led by a pastor who does not simply “do” ministry, but one who leads others in effective ministry.

The key to becoming the influence you want to be is to spend time with leaders who motivate and inspire you to grow.

—RICK WARREN¹²

I heard of a pastor’s wife who was given a \$25 gift certificate to a local clothing store. After a few weeks, she took the certificate to the store and walked immediately toward the fashion department. There on a wall display, was a beautiful silk lavender dress.

“That’s the one!” she said to the lady that waited on her.

The saleslady replied, “Let me see if we have that dress in your size.”

After the ladies discussed softly the size and price details, the saleslady went to a stockroom and brought the dress to the customer.

The pastor’s wife tried it on and said, “It fits! I’ll take it.”

Later, she showed the dress to her husband. He commented, “How much?”

“Only \$144.99,” she replied. Her husband said, “I thought you had a \$25 gift certificate?” “I did. But I also had a credit card from the store. I just couldn’t resist—it was like the devil was whispering, “That dress looks mighty fine on you.”

“You should have said, ‘Get thee behind me!’” the husband replied.

His wife said, “I did, but he seemed to say, ‘It looks good from back here too.’”

We live in a “Me” generation that often impulsively buys first and thinks later. And buyers of that generation worship in churches just like yours.

Businessman Rolland Young said, “I am a self-made man, but I think if I had it to do over again, I would call in someone else!”¹³ Steve DeNeff and David Drury wrote a book, *SoulShift*, that has been well-received in the church world. One chapter that especially intrigues me is entitled “Me to We.”¹⁴ Specifically in regards to the church, it calls on people to lay aside their individualism – which is difficult for Americans to do – in favor of community, doing life with one another.

In terms of leadership, we make a great error if we think leadership means doing ministry all by ourselves. Pastors certainly have major responsibilities for doing ministry, but one of the main responsibilities is to lead others to become the people God intended them to be.

LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

My early years in ministry were spent serving as John C. Maxwell’s first staff member. I learned many leadership principles from John, unlocking the truth of the apostle Paul’s admonitions: “Hold tightly to the pattern of truth I taught you, especially concerning the faith and love Christ Jesus offers you” (2 Timothy 1:13 TLB).

Level One: Position – People follow you because they have to.

Generally speaking, people tend to follow individuals who have an authority inherent in their *position*. This is Maxwell’s Level One of effective leadership. In rhetoric and persuasion, it’s called an ethical argument. In other words, we tend to believe a president of a company or institution, a preacher, a commercial pitchman, or a parent, not necessarily because of what is being said, but because of *who is saying it*. Think about television commercials you have seen. Chances are that many had Peyton Manning

or Shaquille O'Neal or some other celebrity in them, making you feel more secure that the product was worthy not only of your attention but also a piece of your pocketbook. "After all," you might have thought to yourself, "if it's good enough for Peyton or Shaq, it's certainly good enough for me."

Your congregation will follow you because they are supposed to: you're their pastor! Initially that can suffice, but as your pastorate wears on, it will become less and less healthful for your leadership to mire itself in this "have-to" mode. An effective leader is one who *pulls* his or her following – not pushes it, even though by nature most people who respect authority will support their pastor.

Level Two: Permission – People follow you because they want to.

Maxwell's second level of effective leadership is *permission* – when the have-to of the preceding Level One evolves into the want-to stage of followership. This is the leadership level modeled for us by Jesus Christ himself, who called his disciples one by one to follow him. Each immediately put aside his earthly plans and followed the Master.

**Followership is not blind acceptance, nor is it a sign of personal weakness;
rather, followership is as important as leadership.**

Pastor-leaders will gain this permission to direct and guide as they begin both learning how to follow God's leadership in their own lives and teaching their congregations how to be effective followers as well. Please understand that followership is not blind acceptance, nor is it a sign of personal weakness; rather, followership is as important as leadership.

Six characteristics make up strong, powerful followership:

F AILURE
O RIGINALITY
L ISTENING
L EARNING
O BEDIENCE
W ILLINGNESS

A follower is not afraid to *fail*. One university professor claims a student whose grade point average is 3.97 has a far greater appreciation for success than a student with a perfect grade point average of 4.0. Once we have fallen, we realize how good it feels to stand up.

An effective follower is an *original* thinker. When assigned a task, a follower will not be content to do it the way it has always been done. He or she will think of a new method or means to complete the job.

Third, a follower learns how to *listen*. Honest listening is a highly active endeavor, and for a non-listener, it can be a real strain. Taking notes, making eye-to-eye contact, repeating key points, and summarizing are all important components of listening. The most effective counseling is 90 percent listening and 10 percent advising.

Fourth, a good follower is a *learner*. Like the writer of Proverbs, we learn not to lean on our own understanding, but rather acknowledge him, who will make our paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6). We learn to acknowledge areas of ignorance or weakness and we seek the wisdom of more experience or better trained people to fill in the gaps.

Fifth, a follower *obeys* instructions. Sometimes the word "meekness" is misinterpreted as "weakness." This could not be further from the truth. Only one who is secure and possesses a strong sense of integrity is capable of Christ-like humility. We must learn to humbly obey.

Finally, a good follower is *willing* to do whatever it takes to get the job done. It is amazing what we can accomplish when we don't care who gets the credit.

Level Three: Production – People follow you because of what you have done for the organization.

People follow leaders who have proven to be efficient and effective in setting and meeting goals for the local church. This is not always the kind of success measured by the annual report. It may also mean spiritual camaraderie – a sense of goodwill among the fellowship, within the community of believers as well as the surrounding community.

One of the dangers in this stage of leadership is workaholicism and subsequent burnout. I've known pastors who put so much stress on themselves to produce and then to produce more, that they are out of the ministry by the age of 30. Pastors should get a handle on this sense of overachievement early in their ministry, and learn the art of delegating.

Level Four: People Development – People follow you because of what you have done.

This is the level where the leader reaps the fruit of investing in people. Unlike investing in Wall Street, which is a financial investment, investing in people is a donation of time, life's most precious commodity. True people development is more than networking, which can be rather self-serving. People development is "others centered."

It happens in many ways: socializing, conducting seminars, involvement in compassionate ministries. People who develop others share the spirit of the Early Church in the book of Acts. Do it well and you will develop "sons," "daughters," "brothers," and "sisters" all over the world.

Level Five: Pinnacle – People follow you because of who you are and what you represent.

This is Maxwell's final level of leadership. Billy Graham is still named in the top five of the most admired people in the world. It is not because of his characteristic voice, but because of his solid integrity. There was a time when some preachers criticized Mr. Graham. Yet today most of us quote him because over the years he has won more souls for Christ than any of us. The city of Charlotte, North Carolina, has named a busy parkway in honor of him. Time magazine has named him Man of the Year.

BIBLICAL QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

History has seldom given us a leader of the caliber of Moses. With God's help, Moses led two million people from slavery to freedom. With God on his side, Moses outwitted, outmaneuvered, and outlasted the greatest military power on earth at the time. In dependence on the Lord, Moses provided civil and spiritual leadership for a band of rebels and delivered them to the border of the Promised Land. Did he make mistakes? Of course. All leaders do. But we could do worse than emulate the leadership style of Moses.

A leader is humble.

Someone might argue that it isn't necessary to be as humble as Moses was – nearly tongue-tied and afraid. It's true that when God approached him in a burning bush and commissioned him to lead the people out of Israel, Moses tried to defer to someone else. "Pardon your servant, Lord," Moses pleaded. "Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13).

But remember where Moses came from. What drove him out of Egypt and into the wilderness for forty years? He had the right idea as a younger man – deliver his people from Egyptian bondage. But Moses tried to do it one overseer at a time. He killed the overseer and tried to hide his body. Wrong approach. God had bigger plans – lead the whole nation of Israelites out at the same time.

Having failed so miserably and having fled so ignominiously, Moses had no desire to go back and face Pharaoh. Yet he humbly yielded to God's plan and went in God's power, rather than with brute force. His failure had humbled him. But he picked himself up and went back to Egypt.

A leader is courageous.

It took awhile for Moses to overcome his timidity. When God said, "Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you," Moses protested, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" (Exod. 6:29-30).

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is acting in spite of our fears. Dorothy Bernard said, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.”¹⁵ So with a prayer in his heart and his brother Aaron by his side, Moses went to stand before Pharaoh. In fact, “Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them” (Exod. 7:6). Walking in obedience to God always reinforces courage to do the right thing.

**Courage is not the absence of fear.
Courage is acting in spite of our fears.**

A leader is bold.

You will notice I did not say a leader is brash or cocky. Moses had lost that tendency by spending time in the wilderness with a flock of sheep. Years earlier, he took matters into his own hands. Now, with the help of God, he boldly steps up to face the strongest man, politically, in the world. If anyone had maximum power, humanly speaking, it was Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Yet Moses stood before the monarch and faithfully followed God’s instructions. God said, “Confront him (Pharaoh) on the bank of the Nile” (Exod. 7:15b, parenthetical word added), and that is exactly what Moses did.

A leader often has to take bold steps in the face of overwhelming odds, when he or she knows that God is leading.

A leader is persistent.

Success does not always come with the first step we take. In fact it seldom happens that easily. Success requires persistence. What would have happened if Moses had quit after the first plague, when Pharaoh refused to let the people go?

Moses could have said, “I can’t believe it. The water turned to blood. The fish died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water. Yet Pharaoh is too stubborn to let the people go. I give up! This is too hard!”

But Moses did not give up. Instead he persevered, plague after plague after plague – ten in all. A leader has to be as persistent and tough as the problem. Moses persevered.

A leader remains calm in a crisis.

Moses had every reason to panic. There he stood, on the bank of the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his army approached from behind. Nothing but water lay before him. It was an impossible situation. Further, the people began to panic. In their terror, they accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt only to die in the desert.

Moses remained calm. He answered them, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exod. 14:13-14).

Consequently, God parted the waters, the people went through the sea on dry ground, and God saved them. Moses, like every great leader, remained calm and showed true leadership.

A leader learns to delegate.

It didn’t take long for the problems of two million people to become overwhelming. In God’s providence, Moses’ father-in-law Jethro, visited Moses and saw how the people were wearing Moses out with their need for constant attention. At Jethro’s recommendation, Moses formed a system of representation, selecting capable men, who could help him judge the people. He invested in others and made his own load lighter. It’s an important lesson for all of us in leadership, who ultimately must learn that no leader, no matter how gifted, can do it all.

A leader goes to the mountain.

Moses could have allowed the constant demands of the people to drain him completely. Instead, after delegating authority to others, he went to the mountain. On the mountain, God met him and gave him the

law. Coming out of Egypt was one thing. Knowing how to behave once they reached the Promised Land was quite another. God gave Moses the guidelines for human behavior that are still the basis for much of our system of laws today.

Every capable leader must go to the mountain from time to time. Without contact with God, the leader falls back on his or her own resources. Such assets are always inadequate.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Across the years, I have made several observations about spiritual leaders. They may not all lead alike, but all effective spiritual leaders have a few things in common.

Spiritual leaders are persons of integrity.

In my book, *Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*, I mentioned five action points for building integrity.

- *Never do anything privately that wouldn't pass public scrutiny.* Think about the kinds of television programs or movies you watch. Think about the decisions you make when you hold the computer mouse in your hand. When you are home alone, what choices do you make? What decisions do you make when no one is watching?

As David Starr Jordan observed, "There is no real excellence in all this world which can be separated from right living."¹⁶

- *Never do anything the Scriptures frown upon.* You don't have to look any further than God's Word to find a clear path to integrity. The Book is filled with the stories of people who handled life well and those who did not. If you study their lives, you will learn what they refused and what they gripped tightly. Be a diligent student of these biblical leaders.
- *Never do anything that will bring shame to the Kingdom.* Many people who never read the Bible will read your life. They will watch carefully to see whether you do what you say and whether your walk matches your talk. If you walk uprightly, it speaks well for the Kingdom. If you fail, it brings shame to the Kingdom. Do your best and trust God. He promises to strengthen and uphold you (Isaiah 41:10).
- *Never do anything that will rob you of your self-worth.* Ultimately, you have to live with the person you see in the mirror every morning. God has already determined your worth. You are precious in his sight. But if you lose confidence in yourself and cannot stand the sight of yourself in the mirror, your behavior will suffer and so will your testimony. Stand tall. Believe in God and believe in yourself.
- *Never do anything that will make you vulnerable to Satan.* Scripture reminds us that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The Bible also cautions us not to "give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:27). He looks for the slightest opening where he can gain an advantage. Be aware of his disguises, as he often approaches us adorned in cuteness or cleverness. Trust in God and avoid the enemy's traps.

Spiritual leaders overcome fears.

A spiritual leader overcomes fears. Otherwise, fears will paralyze the leader's action and dilute the leader's effectiveness. President Harry S. Truman observed, "The worst danger we face is the danger of being paralyzed by doubts and fears. This danger is brought on by those who abandon faith and sneer at hope. It is brought on by those who spread cynicism and distrust and try to blind us to the great chance to do good for all mankind."¹⁷

Some spiritual leaders fear criticism. No one is immune from it. No less a spiritual leader than Bill Hybels admits his vulnerability to criticism. He said, "I have told my wife Lynn that I believe that for the rest of my life I will live with a dull pain because of the pain of people criticizing me."¹⁸ Obviously, while criticism is a reality, he has learned not to let it paralyze him.

Some spiritual leaders fear inadequacy. It's like the classic story of the preacher who discussed his short-comings and phobias with his brother. "Sometimes I feel inadequate, bro."

His brother responded as many brothers would, "You ARE inadequate.

Just get over it and keep plugging away!

Congregations are like older brothers, often placing high expectations on today's pastors. They expect the pastor will have leadership skills, relational skills, equipping skills, and to have an attitude that is always positive. These expectations can drive a sensitive person crazy because we are all just human enough to feel that we fall short at times. Remember, that the Lord is your adequacy and will strengthen you where you are weak (Ezekiel 34:16).

Some spiritual leaders fear burnout. When you work as hard as you can, yet do not see the results you anticipate, you may become a victim of burnout, as did John Madden, former championship coach of the NFL Oakland Raiders. "When you don't care," he admitted, "it's time to go . . . you're history . . . you're done."¹⁹ To continue being effective, you must avoid burnout. Don't fear it. Instead, embrace the God who knows the end from the beginning and is the only one truly capable of evaluating our best efforts.

Spiritual leaders facilitate change.

A spiritual leader learns to facilitate change. Many people feel threatened by change, which is why it is important to understand there are four groups of people in a church, especially as it relates to change.²⁰

**Embrace the God who knows the end from the beginning and is the only
one truly capable of evaluating our best efforts.**

Radicals are proponents of creative programs. They like to start new ministry programs, which is why radicals are often found in new churches. Radicals rarely feel comfortable in older churches.

Progressives live on the growing edge of the church and are proponents of change. They typically see the growth needs of the church before others do. Progressives can be great allies to pastors as they are capable of communicating the need for change to the conservatives.

Conservatives resist change. They love the status quo and are not happy about things that jeopardize their personal comfort. They are the opponents of change. Further, they carry most of the church's financial burden and are willing to take risk only if they feel confident of a high level of success. They often ask probing questions of church leaders, keeping them honest.

Traditionalists are also opponents of change. They often have to be dragged along as a church starts new programs and ministries.

Understanding these four types of persons doesn't guarantee that a leader will be successful in leading change. Yet it does clarify the task, as Peter Drucker states it: "You have to infuse your entire organization with the mindset that change is an opportunity, not a threat."^{xxi}

Spiritual leaders manage time well.

Charles Richards said, "Don't be fooled by the calendar. There are only as many days in the year as we make use of. One person gets a week's value out of a year, while another person gets a full year's value out of a week."^{xxii}

Plan your time.

Many pastors make a "to do" list for the day or for the week, whichever fits your rhythm best. Fred Smith said, "Most of us don't let other people spend our money; likewise, we should limit their power to spend our time, also."^{xxiii}

Prioritize your time.

Not everything is of equal importance. Do the most important things first. You can't afford to drop the ball on the important things.

File for the future.

As you read, mark items of interest in the margin. File them away by topic, and when you need something on that topic, you will find it in your file, thus saving the time you might have used to look for it.

Learn to say, “No.”

Except for emergencies, schedule appointments at your convenience. If you don't manage your time, others will manage it for you.

Delegate time-consuming tasks to others.

If you can find someone else who can do it 80 percent as well as you can, let them do it.

Eliminate time-wasting tasks.

Avoid wood, hay, and stubble activities. Watch out for curiosity; it can waste your time. Decide what to do and do it. Decide what not to do and don't do it.

Simplify.

I know outstanding business leaders who don't read the newspaper. Or they read it standing up, to avoid spending too much time with it. Protect your personal energy, especially if you are a low-energy person. Give your best energy to the most important tasks.

SPIRITUAL LEADERS

A spiritual leader can be summed up in three words: servant-leader, shepherd-leader, and steward-leader.

Servant-leader.

Servant leadership is a New Testament model that came to the forefront in the mid-70s with the publication of Robert Greenleaf's book *Servant Leadership*. In it, Greenleaf suggests that churches do away with head tables, that pastors should shine the shoes of their people, go last in line, and defer all credit for goals accomplished. There is much to consider in these admonitions if we generalize them throughout all facets of our ministry.

Shepherd-leader.

Luke tells us among the many miracles of Jesus – the feeding of the multitude, the conversation with Moses and Elijah, the healing of the demon-possessed boy – that Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to follow me must put aside his own desires and conveniences and carry his cross with him every day and *keep close to me!* Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it, but whoever insists on keeping his life will lose it, and what profit is there in gaining the whole world when it means forfeiting one's self? When I, the Messiah, come in my glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels, I will be ashamed then of all who are ashamed of me and my words now” (Luke 9:23-26 TLB).

And then in his second book, the stories of the acts of the Early Church, Luke quotes Paul: “Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock – his church, purchased with his blood – for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers. I know full well that after I leave you, false teachers, like vicious wolves, will appear among you, not sparing the flock. Some of you yourselves will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out!” (Acts 20:28-31 TLB).

H. B. London says in his book *Pastors at Risk* that 80 percent of all pastors fit into the chronically fatigued category of shepherd-leader. Most pastors are in this condition, he contends, from spending most of their time caring for people. “They don't get anything accomplished with the exception of caring for people all the time,” he says.

Steward-leader.

The pastor as steward-leader has two responsibilities: to live the mission of the Church and to teach the stewardship of the gifts to God's people. The steward-leader says, “I can combine the best qualities of the servant and shepherd leader and understand the mission, and my first responsibility will be holding people to the mission and beliefs.” The term “stewardship” has too often been linked to money. But if I

know that all the people of God are uniquely gifted, have distinct personalities, and at least one spiritual gift, then my real assignment as a spiritual leader is to get those people placed into ministry.

We learn to involve people in service as a steward-leader rather than doing everything for them. If we involve them first and foremost, God's Church will grow. We're back to the "me to we" concept I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. It's not just about what "I" can do, but about what "we" can do together.

THE GREATEST ENTERPRISE

Many pastors are discouraged because they are overwhelmed with the task. They may feel like driving by the church on Monday morning with their resignation in a brown paper bag, weighted down with a little rock, throw it out the window, and shout, "HERE YOU GO! SEE YA LATER!!"

I remember one pastor who wrote a note on Sunday morning to his church. The note read: "I've bought a truck. I'm leaving to drive a truck. I hope you have a great time here. I'm gone." He just left the note on the podium. Now that's frustration!

But steward-leaders know they can do better than that. He or she can jealously guard the mission, the values, the beliefs, and can get people involved in ministry. Together they can grow God's Church. Real spiritual leadership is not just "doing" ministry. It is leading others to use their gifts in effective ministry for Christ.

ACTION STEPS

1. Analyze where you are currently in the five levels of leadership. What would it take to move to the next level?
2. Study the five action points in the section on "Spiritual leaders are persons of integrity."
3. Regarding your current leadership, is it more about "me" or more about "we"? What, if anything, needs to change?

Chapter Three

GOALS

A Church with Exciting Goals

A vibrant church is one that knows where it is going and has a clear strategy as to how it will get there.

Goal-setting is the basis for all truly exceptional achievement.

–JIM ROHN

When John Goddard was 15 years old, he made a list of 127 things he would like to do or see or experience in his lifetime. At age 74, he had completed 109 of his goals. Some were relatively simple, like visiting certain places in the world, or marrying and having children. Others were more challenging, like milking a poisonous snake or circumnavigating the world (which he has done four times, by the way).²⁴

Goddard has become the “poster child” for accomplishments. I can’t help but wonder, how many he would have accomplished if he had not written them down and taken them seriously. Maybe visiting the birthplaces of both maternal and paternal grandfathers in Denmark and England, respectively, would not be important to you, but they were important to him, and he accomplished them.

He tried to accomplish others and fell short. He wanted to study dragon lizards, the world’s largest living lizards, on Komodo Island, one of the more than 17,000 islands that make up the Republic of Indonesia. However, his boat broke down within twenty miles of the island. He also wanted to appear in a Tarzan movie, not an unusual desire for a 15-year-old boy in his day. However, to my knowledge, they quit making Tarzan movies quite some time ago.

Nevertheless, Goddard is not known for the goals he missed, but for the extraordinary number he reached over a lifetime of persistence.

WHY SOME DO NOT SET GOALS

Some people do not set goals. They think goal-setting is not “spiritual.”

Not spiritual.

They say we should just pray and work and leave the results with God. Who’s to say that’s not a valid plan? I believe in work. I believe in prayer. I believe God blesses them both.

But consider this: if I only pray and work and if I have no specific target, am I not like the boy who shoots arrows into a fence, then draws bulls-eyes around each arrow, and proclaims himself a success?

Perhaps someone is thinking: what if you have a target and you work and pray, but you don’t reach your goal by the specified date? If I make progress each day toward my goals, have I not at least achieved some success? Success may be defined as “the progressive realization of predetermined, worthwhile, personal goals.”²⁵

Someone said, “A goal is a dream with a deadline.”²⁶ If I only dream and never write it down or never set a deadline for its accomplishment, it is not productive. But if God, in answer to prayer, gives a pastor a dream, a vision for the preferred future, and the pastor writes it down and puts a deadline to achieve it, progress can be tracked.

Fear.

A Sunday school teacher asked her students who “Moses” was. After a long silence, one brave little guy shot his arm in the air and hollered, “I know!” “I know!” “He was the guy that climbed up Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Commencements!”

Yet, some people do not set goals because they seem to fear the whole process. What if I set a goal and then I don’t achieve it, won’t I look foolish? What if I set a goal and then later discover it was the wrong goal?

Goals are typically not chiseled in stone. We're not talking about the Ten Commandments. We write our goals on paper or type them into a computer. We can tear up paper and throw it away. We can hit the delete button and destroy what we have written. Or we can erase and start over, delete and begin again.

Sometimes all we need to do is to realize our timing was a bit off. It may not be the goal that is wrong, but our timing. It may take longer to do some things than we realized. It may involve enlisting others to help, finding a source of funding, or other challenges that create delays we had not anticipated.

Yes, it may be that others will think us foolish if we announce our goals and then miss them. However, it may also be exactly as Mark Duduit observed: "At age 20, we worry about what others think of us. At 40, we don't care what they think of us. At age 60, we discover they haven't been thinking about us at all."²⁷

Lack of understanding.

Others never get around to goal-setting because they don't understand the process. For one thing, the only effective goals are written goals. If you haven't written it down, it will likely not motivate you to action. You will forget your great idea, or your dream will remain an ethereal, intangible idea you never quite fulfill.

The only effective goals are written goals.

To write it down, you must be able to state it clearly. If you cannot state it clearly, then you probably don't understand what it is you hope to accomplish. If you don't understand it well enough to state it clearly, you need to think it through more carefully.

So write it down. If you don't like the way it looks or sounds, rewrite it. Revise it. Re-state it. Polish it until you are satisfied that what you have written is a clear statement of the direction you want to go. Only then will you be able to convince others to follow you.

DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR GOALS

David makes an interesting study in goal-setting. The goal of becoming king of Israel was not, from all we can understand, a dream of his from the beginning. A young man tending his father's sheep is the image we have of David when we first meet him. The best we can say for him is that he was faithful to the task his father had given him. He was "ruddy with a fine appearance and handsome features" (1 Samuel 16:12).

It was not because of his appearance that convinced Samuel to anoint him king. Rather the Lord seemed to whisper to Samuel and indicate David as the one to be anointed, "and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13b).

A dream delayed.

Yet, although he was anointed by the prophet, David did not seem to transform instantly into a person obsessed with ruling the country. Instead, he humbly took the position of armorbearer to King Saul and player of the harp to ward off Saul's bad moods.

When the day came that David sought permission from Saul to fight the giant Goliath, he did not frame his request in the form of an ambitious step toward the throne. He did not say, "Don't you realize I have been anointed king, and if anyone is going to follow me, I must step up and prove myself worthy of being followed."

Instead, when Saul tried to reject his offer, David recited his success at protecting his father's sheep. In reading the account, we do not get the impression that David is trying to boast or promote himself. He wasn't trying to make it a bigger deal than it was, nor was he trying to downplay it. He simply stated the facts as he saw them: God helped me overcome the bear and the lion and he will help me overcome the giant too.

It was confidence in God that motivated David to face Goliath, not confidence in himself. His motivation was to silence the enemy, not prove himself a great warrior. When the giant mocked him,

David confidently responded that God would deliver the giant into his hands, and “the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Samuel 17:46).

Integrity kept intact.

In time, Saul became jealous of David and tried to kill him. When David no longer appeared in Saul’s presence, the king pursued him, forcing the young man to hide in caves and avoid the king in every way he could.

On more than one occasion, David could have taken Saul’s life, but he had such respect for the office of king, that he would not touch Saul. At one point, David and Abishai, one of his lieutenants, entered Saul’s camp at night, while the king lay sleeping. Saul’s spear was stuck in the ground near the sleeping king’s head. Abishai encouraged David to let him pin the king to the ground with one thrust of the spear, but David refused. “Who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless?” David asked (1 Samuel 26:9).

Instead of killing the king, David took Saul’s spear and water jug, crept out of the camp without waking anyone, and then, from a safe distance, called out to the army. Saul recognized David’s voice and admitted his sin in pursuing David. The young man said, “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 26:23).

Some people become so driven to reach their goals that they sacrifice integrity in order to achieve their desires. But not David. He remained a man of uprightness and integrity. He confidently believed that although he should be king, God would bring this to pass in the Lord’s own time.

Never give up.

Patience is often required when the mission to seek our goals is delayed. Patience could be described as holding your horses long enough to get a saddle on them. We may often run into obstacles. But patience and persistence can enable us to hold steady when it appears our goals are unachievable. Robert Schuller wrote, “When faced with a mountain, I will not quit. I will keep on striving until I climb over, find a pass through, tunnel underneath, or simply stay and turn the mountain into a gold mine! With God’s help!”²⁸

The two most important phrases in that statement are “I will not quit” and “With God’s help.” If David had given up when faced with all the obstacles in his pathway to royalty, and if he had slunk off into another country, and if he had given up hope, he might never have become king. And if he had forgotten that God would help him, he surely would have been permanently side-tracked from leadership in Israel.

Patience and persistence can enable us to hold steady when it appears our goals are unachievable.

But his writings prove he never gave up on God. And God never gave up on David. “I sought the Lord,” he wrote, “and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. . . . This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. . . . Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing . . . The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry” (Psalm 34:4, 6, 9, 15a).

A DREAM WITH A DEADLINE

As I mentioned earlier, a written goal is a dream with a deadline. A study of a Yale University graduating class several years ago showed that the small percentage of graduates who had written down their goals accomplished more than all of the other graduates combined.

Steve Moore, reflecting on the lives of Dwight L. Moody, Hudson Taylor, and John R. Mott, suggests that people who dream great dreams (and I might add, achieve great goals) have five things in common.²⁹

They are intentional.

Goal-setting is simply an exercise in trying to determine what is God's preferred future for you. All else being equal, you have a future. The question is: what kind of future will it be? You can take the attitude of the song that was popular many years ago, "Qué será, será" – "What will be, will be." Or you can be intentional about planning for your future.

Setting a goal is similar to focusing sunlight with a magnifying glass. With focused energy, you can start a fire. Unfortunately, while many people have an opinion, few have a plan. Hudson Taylor, born in 1832, in Barnsley, England, was converted at the age of 17 after reading a tract from his father's library. Early in life, he dreamed of serving others in China, which he actually did for 51 years. He founded a new mission society, the China Inland Mission. By the time of his death in 1905, he had established 20 mission stations, brought 849 missionaries to the field, and trained 700 additional Chinese workers. By some estimates, he baptized 50,000 Chinese people, as many as 35,000 of them being people he had personally led to Christ.³⁰

What will you accomplish, with God's help? You don't have to compare yourself to Hudson Taylor, but all of us do need to be intentional, if we want to accomplish God's best plan for us.

They are disciplined.

The wise man communicated a powerful message about discipline when he cited the ant:

"You lazy fool, look at an ant.
Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two.
Nobody has to tell it what to do.
All summer it stores up food;
At harvest it stockpiles provisions.
So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing?
How long before you get out of bed?
A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there,
Sit back, take it easy – do you know what comes next?
Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life,
poverty your permanent houseguest!
– PROVERBS 6:6-8 (THE MESSAGE)

Discipline!

It's the determination to channel our energies into the right place at the right time to accomplish the right things. Once you have decided on your goal and have written it down, the next step is often difficult – channeling our energies in the right direction. Fear or procrastination has sidetracked many a well-intentioned goal-setter.

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who led U.S.-allied forces to victory in the first Gulf War, said, "The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it."³¹

Business philosopher Jim Rohn believed in the power of discipline. He said, "Something will master and something will serve. Either you run the day or the day runs you; either you run the business or the business runs you."³²

If you cannot discipline yourself to write down your goals, it is highly unlikely you will discipline yourself to achieve them.

They are humble.

Dwight L. Moody, a highly effective evangelist of the nineteenth century, surrounded himself with men who were more educated than he was in order to learn from them. John R. Mott, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for his work in establishing and strengthening international Protestant Christian student organizations that worked to promote peace, sat at the feet of Moody. Although a student at a leading university, Mott was not above learning from the gifted evangelist, who had only a few years of formal education.

Samuel Logan Brengle became a leader in the Salvation Army. On one occasion, someone introduced him as “the great Dr. Brengle.” He later wrote in his diary:

If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without Him, and helping me to keep little in my own eyes. He does use me. But I am so concerned that He uses me and that it is not of me the work is done. The ax cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, and he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron. O that I may never lose sight of this.³³

Sometimes Christians get confused about humility. They think they have to put themselves down or make themselves look smaller than they really are. We need to remember the admonition of Phillips Brooks: “The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.”³⁴

They are creative.

When D. L. Moody held an evangelistic campaign, he organized a special meeting called the Question Drawer. People who attended could write a question on a piece of paper and drop it in a box. Moody would draw out a question, but before offering an answer of his own, he would defer to any local clergy who were present and allow them to present an answer. By doing this, he learned what was on the minds of the people who attended his services. He could then adjust his preaching topics and illustrations to address their needs more specifically and adequately. As he listened to the answers the pastors gave, it also provided Moody with the opportunity to learn from them.

One example of John Mott’s creativity was his Quiet Day. On a Quiet Day, he invited a few of his peers to meet with him. They would share books they had read, talk about plans for the future, and express to one another their heart-felt concerns. He augmented these meetings with a monthly newsletter. In so doing, this circle of relationships became lifelong friends.

Previously, I mentioned Hudson Taylor. Some evaluated his work as having the equivalent of a doctorate in missions by observing the mistakes and failures of others, as well as his own. These experiences enabled him to chart a better course for the China Inland Mission.

They are active.

Someone observed, “When it’s all said and done, there’s a lot more said than done.” So it’s important to get started. Get started developing your goals so you can fulfill your dreams.

Doing something is better than doing nothing when it comes to fulfilling your dream.

Thomas E. Burnett Jr., a passenger on Flight 93, the airplane that crashed into the Pennsylvania countryside on September 11, 2001, instead of the terrorists’ intended target in Washington, D.C., called his wife Deena four times during that flight. In his last conversation with her, he said, “Don’t worry, we’re going to do something.” Of course, what they did cost them their lives, but it also foiled the terrorists’ plot and saved the lives of countless others.

Doing something is better than doing nothing when it comes to fulfilling your dream. John Mason said, “Don’t wait for your ship to come in – swim out to it.”³⁵

Of course, some people think it’s better to pray than to plan. That reminds me of the two fishermen, trapped in their boat in the middle of the lake during a storm. One turned to the other and asked, “Should we pray or should we row?” His wise companion responded, “I have an idea! Let’s do both.” Kemin Wilson, founder of the Holiday Inn chain of hotels, was asked how he became successful. He replied, “I really don’t know why I’m here. I never got a degree, and I’ve only worked half days my entire life. I

guess my advice is to do the same – work half days every day. And it doesn't matter which half. The first twelve hours or the second twelve hours.”³⁶

Everybody has a great idea in the shower. The world is run by people who get out of the shower, dry off, and go to work on the idea.

CREATIVITY AND GOAL-SETTING

Goal-setting is as simple as taking a legal pad and a pen (or a tablet and a stylus) and beginning to think and write.

- What do you want to do?
- Where do you want to go?
- What would you like to see?
- What would you like to accomplish?
- What do you want to have?
- Whom do you want to meet?
- Whom would you like to influence?”

Write down your answers. As you refine them, they become your goals. Regarding your church, think: “Where do you want to be in five years, ten years?”

- What would the church look like?
- What kind of ministries would you offer?
- What kinds of people will you influence?
- What will your facilities look like?
- What kind of staff members will you need to fulfill these dreams?
- What kinds of resources will you need?”

Write down your answers and formulate them into goals.

Being creative will help you as you go through the goalsetting process. Some people complain, “I’m just not creative. I don’t have a creative bone in my body.” Ted Engstrom believed that “creativity has been built into every one of us; it’s part of our design.”³⁷

You can be creative too. Here are five tips toward greater creativity:

Determine not to accept the status quo.

This does not necessarily mean that everything you have done in the past is wrong. Yet there is a subtle danger in doing everything the same way all the time. Thinking outside the lines, even outside the box, is normal for people who make progress and innovation.

John C. Maxwell observed:

“Complacent people see nothing wrong.

“Critical people see everything wrong.

“Creative people find solutions for what is wrong.”³⁸

Become comfortable with change.

By definition, creativity requires change. When God created the world, it was a change from *nothing* to *something*. When he created a new heart within you and me, it was a change from *night* to *day*, from *bad* to *good*.

If you don’t like change, you will probably not be very creative. If you are not creative, you will have difficulty fulfilling your dream. Thomas Watson, Jr., chair of the board of IBM for many years, said, “Strangely, the expounders of many of the great ideas of history were frequently considered on the lunatic fringe for some or all of their lives. If one stands up and is counted, from time to time one may get

knocked down. But remember this: A man flattened by an opponent can get up again. A man flattened by conformity stays down for good.”³⁹

Learn to think what could be instead of what is.

In an issue of *Success* magazine, editors profiled a group of entrepreneurs regarding how they identify, evaluate and exploit new opportunities. One entrepreneur said, “I step out of the confusion and take a long walk in the woods, and I listen to what I *really* think.”⁴⁰

It is often difficult to know what you think when you are surrounded by the clatter and clang of machinery, office noise, or simply the familiarity of your typical surroundings. An environment to which we have become accustomed often lulls us into thinking the way we have always thought. A change of scenery can sometimes stimulate fresh thinking.

For instance, several years ago a team of NASA scientists were trying to fix a problem with the Hubble telescope, which was already in orbit. They were having trouble with distorted lenses in the giant telescope. Experts in optics proposed that tiny inversely distorted mirrors could correct the images. But how could they be installed into the hard-to-reach space inside the instrument?

Jim Crocker, an engineer, was taking a shower in a German hotel when he noticed the European-style showerhead mounted on adjustable rods. It occurred to him that the Hubble’s little mirrors could be extended into the telescope if they were mounted on similar folding arms.⁴¹

In an environment totally unrelated to the problem with which he was wrestling, creative juices flowed in a different way and supplied the answer.

Look for many solutions.

Seldom is there just one way to solve a problem. If you look only for the perfect way, you will become boxed in. Instead, consider various possibilities and you will find a good solution among them.

Henry Ford said, “Don’t find fault . . . find a remedy.”⁴²

See problems as opportunities.

John Mason points out: “Watch for big problems; they disguise big opportunities. Opposition, distraction and challenges always surround the birth of a dream. Make the most of all that comes and the least of all that goes. Adversity is the soil for creativity.”⁴³

Any idea worth its salt will attract both resources and obstacles. Every goal has its advantages and disadvantages, its pros and its cons. If it’s a great idea, especially one inspired by God, you can’t afford to let obstacles stand in your path. You must find the opportunity in the obstacle and use it to your advantage.

THE GREATEST ENTERPRISE

You may not have a list of 127 things you want to accomplish in life, as John Goddard did. But do you have a list of things you would like to accomplish this year? A vibrant church needs a pastor who thinks ahead, who imagines the best, who sees the preferred future, and charts a course toward achieving God’s best for the church.

You can be that pastor if you take goal-setting seriously and go to work on it.

ACTION STEPS

1. Think of David and his dreams that were delayed for so many years. Do you have dreams and goals that have been sidetracked? Think about what it would take to get back on track. God may yet have a bright future for you and your church.
2. Meditate on the lives of Moody, Chambers, Mott, and Taylor. What does your life have in common with them? How is your life different? How many of the five traits do you have in common with great dreamers?
3. On a scale of one to five, rate your creativity, with one being mired in complacency and five being wildly creative. What would it take to move up a notch toward reaching your creative potential?

Chapter Four

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A Church with Proven Strategies and a Plan that Works

A vibrant church is one that engages in strategic planning.

Good fortune is what happens when opportunity meets with planning.

—THOMAS EDISON⁴⁴

A pastor approached his congregation on Sunday to raise money for the building program and said, “I have some good news and some bad news, which do you want first?” Someone shouted from the back of the overcrowded sanctuary, “Give us the good news!!”

The pastor said, “Well, here it is: we have more than enough money to finish our new worship center.” He then paused, looked down at his notes, and said, “The bad news is it’s still in your checking accounts.”

Everybody needs a plan. Whether you’re talking about going on vacation or building a church, you need a plan.

Several years ago, my wife Linda was diagnosed with cancer. We had noticed several things in her daily life in the weeks prior to her diagnosis that didn’t seem right, but we passed them off as things that come with age. Finally, the tests came back positive for colon cancer and we immediately scheduled surgery.

After our Sunday evening church service in Nashville, where we were pastoring, we checked into the hospital. Dr. Santi, our surgeon, came by that night to visit with us and tell us about the procedure, possibilities, and plans. He diagrammed her colon, showed us exactly where the tumors were located, and pointed out a large tumor on the X-ray that he determined was malignant.

In great detail, he outlined what he would do, how much of the colon would be removed, what complications might arise, and possible prognoses. Linda and I did a lot of soul-searching and looking at each other as Dr. Santi spoke to us. We wondered what the next day would bring and how drastically our lives might change.

When Dr. Santi finished, he did something unforgettable. He said, “I am only a human being. I have to rely on God for everything I do.” We had no previous indication that Dr. Santi was anything more than a great surgeon. Now we knew he was a great Christian surgeon. He reached over and took Linda’s hands and held them up toward heaven. “Lord,” he prayed, “tomorrow our hands will be in Your hands and we are going to trust Linda to Your care.” Then he prayed for me. As the doctor left, Linda and I held each other’s hands and thanked God for providing us with a marvelous Christian man, who both ministered to her body and served as a pastor to our hearts.

Linda’s surgery was a success. The surgical team had to do just about everything Dr. Santi had outlined to us. They placed her in intensive care until she stabilized, and then in a regular room for seven days until we took her home. It took several months for her energy to return and for her routines to normalize. But she returned to teaching and resumed her active involvement with family, friends, and church.^{xiv}

We praise God for his healing touch on Linda, but we also thank him for the doctor’s diagnosis and step-by-step plan for immediate action.

Planning is the design of hope for the future, whether the plans concern our physical health, our spiritual well-being, our families, our churches, our vocations, or even our vacations. It is in our planning that the strategies that bring success are made out, laid out, and paid out. Good planning is rarely an attempt to predict the future; it is more frequently an opportunity to direct the future. It proactively prepares the leader of a local church to shape and regulate growth.⁴⁶

QUESTIONS FOR STRATEGIZING

Unless you've been living under a rock, it's pretty obvious that a church that operates the same way it did fifty years ago is woefully behind the times. Its ministries are probably irrelevant to our culture today. Unfortunately, as Rick Warren observed, "Churches continue to offer the same old generic programming to a world that is segmented into a million different niches."⁴⁷ When this is the case, stagnation and irrelevance are inevitable.

Inside and outside planning.

Churches that have engaged in successful planning have learned the value of both inside planning and outside planning. The former occurs when the pastor sits down with his or her leadership group and works as a team to devise a strategy. Outside planning happens when the leaders recognize the need to call in an outside consultant to help get the ball rolling. Consultants may assist with fund-raising, stewardship development, leadership training, and other areas of concern.

Four crucial questions.

Whatever strategy you use, you need to ask four questions:

1. Do I have complete knowledge of my mission? This begs a follow-up question: how do I gain such knowledge? Obviously, a pastor concerned about such crucial knowledge will seek input from associates with whom he or she works closely on a regular basis. Prayer guidance from the Holy Spirit is another critical element, as well as spending time thinking, writing, and reading about the mission.

2. Do I understand my capabilities? It is vital that pastors understand their own gifts. Where are they strong? Where are they weak? Can they make a list of the three to five things they do well and the three to five areas in which they need to ask others to help? Pastors must also consider the size of their church. If the plans are grandiose, the pastor may have to take baby steps in strategizing or the process itself could overwhelm limited resources.

3. Do I have complete knowledge of my team's capabilities? A pastor needs to know the strengths and weaknesses, positives and negatives, of the leadership team. Failing to take this into consideration could lead to confusion as to what people's roles are. Ideally, the team should complement itself. If gaps exist, determine how to best fill those.

4. Do I receive constant feedback and have open communication? You likely have some people on your team that quickly and efficiently agree or disagree with your plans. Others may have strong feelings, but are reluctant to express them. Have you endeavored to draw out the "strong silent types" so that you gain the benefit of their input?

Other questions:

- Some other questions you may want to consider:
- Who is our target group?
- Do we have the right people in the right places to fulfill our strategic plans?
- Do we need outside help with our planning?
- Where are we going as a church?
- Who will be responsible for what, and who will be responsible for whom?
- Do we have the resources to accomplish our goals?
- Do we effectively communicate the direction of the church?
- How can we keep improving?

PRAYER FOR A NEW STRATEGY

Norman Vincent Peale used to tell about strolling through a crooked little street in Kowloon, Hong Kong, and seeing the words "born to lose" in the window of a tattoo shop. A customer could have those words tattooed on his body, if he so desired. Bypassing flags, mermaids, and other typical tattoos, a person could have this ultra-negative statement emblazoned on his or her flesh.

Peale entered the shop and said to the Chinese man, “Does anyone actually have ‘Born to lose’ tattooed into his flesh?”

The proprietor answered, “Yes, some.” But then he tapped his head and added in broken English, “Before tattoo in chest, tattoo on mind.”^{xlvi}

Jabez was such a person. No, he did not literally have those words tattooed on his body, but he might as well have worn a sign around his neck, for his mother had named him, “Jabez.” In Hebrew, that sounds very much like “pain.” She had given birth to him in pain and she branded him for life by calling him “Jabez.” Can you imagine the other children? They probably said, “Jabez, you are truly a pain.”

Destined to be a loser.

As such, he was destined to be a loser. Yet he was anything but a loser. He became a winner of great magnitude. The thing that turned him around was prayer. His story is related briefly in two verses – 1 Chronicles 4:9-10:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request.

What a powerful passage! What a powerful lesson! Who knows how many thousands, perhaps millions, of people have gone through life with the word “loser” branded on their brains. Unlike Jabez, it never occurred to them to pray that God would reverse their childhood identity. It never occurred to them that a new strategy, inspired of God, and directed by God, might lift them from perennial defeat to perpetual victory.

The insight to dream.

Jabez had the insight to dream, to strategize, to become someone better, sharper, faster, more successful than what he had always been. His strategy was wrapped up in a simple prayer: “O God, help me to break free of my branded identity, my childhood image. Instead help me to become a person blessed beyond measure by the God of the universe. Help me to enlarge my territory beyond anything I might normally be expected to achieve. Instead of fulfilling a destiny dictated by my name – Pain – help me to rise up and be free of pain myself and never cause pain to others.”

God granted his bold request. As Leslie Allen observed, Jabez “had a psychological handicap, none the less real for being psychological. He was able to gain release from its grip and enjoy a social position of respect and honor which naturally he would never have attained, born loser as he was.”⁴⁹

Churches and pastors can be plagued with low self-esteem too. “We’ve always done it this way,” they lament. Or sometimes they reverse it and say, “We’ve never done it that way before.” Either way you say it, it spells defeat. It spells stagnation. It spells “loser”!

Breaking free of negative expectations.

Through prayer, just as Jabez broke free, you and your church can break free of whatever negative image you have struggled with for years. A colleague told me about a church whose pastor had been convicted of sexual transgressions. Years later, they determined that this behavior had so tarnished their image in the community, they could no longer exist, no longer have a viable ministry in that town. So they closed their doors and sold their property.

What might have happened if they had covenanted together to pray that God would bless them and enlarge their territory, and grant them the privilege of being known, not for some sordid behavior, but for extending love and compassion to a community desperately in need of a Savior?

You and your church can break free of whatever negative image you have struggled with.

What is your church dealing with from its past? Does it have a shadowed reputation in the community? Maybe it isn't a matter of a poor image outside the church. Maybe it's a matter of a poor self-image inside the church. "We have always been small. We'll never be any bigger than this," some churches think. "We have never been able to afford a full-time pastor," others lament. "We will always be led by a bi-vocational pastor."

Maybe it's time for a new strategy, one born in prayer, one that dares to ask God to bless you, make you a blessing, enlarge your boundaries beyond anything you have experienced before, and enable you to bring blessing to the community instead of pain.

It worked for Jabez. The same God is listening to hear if you will dare to pray such a bold, Christ-honoring, community blessing prayer.

PLAN AHEAD

Several years ago, I started using the following PLAN AHEAD acrostic to lead and monitor the planning process.

P redetermine a course of action
L ay out your goals
A djust your priorities
Notify key persons
A llow time for acceptance
H ead into action
E xpect problems to arise
A lways point to your successes
D aily review your plan

You cannot expect everyone to jump onboard immediately, so allow sufficient time for plans to be presented, considered, and accepted. Your time frame may differ from another church, but aim for positive or negative feedback within a couple of months. Eventually, when you have built a successful strategic plan, you can point to the success and say, "God really honored this!"

Let's take a closer look at the PLAN AHEAD acrostic.

Predetermine a course of action.

The alternative to predetermining a course of action is to accept whatever happens. You can always fall back on, "I guess it was God's will for things to turn out that way." It's pretty lame to blame God for your own lack of planning. Instead, why not prayerfully chart a course that will result in good things for God and the community! As Gary McIntosh advises, "Planning is no more than an attempt to understand the will of God for our church and respond to it by our actions."⁵⁰

Lay out your goals.

We spent a fair amount of time in the last chapter talking about the importance of written goals. Writing them down forces us to declare ourselves as to what we specifically want to happen, even expect to happen. Comedian Lily Tomlin once quipped, "I always wanted to be somebody, but I should have been more specific."⁵¹ We smile at that, but it clearly describes millions who have had vague, nebulous dreams that might have been fulfilled had those dreams been translated into concrete goals.

Adjust your priorities.

Most of us try to do too much. We overestimate what we can do in a year and underestimate what we can accomplish in five years. One of the keys is adjusting our priorities to focus on the three or four things we do well and delegate as much of the rest as possible. Tim Redmond observed, "There are many things that will catch my eye, but there are only a few things that will catch my heart . . . it is those I consider to pursue."⁵² Peter Drucker recommended further refining it by doing one thing at a time. He

pointed out that Mozart was the exception, capable of working on several compositions at the same time, all of them masterpieces. Other prolific composers – Bach, Handel, Haydn, Verdi – focused on one work at a time. He admonished executives that they should hardly assume they are Mozarts. Instead, “Concentration is necessary precisely because the executive faces so many tasks clamoring to be done.”⁵³

We overestimate what we can do in a year and underestimate what we can accomplish in five years

Notify key persons.

Don’t leave your key players in the dark. If you want them to be on the team, you must keep them informed. Better yet, bring them into your circle of consultation. Teamwork makes the dream work. Learn to trust others to give you honest feedback. You know whom you can trust not to trample on the dream. You know who will be positive and enhance the plan rather than shooting it down. Keep key persons in the loop.

Allow time for acceptance.

You won’t need to worry about early adopters. They’re already on board. Late adopters take more time. You have thought it through. You know the plan backward and forward. But those who have only heard the plan once may not be on the same page yet. It takes longer for some people to process information than others. Some people, by nature, will find flaws in the plan. That’s a good thing. Better to know the downside earlier rather than later. Flaws can be mended. Allow time for your key people to feel comfortable with the direction you want to take.

Head into action.

Sooner or later you have to act. Long before Nike developed its trademark swoosh and its slogan, “Just do it!” The late Norman Vincent Peale was once encouraging people to take action. “Have you got a promising idea?” he asked. “Do it! Do you have a cherished dream? Do it! Do you have a hidden ambition? Do it! Have you some great impulse, some burning desire? Do it!”⁵⁴

Expect problems to arise.

Adversity nearly always enters into every enterprise. However, it need not sidetrack you from achieving your goals. If you have planned ahead, you can see the end from the beginning and adversity can be overcome. It is a matter of finding a way over, around, or through the problem. At the end of the Revolutionary War, British Field Commander Charles Cornwallis told General George Washington, “This is a great victory for you, but your brightest laurels will be writ upon the banks of the Delaware.”⁵⁵ Cornwallis was referring to Washington’s decision to cross the Delaware River in sub-freezing weather in order to surprise the British troops at Trenton, New Jersey, on Christmas Day. This was in spite of the fact that his men were sick, ill-equipped, and in a retreat mode. In your case, problems will arise. Face them and find a way through the obstacles.

Always point to your successes.

What is the point in laboring our failures or losses? Someone may object that we are ignoring the negatives by putting a positive spin on what happens. Pointing to our successes is more than simply becoming a “spin doctor.” It’s a matter of refusing to be sidetracked by the inevitable problems that come. One of the advantages in knowing where you are going is that you can understand that adversity is only a temporary setback. If you are absolutely determined to reach the goal, you will find a way to overcome the obstacles.

Daily review your plan.

Good plans have a way of getting lost in the weeds of everyday responsibilities. The unexpected occurs. Another project takes longer than you anticipated. Interruptions come in bunches. Unless you regularly

review your plans, goals, and strategies, you can lose valuable time by focusing on the urgent and ignoring the important. So prioritize your day by taking time early to review your plan. Then when you must deal with other things, your strategy for reaching the main thing is never far from your thinking.

STRATEGY VS. GOAL-SETTING

What makes a strategy different from goal-setting? A strategy not only thinks about the end result; it thinks about how we get from here to there. What are the intermediate steps? What is the best way to achieve the desired goal?

Strategy begins with the leader.

“Follow me,” said Jesus (Mark 1:17), and the apostle Paul said the same thing: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). “Follow *we* never works. Ever. It’s ‘follow *me*.’ God gives a man or a woman the gift of leadership. And any organization that has a point leader with accountability and freedom to use their gift will do well.”⁵⁶

It is true that leadership has been abused by some leaders who lacked integrity. However, that is no reason to abandon the idea that God uses strong leaders to guide organizations, including local churches, to accomplish great things that make a difference in the world around us. Team leadership is a valid concept, but even within a team, someone has to take the responsibility to get the ball rolling and keep things moving in the right direction.

Bring the best people around you.

Wise is the leader who brings the best people together to collaborate on the best direction for the future. In fact, Jim Collins, who wrote *Good to Great*, says it is a mistake to simply announce a vision and try to rally people around the vision. Instead, he recommends, “Let’s get some strong people in key seats who care about the cause we’re engaged in.” The reason he states it this way is that “the work is too important to let key seats on the bus be occupied by the wrong people.”⁵⁷

What if the people on your boards and key committees are not forward thinkers? What if they are not positive toward the mission of the church? Then you have some work to do – over time – to bring stronger, more positive leaders into some key positions. In addition, in your leadership development, you can work toward enhancing people’s leadership skills. Many churches have people who are not better leaders because they have never been taught to think differently, and consequently, lead differently.

Strive for consensus, not unanimity.

It may sound “spiritual” to have every decision be unanimous, but in many organizations very little would be accomplished if that were the standard. When North Point Community Church, led by Andy Stanley, went to a multi-site approach, in effect becoming “churches” instead of a church, one of the leaders thought they should never make a decision without unanimity among the elders.

Stanley challenged the idea because, without that standard being binding on all decisions, they can have a couple of “cowboys,” a couple of independent thinkers on their board. Such persons are often contrary to what others say. But Stanley saw the opinion of contrarians as a valuable perspective to have at the table. So the board eventually decided all decisions did not have to be unanimous. Through the years, almost all decisions have had 100 percent agreement, but they don’t require it.⁵⁸

The Yiddish proverb says, “If all pulled in one direction, the world would keel over.”⁵⁹ This is another way of recognizing that contrary opinions have their place. Yet we strive for consensus, for agreement, for harmony, so that even if we do not achieve unanimity, we have sufficient agreement to move forward without discord.

Outline the intermediate steps.

Without intermediate steps, you do not have a strategy. You only have a goal, a dream, with no way to achieve it. The intermediate steps form the strategy.

It's like the little boy who said he was hungry enough to eat an elephant. When somebody without imagination scoffed "How on earth would you do that?" the boy answered, "One bite at a time."

That's how goals are achieved and dreams are realized: one bite at a time. Your intermediate steps may be divided into time segments – you accomplish so much this month, next month, in six months, or a year. The steps may reflect a logical progression from point A to point B – first we lay the foundation; then rough in the plumbing; then work on the slabs, basement, and garage; next the framing; then exterior siding, and on it goes until you are enjoying your new home.

Perhaps your goal is to touch every home in your community with some influence from your church. How will you go about it? What is the first step? Whom will you enlist to help with the project? What kind of time schedule are you considering? All these and more are intermediate steps to consider in moving from start to finish.

Determine a realistic time line.

During the Cold War, Ronald Reagan loved to tell the story about how things worked in the Soviet Union. If you wanted to buy an automobile, there was a ten-year wait. When people finally worked their way through the process, they had to put up the money in advance. Reagan told about a young fellow who had gone through all the agencies required, signed all the necessary papers, and was ready to receive the final stamp of approval. The man at the last agency said, "We have everything, now come back in ten years." The young man said, "Morning or afternoon?" The man said, "It's ten years from now – what difference does it make?" The young fellow replied, "Well, the plumber's coming in the morning."⁶⁰

Hopefully your strategy will not involve such a convoluted process. Yet I know of a church that have had to fight battles with local authorities stretching over several years, just to get permission to start building near the spot where two little endangered birds occasionally visit.

A worthwhile project takes time. Don't try to rush yours too quickly. Develop patience and don't skip important steps. And remember, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3).

TAKING IT SERIOUSLY

A church without strategic planning is like a surgeon who just starts cutting with no idea of what will be found. Today, with X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs, surgeons usually have a clear picture of what they are going to find before they ever pick up a scalpel. They think strategically. And so must we. A surgeon's work may save a life. The church's work may save many souls – but it demands our best strategic planning.

ACTION STEPS

1. What does your project require – inside or outside planning? How will you decide? Whom will you enlist to help you?
2. Think about your style in approaching projects? Do you tend to take on too much or too little? Are you more like Mozart (working on multiple projects, each one a masterpiece) or Bach (working on one thing at a time and doing it well)?
3. Consider whether you have the best people on the bus. If not, how will you go about enlisting better, more strategic, thinkers and leaders?

Chapter Five PARTNERSHIP

A Church Where Every Member is a Member

A vibrant church is one that mobilizes its members to active service for Christ in accordance with their gifts.

Football is 22 people on the field who desperately need rest and 22,000 people in the stands who desperately need exercise.

—BUD WILKINSON

Some time ago I overheard two mothers talking in the foyer of the church between Sunday school and the morning worship service. One of the mothers looked a big frazzled and disheveled as she unloaded on her friend.

“I just can’t get my kids to do anything around the house, so I end up having to do it all – the cleaning, the dishes, the laundry the yard work. I don’t know how much longer I’m going to hold up. I’m exhausted.”

The other woman looked her straight in the eye and said a very profound thing. “Maybe you should just stop doing everything and see what happens.”

I have discovered that in most congregations, 20 percent of the people are doing 80 percent of the work, while the other 80 percent of the people are doing only 20 percent of the work. Beyond that, George Barna claims that 80 percent of ministers in America today are talking about lay ministry, but only 20 percent of them are actually providing their people with opportunity to get involved in ministry.

That’s where the mother mentioned above had failed her children. Instead of asking and assigning tasks for her children – and then expecting them to follow through – she simply decided to do it all herself. We will become burned-out workaholics if we try to do everything that needs to be done all by ourselves. We will become effective leaders only if we delegate the work to those who surround us.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR LAY MINISTRY

Lay people should be inspired and empowered to fulfill their personal ministry in and through their local church and in the world. It is the responsibility of the clergy to enable and equip them.

Believers are called to minister.

Lay ministry is not merely another program – it is a mind-set of the local church. And it is a primary biblical principle. Paul told the Corinthians, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on God’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

The apostle Peter writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

All of these verses point out the importance of every believer’s having a ministry in the family of God.

Every believer is gifted by God in unique and specific ways.

Paul told the Romans, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:6-8).

As Reuben Welch said in his book by the same title, “We really do need each other.” We need to say to one another, “With your gifts, we need you. You are unique, and God wants to use you in a specific, special way.”

One of the most significant roles of the pastor is in equipping the laity for ministry.

Sometimes the reason laypersons do not use their gifts is a problem of ignorance or misdirection of gifts. The bottom line, a pastor’s responsibility is to equip the laity for ministry. If a pastor is able to understand his or her congregation’s spiritual gift mix and allow them to do what they are most passionate about, he or she will spend much time in training people to do ministry in the Body of Christ. When lay equipping becomes a part of local church ministry, workshops and seminars on teaching Sunday school, personal evangelism, writing, social services, and so on are a must. In describing Jesus Christ and his relationship to his church, Paul says, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

The church gathered and the church scattered.

Some time ago I spoke at a conference in Springdale, Arkansas. Upon leaving the church property, I noticed a sign reminding worship attendees, “You are now entering the mission field.”

When we gather, we worship God, but when we scatter, we serve God.

The church should be a place for ministry, the church gathered, as well as a base for ministry outside the church building, the church scattered. When we gather, we worship God, but when we scatter, we serve God. As the pastor shares lay ministry principles, it is critical to talk not only about the gathering of the church for worship, but also the scattering of the church to do ministry in the community. We are all called to minister, no matter what our job description at work says. Some of the best evangelists in the kingdom of God have sat behind a desk or stood on an assembly line or bent under the hood of a car.

Dr. Luke tells us that the Early Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:42-44).

Lyle Schaller calls it a “seven-day-a-week church.” It is not just this or that building we call the Church. It is we and they, the temples in whom God dwells, who are the Church.

Ministry is serving; it is love in action.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. . . . in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 18, 27).

To the church at Rome, Paul wrote, “Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5).

To fully accomplish its mission, the church must mobilize laypersons.

Have you ever tried to worship at the Church of the Valley of Dry Bones? The services are so dull they couldn’t cut melted butter, because there is no life, no breath, no spirit. Why? Because there is ministry going on, but it is just maintenance. In a maintenance organization, the pastor serves the 80 percent of “dry bones” and is a worker instead of a leader. The other 20 percent of the laity are doing the work.

The prophet Ezekiel found himself mired at the Church of the Valley of Dry Bones in the 37th chapter of his Old Testament book:

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord'" (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

Ezekiel did as he was told, and the Lord did as he had promised.

Then the Lord said to Ezekiel, "These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone . . . I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them . . . back to the land of Israel. . . . I will put my Spirit in you and you will live'" (Ezekiel 37:11-12, 14).

Training the laity to do the work of the ministry will increase the 20 percent of laypersons actively involved and help to steer clear of becoming a Church of the Valley of Dry Bones.

THE LAY MINISTRY PRINCIPLE

During the Olympics I usually sit in my recliner and watch the Olympians do all the work. I've noticed that an athlete's body type often relates to their sport. I watch as the runners carry their virtual skin and bones through the streets of the host city at speeds I can only dream about. Then I see the weightlifting "behemoths" plod up to the ring and hoist the equivalent of a Smart Car above their heads.

Then I begin to smile as I imagine the weight lifters lifting the bar with no weights on it at all, much less 500 or 600 pounds. At that moment, I realize that fitness applies to task, and even though one person may be as thin as a rail and another as broad as a house, the thing that unites them is that they are fit – not fat.

In a growing organization, the pastor equips the 20 percent of the people 80 percent of the time. He or she is a leader, training people who have been involved in everything. Such a pastor knows that leadership is influence, so he or she finds the people who are able to influence others. The influencer serves the other 80 percent of the people 20 percent of the time. This pastor is a *modeler*. Instead of running "milk routes," running around, putting spiritual bottles into screaming mouths, burping babies, and changing diapers, he or she ministers to people who can in turn minister to others. The church becomes a place of participants – partners in ministry, rather than an arena of spectators.

In a growing church the pastor and lay leaders together cast the vision. The lay leaders recruit and train others to lead, who in turn recruit and train participants who perform the ministry.

Pastor and lay leaders cast the vision.

As long as the pastor sees himself or herself as a worker rather than a leader, laypersons will never catch the vision of greater involvement themselves in the work of the ministry. In many small churches, often pastors are the chief workers. They preach the sermons, call on the sick, conduct all the meetings, and provide all the pastoral care.

The wise pastor trains laypersons to use their gifts for ministry.

As the church grows, the pastor is still responsible to see that all the work gets done, but a wise pastor casts the vision for lay ministry. Just as the early apostles appointed laypersons to "wait on tables" while

the apostles gave their “attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2b, 4), so the wise pastor trains laypersons to use their gifts for ministry.

Unfortunately in many churches, the pastor may actually be the chief roadblock preventing this from happening. A colleague told me about a pastor of his acquaintance who said, “I have 100 people in my church and that is enough for me to keep track of. I don’t want any more people.”

Such a pastor lacks vision. He is content to do the church’s entire ministry, while the laypersons’ gifts stagnate through neglect. This is not only unbiblical, it is highly unfortunate because it prevents the laypersons from developing into the fully devoted followers of Christ they are intended to be.

Leaders recruit and train leaders.

So when a pastor communicates a vision for lay ministry adequately, he or she, along with key lay leaders, can begin to recruit and train others. Many people are glad to be of use in the kingdom, but they don’t know what to do, or how to do it.

God is more concerned about availability than ability.

The place to begin is with a spiritual gifts inventory or perhaps a seminar on “how to discover and use your spiritual gifts.” In this way, people begin to understand how God may have already equipped them, through their natural interests and abilities, to work in the kingdom. Additional training provides them with information and insights into how they can best use their gifts to enhance the work of the Lord.

Newly developed leaders recruit and train participants.

Now the newly developed leaders can begin to spot other potential workers – engaged participants – to carry on the ministries of the church. By knowing what to look for in their friends and fellow congregants, they begin to find people who turn out to be capable teachers, musicians, helpers, and so forth—both skilled and unskilled. God is more concerned about availability than ability. When people make themselves available, they begin to fit into God’s plan to turn bystanders into participants.

Participants perform the ministry.

A whole army of participants are waiting for the opportunity to become engaged in a multiplicity of jobs in and around the church. New workers for all kinds of church ministries – both in the church and in the community – are potentially waiting in the wings until some insightful person asks them to become involved.

So pastors and key lay leaders should begin looking at the vast 80 percent of persons not currently engaged in active ministry for the church. As these potential workers are discipled, they become stronger in their faith and practice. As soon as they become ready, they can be put to work in useful tasks that make a difference, influencing souls for eternity.

Before long, people in the church and community may be able to give testimonies similar to that of Ridge Burns, who said:

“Although I’ve been in the ministry 20 years, this may have been the first time I felt genuinely ministered to. And surprisingly those I felt *least* connected to were the professional pastors of our church; it was the lay people who seemed to know what I was feeling. Not that the pastors are uncaring. They’ve done a good job of organizing our lay people to minister. The catch, though, is that the better job pastors do organizing their lay people to minister, the more some of the latter wonder what they need pastors for since they do such a good job themselves.”

RESTRUCTURING YOUR CHURCH

Jesus taught us that we cannot pour new wine into old wineskins, lest they break. An old wineskin is dry and brittle, completely unable to stretch and expand under the pressure of being filled up. Most churches

today are like old wineskins, structured according to the military hierarchy we instituted after World War II. It has relatively little to do with spirituality; it has more to do with immediate results and instant efficiency.

Structural Issues.

On the other hand, church structure does not cause growth any more than a hot oven will produce a German chocolate cake. What structure does is control the rate and limit of your church growth by providing adequate foundation. One way to measure the adequacy of your church growth is to look at its numbers. If your church growth has been leveled off for five years, you probably don't have the structure in place that allows growth to take place.

Your church has stopped growing.

There are many reasons for attendance to stagnate: overreliance on tradition, inability to adjust focus, lack of innovation, same leadership year after year, and so on.

Your church has leaders in conflict.

I have told every congregation I've ever pastored (some more than others) that I am not a fighter. If they want to fight me on every suggestion I make, every step I take, then they ought to seek another pastor, because I will certainly be seeking another church. A fellowship that bickers, fusses, argues, and disagrees about everything that comes along is not a fellowship that fosters confidence in its visitors. Growth in such a church is nearly impossible.

Your leadership is not motivated.

If your church board, staff, or volunteer base seems to be swimming upstream and losing ground, then chances are that the foundation is crumbling around them. They simply need better footing. When we restructure, we are saying, "Yes, we want to open up our system for more involvement."

Elements of church renewal.

Four elements of renewal are imperative as you think about restructuring your local church. I have listed them in chronological order, since the first is a prerequisite for the second, and so on.

- ***Personal renewal.*** This means getting alone with God and experiencing an old-fashioned revival in your heart. This might be for as short as an hour or as long as two weeks. I have been known to crawl under my desk and pray until I felt I had touched the hem of his garment. I have taken much-needed retreats to a lake or to a mountain cabin, seeking his guidance and wisdom in major decisions. Just like going out on a date with my wife – talking and listening, which renews my relationship with her – so, too, going on a "prayer date" with God renews my relationship with him.
- ***Corporate renewal.*** This occurs when what happens to you during your personal renewal becomes contagious and the whole church gets fired up, absolutely excited for God. One of my favorite teachers taught a subject many of us detest – English grammar. She honestly loved the study of our language, from its parts of speech to its exceptional number of exceptions. When she breezed into the room, the class came alive. As she joked about what she had just heard in the hall or read in her office, we became aware of how fun grammar could be. I learned a lot about writing from her, despite my reluctance and reservations.

That's what can happen to the body of the church when its leader comes into the sanctuary, exuberant and head-to-toe excited about his or her vision and mission.

- ***Functional renewal.*** This is best described as prayerful introspection. What operations of the church contribute to its spiritual health and vitality? Which ones seem to miss that mark? Which programs count for eternity, and which ones seem to fill an insignificant need to appear busy? What is the primary need in the immediate community, and how are we adjusting our vision to address that need? What ministry would distinguish us from the other 20 churches in the area?
- ***Structural renewal.*** This is where you begin to examine everything you do structurally. For instance:

A church can never grow beyond the dimensions of its base.

This has to do with property, your parking lot, your facilities, as well as your organizational structure. Visualize an eight-footlong table. Now imagine putting sand on the table, knowing that as the pile gets higher, it will form a pyramid that may begin to run off the sides. What can you do about that?

Unfortunately, some pastors would not do anything about it, but if you want the pyramid to grow and increase, you'll have to stop the sand from running off the table. If you don't make the base of the table larger structurally, you will discover that you cannot expand or grow the pyramid beyond the dimensions of the base. That principle is certainly true as well with church growth. If you have not laid a foundation or structure that is large enough, ultimately it will strangle and limit the rate and size of your growth.

A church cannot grow beyond its ability to care for people. Let's say your church runs 50 in attendance, and it takes one usher every Sunday to make your church hum. If your church begins to grow and soon you have 100, how many ushers will you need to continue to hum? You will need two, won't you? Then why do so many churches continue to use one? Tradition and lack of vision – that's why. If you're wise, you will have two ushers for 50 people and four for 100. Before I ever got to 100, I'd probably want to have four ushers; after all, I always want to be ready for company.

The nature of the church

I've heard it said that the nature of the church determines the structure.

The church is a fellowship. The number one reason people attend your church is for fellowship. Nothing is more comforting in life than to see familiar faces and friendly people. I think that's one reason churches should have some kind of celebration at least once a month: a dinner together, a birthday party, a picnic, an anniversary, whatever.

The church is a family. Using the Ephesians 4:4 model, the church should operate on the basis of relationships, not rules. What has happened in most denominations today is that we have moved toward legislating everything with an "I so move" and an "I second that." Eventually, we will lose our vision and vitality if *Robert's Rules of Order* usurps Christ's command to love God and one another.

The church is a body. Because it is a body, then it should operate on the basis of spiritual gifts, everyone pitching in according to his or her talents, desires, and needs.

The church is a flock. It should operate on the basis of pastoral care and shepherding. When we structure our local church, we cannot ignore the care of the people. Unfortunately, too many are mired in traditional pastoral care, in which the church hires someone to run around and care for needy sisters and brothers instead of giving laypeople an opportunity to minister sincerely day in and day out. No one should be neglected in the Body of Christ. The church is a flock, and the pastor is its overseer. Pastors and lay leaders become facilitators of care for the flock.

The pastor should have a personal, professional, and corporate growth plan that will allow for management and evaluation, as well as definitions of major areas of responsibilities that establish lines of authority, accountability, and empowerment.

THE WAY WE THINK

Like the mother who had not yet trained her children to help, thousands of churches are mired in a system that expects the pastor to do it all. As we begin to break out of this mold and train our laypersons to be the competent workers they are capable of being, the church will become more like the body Christ intended it to be.

To change the way we behave, we must change the way we think. As David Schwartz said, "Where success is concerned, people are not measured in inches or pounds, or college degrees, or family background; they are measured by the size of their thinking. How big we think determines the size of our accomplishments."⁶²

ACTION STEPS

1. Who are the top 20 percent of the potential leaders in your church? List them.
2. Write out the steps you will take to disciple the 20 percent.

3. List the steps your 20 percent can take to disciple the 80 percent.

Chapter Six FRIENDSHIP

A Church with Dynamic Relationships

A vibrant church cares enough about unchurched people to fulfill the Great Commission by developing a dynamic outreach ministry.

We are debtors to give the gospel to every person in the same manner in which we have received it.

—PHINEAS F. BRESEEL⁶³

The late Bob Benson recalled the “olden days” of old-fashioned church picnics. The someone would announce, “We’ll all meet at Sycamore Lodge in Shelby Park at 4:30 on Saturday. You bring your supper and we’ll furnish the iced tea.”

But, Bob surmised that many people were like he was, coming home at the last minute, ready to pack the picnic, and finding only a dried up piece of bologna in the refrigerator, with barely enough mustard in the bottom of the jar, and two slices of stale bread. Nevertheless, you make the bologna sandwich, wrap it in a brown bag, and go to the picnic.

“When it came time to eat, you sat at the end of a table and spread out your sandwich. But the folks who sat next to you brought a feast . . . fried chicken and baked beans and potato salad and homemade rolls and sliced tomatoes and pickles and olives and celery. And two big homemade chocolate pies to top it off.

“But they said to you, ‘Why don’t we just put it all together?’

“No, I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t even think of it,’ you murmured with embarrassment, with one eye on the chicken.

“Oh, come on, there’s plenty of chicken and plenty of pie and plenty of everything. And we just love bologna sandwiches. Let’s just put it all together.’

“And so you did and there you sat, eating like a king when you came like a pauper.”⁶⁴

SALVATION IS A GIFT

God offers every man, woman, and child a bountiful feast at his banquet table, rich food fit for a king and queen, prepared with loving affection – and all we have to bring is whatever we have, no matter how small, no matter how pitiful. Is there any better news than that?

But for some reason, people have trouble comprehending that God will accept us just like we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way. We think we have to bring a lot to the table and the truth is that “Jesus paid it all.”

Salvation is simple.

Salvation is like receiving a gift.

Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death, but *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (emphasis added).

Salvation is like opening a door.

John quotes the Master in Revelation 3:20, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and *opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me*” (emphasis added).

Salvation is like going through a door.

John quotes Jesus in his Gospel as saying, “I am the gate; *whoever enters through me will be saved*. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:9-10, emphasis added).

Salvation is coming home.

Jesus compares salvation in Luke 15 to the return of a wayward son. “We had to celebrate and be glad,” the father says to his older son, “because this brother of yours was dead *and is alive again*; he was lost *and is found*” (Luke 15:32, emphasis added).

Myths about salvation.

Many hold myths and misconceptions about salvation.

- *Some think we gain salvation through inheritance.* This line of reasoning tells a person that along with brown eyes and black hair, he or she also inherited eternal life from a Christian parent or grandparent.
- *Some think we gain salvation through human effort.* In other words, if we do enough good works, if we show enough benevolence, then we can buy a ticket through the pearly gates.
- *Some think we gain salvation through the desires of others.* This myth believes that if Mom and Dad pray hard enough, God will have to answer their prayers no matter how little the sinner might do in humble obedience to God.

THE ABCS OF EVANGELISM

Personal evangelism is always a one-on-one relationship, effective only as we build bridges of kinship with the person we want to lead to the throne. Jesus showed us this time and again during his life, and we would be foolish to stray from his model. The message might be delivered en masse, but it is received only through person-to-person contact in a moment of sincere prayer.

It’s challenging to talk about evangelism. I feel a little like Dwight L. Moody when a young man came to him and said, “Mr. Moody, I don’t like your witnessing plan.” Mr. Moody was a little surprised but asked, “Well, then what plan do you use?”

“I really haven’t found a plan I like,” the young man replied.

“Then,” said Moody, “I like my plan better than your plan.”

Over the years I have developed a four-step process I call *The ABCs of a Personal Relationship with Christ*. Its simplicity reflects the method shown to us by Jesus under the New Covenant. No longer are we entangled with the Law, full of procedures, regulations, rules, and punishments. Instead we are free!

Pray beforehand.

This is always the first step. Pray that God will anoint you as you present the gospel to your friend or family member. Very little accomplishment of eternal value is ever achieved apart from prayer.

Present the plan of salvation.

The ABC method is patterned after the way I was led to the Lord when I was only four years old. “Boys and girls, receiving Jesus is as simple as ABC,” my Sunday school teacher said.

“First, **Admit** that you have sinned. It says in Romans 3:23 that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’

“Next, **Believe** that Jesus Christ died for you. It says in John 1:12 that ‘to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.’

“And finally, **Confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life. It says in Romans 10:9 that ‘if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’”

After presenting the ABCs of salvation, you might use what I have dubbed the “how to go to heaven” pen. (For years, I carried a pen that contained the ABC plan of salvation.) Once you have explained that salvation is a gift, something freely given, ask the individual, “Would you believe me if I told you that I want to give you this pen?”

The answer is almost always, “Yes, I would believe you.”

“But you don’t have the pen right now, do you?” you might ask. “What do you need to do to get the pen?”

“Well,” the person will say, “I’d need to reach out and take it from your hand.”

“That’s right,” you say, as you hand the person the pen. “And now it’s yours. Free of charge. No questions asked. And so it is with receiving Christ as your Savior. All you have to do is reach out and take him into your heart by faith.”

Lead the person in the sinner’s prayer.

The sinner’s prayer goes something like this: *“Dear Lord Jesus, I know I’m a sinner. I believe that you died for my sins and rose from the grave. I now turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I receive you as my personal Savior and follow you as my Lord. Amen.”*

I have led hundreds of individuals in this prayer, and I have yet to remain unmoved as I see the face of the newborn Christian. Radiant. Excited. Grateful. Reborn! Every time I am amazed that so many Christians are so shy about sharing the gospel with others.

Give the new believer assurance of salvation.

It is important to give the new believer assurance that what has just happened to him or her is real and true. First John 5:11-12 says, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

THE ABC NETWORKING PLAN

I recommend developing an ABC networking plan. The idea came to me almost by accident, even though I believe God helped me see it. I was on a plane headed for San Francisco for a speaking engagement when the man seated next to me told me he worked for Amway, and I told him I was a pastor who worked with pastors.

“My church sure needs a boost,” he said, and before I knew what I was doing, I was telling him about the ABCs, handing him a pen, and discovering that he had a sincere relationship with the Lord. Through God’s leading I began to draw circles on a napkin. I drew a circle in the middle with six circles arranged around it, each connected to the middle with a line.

“Have you ever seen anything like this?” I asked him.

“It looks like what we do at Amway,” he said.

“No,” I said, “It’s not Amway. It’s Moses and the circles.”

Moses and the circles.

I continued, “If you were to ask Joe Victor (the chairman of the board at Amway at the time), he would tell you that they designed Amway around Moses’ and Jethro’s conversation when Moses was having problems with his melancholy spirit and organizational problems. Jethro told him, “This is the way you do it. You build circles.””

The networking plan consists of seven circles – one in the middle containing your name and six around the middle containing the names of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and family members you wish to lead to the Lord. After you have filled in all seven circles, begin to pray every day for each name on the network, including your own. Then start to share activities with them, taking them to ball games, having them over for a night of games and refreshment, bringing them to picnics and parties.

On the surface this may sound manipulative – making friends with them just to bash them over the head with a Bible when they least expect it. That’s not what happens. Eventually, when you least expect it, the door will open for you to share why you seem to be different, happy, content, at peace. You’ll be surprised how natural it seems to present the plan of salvation. Another thing you might try is to invite them to an event that is purposefully designed to reach the unsaved and unchurched – a revival meeting, a religious concert, a gospel presentation.

When my son Seth and his cousin Trent were small boys, they played on a soccer team in Oklahoma City. My wife, my brother, his wife, and I went to every game and began to talk to the other parents at the

games, often going out for ice cream afterward. We never said a word about being pastors – we just fellowshiped. After several weeks passed, they asked what we did for a living, but when we told them we were pastors, it was no big deal. We yelled at the referees just like they did and shared a lot of good times together.

Gradually an interesting thing began to happen. I would look out over the congregation on Sunday morning and notice that many of those families were there. Eventually most of the team members started attending, and many were born again – some have even served on the ministry vision team!

Event evangelism.

As a pastor, it is your responsibility to provide opportunities for your people to invite their unsaved, unchurched friends. While pastoring in Nashville, we discovered that about 92 percent of visitors come to church because of a friend or family member.

Consider these five steps to make event evangelism successful:

- Encourage your members to invite their friends to these special events. Be sure to remind them that you will be sharing the ABC plan there – it's best not to surprise anyone. Let the Holy Spirit do the surprising and convicting.
- Advertise the event according to your desired target group, be it youth, young adults, senior citizens, or whoever.
- Use a variety of creative and innovative events to reach as many segments of your community as you can: dinner dramas, concerts, musicals, seminars, revivals, films, workshops, crafts, ball games, and so on.
- Design a response form for each special event. For example, you might plan to share the ABC plan at the midpoint of the event. Be sure to ask *everyone* to fill out the information form and ask *everyone* to pray the sinner's prayer aloud. This will help guests to feel comfortable in participating. This sample form can be used to elicit information from visiting friends.
- Follow up the event with a phone call, a letter, a personal visit within 24 hours of the event. This may be the most important step. This immediate demonstration of interest and shepherding will be sincerely appreciated.

OUTREACH TODAY

The gospel never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Outreach methods do change. Methods that worked in the '70s, '80s, and '90s do not necessarily work well anymore. So how do we reach people who have grown up in a contemporary culture in which they may never have gone to a church regularly, much less to a Sunday school where they learned the great stories of the Bible?

Replace traditional programming with innovation.

The new generations are not into form, formula, and format. They don't like straight rows and lectures – they want to see each other's faces and discuss things.

Stress relationships rather than structures.

Many civic clubs across the country have seen a decrease in memberships. The structure of these organizations does not appeal to many people born in the past few decades.

Meet younger people in their arena of thought.

Younger people want to talk about the issues of the day, so you must schedule series of talks or sermons on hot topics. Should a Christian be involved in politics? What is our mission in the marketplace? Where should we stand on abortion? Gun control? Capital punishment? Divorce and remarriage?

Simplify your message.

Jesus said that unless we come to him as little children, we will not find him. How can we approach him that way unless he speaks that way through you? Someone wrote to Billy Graham and said, “Dr. Graham, send us a preacher. P.S. We want a preacher who does not know Greek and who has not been to the Holy Land.” If preachers sound like a travelogue, if we speak in the Greek or spew in the Hebrew, then we’re missing the point of the gospel. The news is simple – let’s make it equally easy to understand instead of showing off our education and experiences.

Emphasize the integrity of the Christian lifestyle.

People watch more than they listen, so if you are not practicing what you preach or walking what you talk, then it doesn’t matter how polished your speech is. It will fall on deaf ears.

Share the ministry with them.

In groups where the leader insists on doing it “my way,” he or she will usually end up doing all the work. But when the leader delegates work fairly and democratically, everyone feels important and contributes. People like to be a part of that kind of dynamic.

Become evangelistically sensitive.

Instead of pounding the pulpit and screaming, “You’re all going to burn forever in hell!” you might simply look them in the eye and say gently, “It is true – we’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. To receive that gift, all we have to do is invite him into our hearts.”

I heard a preacher say, “If absence makes the heart grow fonder, there’s a bunch of folk who must be crazy about this church!”

Why is it that so many people don’t go to church anymore? Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church, says people claim that the church is always asking them for money, they don’t like the music, they can’t relate to the message, the services don’t meet their needs, and the pastor makes them feel guilty.

Involve people in volunteer ministry.

Margie Morris, in her book, *Tools for Building Your Volunteer Ministry*, says that to attract the young generation, you must do the following:

1. Provide an excellent nursery.
2. Build faith-to-life connections.
3. Address contemporary issues.
4. Mix fellowship and volunteer work.
5. Recruit for short-term assignments.
6. Encourage team teaching and group fellowship.
7. Cater fellowship dinners
8. Provide Bible study.
9. Develop an outstanding Christian education program.
10. Schedule worship services at times other than Sunday morning.
11. Start new programs on a regular basis.
12. Publicize well.

Don’t overlook senior adults.

The fastest growing segment of our population is senior adults. Between 2000 and 2010, the United States population over 65 grew at a faster rate than the country’s total population. The number of people over 65 increased during those ten years by 15.1 percent, while the total population grew by 9.7 percent during the same period. People over 65 now number more than 40 million.⁶⁵ The number of people in the United States who have reached their 65th birthday is now larger than the entire population of Canada.

As this general population increases, the local church had better be prepared to address its needs. Seniors have more time available for volunteer activities than any other segment of the church. They also often have the largest amount of discretionary funds.

One way to reach this generation is to plan friendship-building events. At one of the churches I pastored, the seniors loved to board the church bus every month and go somewhere together: the mountains; a resort restaurant; a nearby town for catfish, hush puppies, grits, and cornbread. Relationships don't become less important as we grow older – they become more important.

POSITIONING THE CHURCH

In business courses, students study marketing theory, one aspect of which declares, “When marketing their products firms need to create a successful mix of:

- the right product
- sold at the right price
- in the right place
- using the most suitable promotion.”⁶⁶

Let's apply those four ideas to the church.

Product.

In the church the product is relationships. The world talks about having a product – our government calls it the “gross national product.” In the church each person reproduces after his or her own kind, so what we have to market is relationships: “You can find a friend in this fellowship. Why, you can even find companionship!”

Price.

In secular marketing, we look for the best price that will result in a profit. In the church, however, our price is commitment: “When you join our church, you are going to have to get involved. It is going to take some time and effort from you. We are not going to give you parking passes and privileges. In fact, we may even ask you to park in the parking lot next door.”

Place.

What does a realtor say are the three most important words in business? Location. Location. Location. In the church, the word “place” means “presence of believers.” I have often noted this slogan for my local churches: “There is no church like this church anywhere near this church. This is the church!” Acts 4:31 says, “When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled” (KJV). There is something very special about a place where believers are present and where the Lord is present.

Promotion.

What are you doing to increase the flow of guests into your church? How are you getting people to come to church? How do you treat visitors when they enter your sanctuary? Do you introduce yourself, hand them a bulletin, and invite them to be a part of the family of God? What do you do after they have come and gone? Do you follow up or merely hope they come back on their own?

I think having guests for dinner is similar to having visitors in church. I know that when we have someone over to dinner, my wife and I knock ourselves out getting the house clean, the food is prepared, the table is set, and the atmosphere is just right. We want our company to feel both at home and like royalty. They are special people. That's the way the church needs to treat its “company.” But we need to remember that it takes effort, preparation, and special attention. Hospitality doesn't just happen.

Today there are many ways a pastor and church leader can market their local church. First, the property should be kept clean, painted, and well-marked. This includes good lighting at night with appropriate signage that is perpendicular to the street. If funding is available, a 30-second or 60-second spot on the radio during drive time is an excellent way to publicize your church. For special events at the holidays,

use press releases and advertisements in your local newspapers. For programs and campaigns, develop attractive pamphlets and brochures to distribute in the community or by mail.

And don't forget the importance of social media. Social networking has become mainstream. Usage has doubled since 2008. About half of Americans 12 years of age and older have a profile on one or more social networking websites.⁶⁷ So, a basic website is essential. So is a Facebook page. Of course, someone must be in charge of keeping the website current and posting regularly on the church's Facebook page.

Methods must change even though the gospel is eternal and unchanging. Prayer is essential, so be sure your church prays for the unchurched of your community. But instead of a nebulous, blanket prayer, encourage them to be specific – as in praying for the names in the six circles of the ABC networking plan.

ACTION STEPS

1. Analyze your evangelism plan. How does it compare with the simplicity of the ABC plan?
2. On a piece of paper, draw the circles of the ABC networking plan. Write in your name and the name of six friends, relatives, or acquaintances. Begin to pray regularly for them.
3. Think about how you are marketing your church. How could you improve your methods?

Chapter Seven DISCIPLESHIP

A Church that is Developing Christ-like Disciples

A vibrant church is one that has a system to develop believers into mature disciples.

Becoming a disciple is not something that just happens. . . . You don't become a Christian by osmosis and you don't mature into a disciple by accident.

–KEN HEER⁶⁶

Discipleship is the process of developing fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The whole process of assimilating people into the church begins by opening the front door and concludes by closing the back door. That may seem like an oversimplification, but there is more truth behind it than you might think, as seen in this thought provoking analogy with a surprise ending:

I must confess I loved her. We tried to see each other at least once a week – more often if we could. We would catch each other's eye across a crowded room, exchange a wink and a knowing smile, and then thread our way through that crowd until at last we embraced and kissed. She would tell me how she loved me, and I would swear my affection to her. You see, we had fallen in love the first time we met, and though many relationships ebb and flow over the years, ours never did; the love and deep feelings waxed stronger with time.

Many times her husband would catch us, but he never seemed to mind. He was just as likely to be hugging my wife – or my kids – or waiting to hug me and say, “God bless you and your family.” I was in love with his wife, it's true, but I loved him in just the same way.

And I probably always will love Reuel and Irma Douglas, the first couple to greet us and make us feel welcome at this church some 16 years ago. We were in our 20s; they were in their 60s, but there was no generation gap. They've both gone to heaven, but their spirit and memory linger near my heart. I can see the twinkle in their eyes, hear their gracious and loving words, and feel the warmth they exuded. It's a shame they're not here to seek out and welcome visitors as they did with us. Guess I'll need to pick up where they left off, engaging new folks in conversation, trying to make them feel at home. I'll be looking across a crowded sanctuary to catch the eye of someone new, but all the while it will be Irma and Reuel I'll be remembering.

– JIM PRIEST

(Used with permission)

Robert Bast, in his book *Attracting New Members*, identifies three stages in assimilating new people into the fellowship of the local church: testing, affiliation, and assimilation.

TESTING

In the first stage you must identify the prospects who have the potential to be assimilated into the church. There are many methods of doing this.

Clipboard.

This could be as simple as stationing a clipboard in every row of the church's worship area, with sheets of paper on which everyone on the row is to put his or her name, address, phone number, and whether or not he or she is a regular attendee or a guest. When I used this method in my churches, we would ask the

last person on the row to look over all the names on his or her row and then pass the clipboard back to where it originated so that everyone else on the row could also read all the names as it was passed back.

Guest card.

Today, we more commonly use the guest card. It provides the same information, but permits more anonymity. You know as well as I that the thing a first-time guest wants more than anything else is anonymity. On the card, you should include a section that asks for information in particular interests: salvation, consultation with the pastor, membership, baptism, Sunday school, children's ministries, and so on. Another section could focus on how he or she heard about your church so that you might detect ways to market your church more effectively.

With the increased use of smartphone or tablets, one futuristic way may be to use an online registration system—with a QR code or URL address in the worship folder. This method would, of course, be more impersonal but might yield the same information gathering result.

Survey.

Once you have established a list of names, it is wise to provide a survey for your guests to let you know what they think of your congregation and services (which again, might be done online from the church's website). In one church I pastored, the people believed they were a very friendly church; in fact, they prided themselves in their friendliness. Yet week after week, I heard visitors say they received the cold shoulder when they entered the building. That is a most lethal combination when you are trying to grow a church.

The survey should contain questions concerning:

- How and where the guest was greeted.
- The friendliness and hospitality of the Sunday school class.
- The warmth of those sitting near the guest in the worship service.
- The ease of access to the facility.
- The guest's feelings during the visit the perception of the guest's children.
- Any negatives, and the probability of his or her return.

Restrooms.

Although it may not be obvious, one place to be certain guests feel welcome is in the restrooms. Face it – a home might be a showcase house fit for a magazine cover, but if there is soap scum on the bathroom sink or an un-flushed toilet, the lasting impression will inevitably be negative. The same is true of restaurants – the food may be great, the service superb, but if the restroom looks and smells like a high school locker room, I won't be back.

It's no different for the restroom of a church. Not only should everything be clean, but soap, toilet tissue, and paper towels should be well-stocked. It might be a good idea to have one of your ushers check the restrooms periodically during worship time to make sure things aren't out of hand. This same attention should be paid to drinking fountains, kitchens, and coffeepots too.

Welcoming guests.

Another area in which your church is tested weekly is at the welcome center. If your church is mid-sized or large, you would be wise to station some of your greeters in the parking lot, especially if the lot is large or some distance from the sanctuary. I know many large churches that use golf carts or vans to provide shuttles to and from the lot, particularly during inclement weather. There ought to be ample space allotted for guest only parking near the facility and someone in the lot to be sure the handicapped parking spaces remain available to those who truly need them. I know of one church where parking greeters write a personal welcome on note cards and place them on the driver's side of the windshield. It leaves a lasting good impression on visitors to know that someone took the time to notice they were there and thank them for coming.

Greeters. Once guests are inside the church, they should be met by a friendly, outgoing person who makes sure they get the proper church materials and are personally ushered to the appropriate Sunday school class or worship area seat. Nothing could be more distasteful and disconcerting than to walk into a strange place and be left completely alone to wander the hallways.

Training. Training for greeters and ushers should include a sheet of dos and don'ts. For instance, "Do offer a hand or arm if footing seems uncertain, but *don't* insist on hugging someone or putting your arm around him or her." Or "Do feel free to make small talk as you walk with the individual, but *don't* grill the individuals for personal information."

When people walk into a church for the first time, the greeter or usher who welcomes them is, to them, the church.
– Win Arn

Once the greeters and ushers have been trained in the classroom, publicly commission them in an appropriate setting, either during a service, dinner, or in the newsletter. At a later time celebrate their commitment in a social setting, where you can also evaluate and schedule future events. Win Arn once said, "When people walk into a church for the first time, the greeter or usher who welcomes them is, to them, the church. The opinions they are forming of the particular usher who is helping them are the opinions they are forming of the church."

Growing churches are learning that a welcome center is a valuable tool in their hospitality and, therefore, retention efforts. This center needs to be staffed by friendly members of your church who will greet all guests and return visitors, distribute helpful information, escort them to appropriate areas, and most important, secure their names, addresses, and phone numbers. Someone needs to be at the center throughout the Sunday school hour for guests who arrive too late for class, but too early for worship. Couches, easy chairs, coffee, and other refreshments should be nearby so each guest feels at home. *One danger I have found in making this area so inviting, however, is that many members loiter there and make visitors feel uncomfortably outnumbered.*

WORSHIP SERVICE.

All these amenities are important to your efforts in providing guests with all they need to feel welcomed, but your primary concern is to be a church where they can *experience* God in worship. Herb Miller said, "If the worship service fails to meet the needs of first-time visitors, no amount of friendliness can convert them to joiners."

AFFILIATION

The second stage of assimilation is the affiliation stage. This includes faithful and prompt follow-up, which is a crucial component for winning potential members. When contact is made within 24 hours of the initial visit, 85 percent of church guests return the following week. When follow-up contact is made within 72 hours, 60 percent come back. But if contact is delayed a week or more, only about 15 percent will return to try your church again.

We have found that laypersons see a much higher percentage of return of visitors when they make the contact than when the pastor makes the call – nearly twice as high. This may be for several reasons, but guests certainly tend to identify more with people just like them than they do with the pastor. And let's not discount the fact that the pastor is a paid emissary, whereas the layperson is a volunteer. That speaks volumes to the guest.

There are six steps a church might consider in developing an effective follow-up program. The first is prayer.

Prayer.

Nothing else matters if God is not centrally placed in the process, so I have always appointed a group of people I call my *Abrahams*, who commit to personal and corporate prayer as we endeavor to grow God's

kingdom. These are usually people who are strongly behind the evangelistic ministry of the church but do not feel gifted in face-to-face outreach. I have found sometimes that shut-ins and other elderly persons are magnificent prayer warriors who know just where to find the throne of grace.

Phone call.

A second step is to make a phone call to each guest within 24 hours of his or her visit. Again, this ministry is often best suited to those who are a bit reserved but like to converse. These *Barnabas* people deliver the message: “Welcome. Hope to see you next Sunday. Let’s meet at the west door.”

Personal note.

Third, the pastor writes a personal note to each guest. Some may choose to type these, but a handwritten letter adds a genuinely personal touch. Unfortunately, my handwriting is more suitable for writing a prescription than it is for welcoming folks to church, but I take extra care with these notes. I use a small note card with the church logo or other identifying inscription printed on the front for immediate recognition.

Gift-evangelism team.

A fourth strategy is to develop a *Gift-evangelism team*. Some years ago I started using the “Bakers of Men” program as developed by Conrad Lowe. A group of men baked loaves of bread each week to be distributed to guests on the Sunday of their visit. It is not necessary, of course, to limit yourself to loaves of bread; pies, cookies, or cakes are equally effective in making people feel welcomed. One church gives out a delicious jar of preserves, on the back of which they attach a note that says, “Your visit has left us a sweet taste.”

Pastor’s brunch.

The fifth step is perhaps the most involved and certainly the most work – it is the pastor’s brunch. Over the years I have tried many methods with regard to assimilation, but without a doubt this has been the most productive. Wes Williams, one of my staff members in Nashville, gave me the idea. I had tried having guests in my home; I had tried giving staff member allowances to take guests out to dinner; I had even worked hard to get people in the congregation to invite guests home with them after services. But these days most people have too much to do to go home to eat after church.

Finally, we decided to have a brunch at Sunday noon every five weeks, inviting every person who had visited our church over that five-week period along with the church staff, who, by the way, do not really sit at a table much because they are circulating around the room during the meal, getting acquainted with the people. We soon realized how much preparation was involved to make these brunches successful and formed a *Pastor’s Brunch Ministry Action Team*, made up of key individuals who had the gift of hospitality. They were in charge of registration, name tags, greeting folks at the door, and being table hosts. We found round tables were best, but any table that allows face-to-face contact would work. Instead of a self-serve banquet table, it is much more comfortable for your guests to have servers who will bring the meals to the table. Alternating Sunday school classes to host is an easy way to get the whole church involved in this.

The Brunch Team is also responsible for decorations, because the room needs to have a warm, inviting atmosphere with lots of color. We use balloon bouquets at each table rather than floral bouquets because they’re more informal, and the visiting children can then take them home afterward. No matter where you plan to have your pastor’s brunch, be sure the room is big enough and well-suited for company. Send out formal invitations for the brunch, just as you might send out invitations for a party at your house. Include the menu, location and directions to that location, and the approximate time the event will be over. Instead of asking for a response (RSVP), call each guest to see if he or she will be able to come. This way your cooks or caterers will be able to plan more accurately, remembering that it’s always better to have too much than to have too little. Churches that have used this strategy most effectively include a different

menu for the children. Whereas a grownup will enjoy croissants and fruit salad, a child prefers a hot dog and potato chips.

One final idea is to have the church photographer come by and take pictures of the people so members will be able to place a face with a name more readily.

The main purpose of the brunch is to assimilate newcomers more effectively into the church family. I have discovered that if a person can make a friend in the church, he or she will stay in the church; and conversely, if a guest remains friendless, chances are he or she will be attending another church very soon. Name tags and introductions around the table are very important. Another tool is the guest packet, which contains information about the church and includes a recent newsletter, a Bible bookmark, an *ABC How to Go to Heaven* pen, or other appropriate gifts and information. Consider having a staff member's child welcome the other children by offering each one a box of animal crackers or a pack of bubble gum. The written information and the opportunity to visit with each staff member personally will give the guest a better sense of where he or she might plug in to your programs and ministries.

Small churches can carry out this program, even if the brunch must be held in the pastor's home and the menu is Hamburger Helper. The joy of being able to spend time with your guests is what matters. Over the years we've found that 86 percent of the people invited to brunch came back to our church.

Pastor's Welcome class.

The sixth step is a **Welcome class** that is designed to share the vision of the local church. It is a four-week class that covers vision, confidence-building, communication, and commitment. Sometime during this class give students a notebook that includes sections on Studies in the Word, Prayer Concerns, Journaling with God, and Worship/Sermon Notes.

After this class, enroll students in a four-week **Gift discover class**. In the first session, individuals complete a personality profile designed by Florence Littauer. This is important for future recruitment of various ministries in the church. In the second week, they are asked about their passions, hobbies, vocational goals, and ministry goals. Consider an interest and skills survey to see if they like to sing, play an instrument, do plumbing, carpentry, painting, whatever. In the last two weeks, explore their spiritual gifts. Using the Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts profile is a good way of doing that.

Each of these tools is important as you guide people into the ministries that will be the most fulfilling to them. Finding the ministry fit that blends the individual's unique interests, giftedness, and personality will maximize his or her satisfaction and effectiveness.

The third four-week class is a **Discipleship class**, during which people are introduced to the church's belief system, declaration of faith, rationale behind the church's creeds, and so on. Supply a small booklet that will capsulize this information. In the second week, discuss core values: integrity, personal holiness, and so on. And ask if they can identify with them. The third week, consider **Biblical stewardship**. Most people who are new to the church need to be taught how to give. Distribute a complimentary box of tithing envelopes with their names stamped on them. The last week of class is about **lay ministry**. Before these students become a part of your fellowship, ask that they make a commitment to the Body of Christ to be involved in ministry, both in and out of the church. When you formally introduce these new members to the church, you will be able to say, "He will be part of our prayer ministry," or "She will help us in our college ministry."

This whole series of introductory classes fills a quarter (12 weeks), and by the time each person has completed it, he or she will be ready to become an active member in the work of building God's kingdom at your local church.

ASSIMILATION

After twelve weeks of the previous classes, the time for commitment has arrived. A real spirit of commitment motivates a person to do what he or she might not otherwise be inclined to do. A wealthy man watched a missionary nurse attending to lepers in China. He said, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nurse replied, "Neither would I. But I do it gladly for the love of God." For the love of God and the love of the church, newcomers become fully devoted followers of Christ.

Commitment to small group.

This may be as simple as committing to a small group, such as a specialty class, the ushering team, and so on. A great deal of accountability occurs when people become part of a small group. If they are not present, someone misses them, which may result in a friendly phone call or e-mail, inquiring about their welfare. Far too many slip through our fingers because they don't commit to a small group.

Commitment to friendship.

Commitment to friendship is often forged at the pastor's brunch or through a small group. Making friends with newcomers is an absolute necessity. I read about a survey that asked people why they joined the church. Eighty-three percent said it was because of the pastor. A follow-up question asked, "If the pastor leaves, will you leave?" Ninety-three percent said no, because they had found friends at that church.

By contrast another survey asked 400 church dropouts why they *left* their churches. More than 75 percent said, "I didn't feel anyone cared whether I was there or not."

Commitment to Christ.

A commitment to Christ begins when a person receives Jesus into his or her life, experiences forgiveness of sins, and begins to take his or her place as a child of God. We are not in the business simply of padding the church membership. We first of all must bring people to Jesus Christ.

Commitment to church membership.

Church membership does require commitment, because it asks a person to agree to a set of beliefs and lifestyle issues. It also brings people into close identity with a group of people who share a set of values. In a congregation, people rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. In a congregation, people feel the positive peer pressure to be a person of integrity. In a congregation, a person has a context for being developed as a leader.

Commitment to growth.

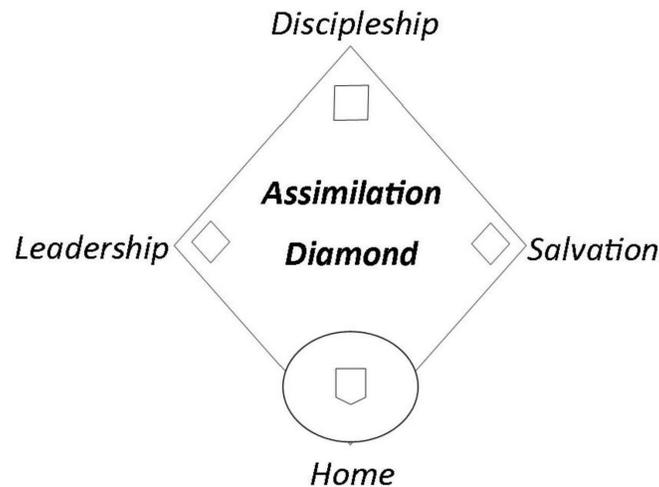
A commitment to growth requires a person to become involved in daily disciplines that bring about spiritual growth – prayer, time in God's word, regular church attendance, and other spiritual disciplines. Such a commitment helps to fulfill Peter's urgent message to his readers: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Commitment raises a person to a new level. As Marshall Fishwick said, "The uncommitted life isn't worth living."^{lxix} And Michael Jordan of basketball fame said, "Heart is what separates the good from the great."^{lxx} Commitment is a heart issue.

A commitment to Christ and the Church will help any individual discover the truth of Abraham Lincoln's statement, "And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."^{lxxi} Commitment puts life into your years.

ASSIMILATION DIAMOND

The assimilation ministry in a local church looks a lot like a baseball diamond. Imagine one right now: at home plate is the initial attraction to your church. It could be the music program being piped to the parking lot, the person at the front door who makes everyone feel like a million bucks, or the pastor's great messages. Whatever it is, it is the beginning of the relationship between the guest and your fellowship.



At first base is salvation – the decision to follow Jesus Christ. This is where the guest's relating to the church and the church's relating to him or her begins.

At second base is discipleship. Now the relationship becomes more of shepherd and flock. Pastors and overseers do intensive care in terms of providing nourishment for everyone.

On third base is leadership. Once the person has become a disciple of Jesus Christ, he or she must then be equipped to become a leader in the church. This is never an overnight process, and for some it takes years, but the eventual transition from becoming a follower to becoming a leader is natural for most people.

Finally, as the person runs toward *home plate* again, he or she is ready to reproduce other Christians.

ACTION STEPS

1. How does your church rate on the first level of assimilation – the testing phase? Look back over the various ways of determining who has potential to become a member of the church. How could you improve your methods?
2. In the affiliation stage, evaluate your methods of following up guests at your church. What is working well? What practices need to be discarded in favor of more effective methods?
3. Analyze the level of commitment being achieved by newcomers? What opportunities could you offer that might increase effectiveness in this area?

Chapter Eight INTENSIVE CARE

A Church that Effective Cares for People

A vibrant church is one that demonstrates genuine love and concern for people.

There is no better exercise for strengthening the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.
—LAWRENCE HICKS

The young pastor held his first chapel service at the local nursing home. Trying to drive home a point on forgiveness, he asked for a show of hands, “If you are willing to forgive your enemies, raise your hand.” Almost everyone in the room—including the nursing home attendants—raised their hand. But way over in the right side of the room, near the exit, an elderly lady sat with her hands folded. She was the only one who didn’t respond to the pastor’s question.

Following the chapel service, the pastor made his way around the room, shaking hands and giving encouragement to the residents. When he came to the elderly lady who didn’t raise her hand, he gently moved to her and quietly inquired, “I notice you didn’t raise your hand. Do you have a problem forgiving your enemies that I can pray with you about?”

She replied, “Sonny, I’m 97. I don’t have any enemies, they’re all ‘dead as a stump!’”

The greatest pastor who ever lived knew the secret to caring for his people. Before he preached to them, he fed them. Before he ministered to them, he healed them. Before he conversed with them, he gave them something to drink. He knew their conversion was predicated on their well-being, so before he evangelized, he catered a meal.

One of my favorite Bible stories is the calling of Levi, who became Matthew. I particularly enjoy the portrayal of the story in the movie *Jesus of Nazareth*. Jesus had spent the afternoon teaching and healing, to the amazement of all who heard and saw him. After all, just imagine seeing a man who had to be lowered through the thatch roof because he had been shriveled since birth. Then imagine seeing him get off his pallet and not only walk, but dance and shout. It must have been absolutely glorious! It surely impressed Peter. And it moved a loathed tax collector named Levi as well, who subsequently invited Jesus to share supper with him that evening. Jesus said, “I’d be happy to” (paraphrase), much to the chagrin of the disciples.

Especially Peter, who said something like, “You can’t be seen dining with sinners. People will think you are no better than they.”

Jesus was quick but compassionate in his correction of Peter. “Sinners are precisely the ones I should dine with. A doctor doesn’t treat the healthy, but the sick. The Lord is not sent to saints, but to sinners, for the heart of the Lord is mercy” (paraphrase). And with that he entered the house of Levi for supper.

After the eating and the dancing, after the laughing and the partying had subsided, Peter himself was drawn to the door of the tax collector’s house to see if his Master had survived, only to find Jesus’ arm around Levi, praying with him, transforming him. Peter, too, was drawn in, and in one of the truly magical moments of Scripture, Peter learned what the gospel of Christ was all about. To win souls to the Kingdom, the first step is to become a friend, to accept one another in all our humanity.

That’s what pastoral care is all about. It’s not just a few moments in the day, but a lifestyle. It’s nurturing and committing and loving. But it is never automatic – it is always intentional. In these days the demands of the pastorate are great, and most days there is simply not enough time to do all that needs to be done.

THE CHALLENGE OF INTENSIVE CARE

What makes intensive care such a challenge? J. H. Jowett, in one of his Yale lectures, said: “The difficulty of delivering a message is in inverse proportion to the size of the audience. To face the

individual soul with the Word of God . . . is one of the heaviest commissions given to our church. Where there are ten men who can face a crowd, there is only one who can face the individual. Gentlemen, it seemed as though I could preach a sermon and never meet a devil. But as soon as I began to take my sermon to the individual, the streets were thick with devils.”⁷²

Pastoral care can be daunting.

Most pastors are quite at home on the platform. Sermon preparation and delivery are the major things they were trained to do. However, many cringe at the prospect of meeting people at street level, face to face—especially in times of crisis or ministering in unfamiliar situations.

The phone rang on the desk of a novice pastor and the voice on the other end told him a well-known and loved parishioner was in the hospital and had just been diagnosed with advance stage of breast cancer. He was frightened at the thought of visiting this woman, a mature Christian. His mind felt scrambled, wondering what he should say to her. Consequently, he delayed his visit. Later someone chastised him for not appearing at the hospital sooner. He blurted, “Seminary did not prepare me for this!”

No amount of “book-learning” will prepare you for the difficult issues that pastors have to face as a routine part of their ministry.

People have different expectations.

To complicate matters, many people have different expectations regarding pastoral care. Some attendees come to church to worship, to enjoy the music, and to hear the message. They do not want a pastoral visit or any kind of follow-up.

Other church members are never satisfied. They are always thinking the pastor should do more. They make appointments for counseling, and may even come back repeatedly, to rehash the same problems. Their goal is not victory over their problems. It’s much more fun just to talk about the problems, especially if they have someone who is willing to listen.

Between these extremes, you will find most people appreciate pastoral care, especially when they’re going through a difficult time in life. Knowing that the pastor and caring people in the church show love and concern is a source of comfort and encouragement to them.

In my book, *Stan Toler’s Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*, I said, “There will never be a substitute for your personal care of those in your congregation or organization. People need you. There will be times when they need you ‘in person.’ They will need your prayers. They will need that shared promise from God’s Word.”⁷³

MAKING INTENSIVE CARE WORK

So how can we make intensive pastoral care work? How can we care for those who need the love and warmth only the church will provide? “People caring for people” is a plan in which laypersons are trained to assume much of the responsibility once called pastoral care. In it the pastor becomes the facilitator of pastoral care, inverting, if you will, the entire paradigm of congregational expectations.

People caring for people

How can we make this idea of “People caring for people” work in your church? *First*, you must train caregivers in at least some of the various needs that are typical to most congregations: grief, divorce, crisis, childbirth, suicide, ministry to the elderly, and so on. You may be fortunate and have some experts in these fields in your congregation, especially if you are near a Christian college campus. But many churches are miles from the closest university and have no such expertise sitting in their auditoriums Sunday after Sunday. Many communities do have Christian counseling centers that are trying to expand their client base (that’s what keeps their doors open). Invite some of their counselors to come over and teach your care leaders on Wednesday nights. Most of them will do it free of charge and will be glad to address issues that are particularly evident at your church.

Another method is to ask your leaders to direct a book study on one topic of interest so the group can learn together. Training our care leaders means that when they go to a hospital to visit a person facing terminal illness or worrisome surgery, they will be effective as they listen and pray and counsel.

When training caregivers, include the following topics:

Death	Stress
Divorce	Grief
Evangelism	Depression
Unwed Mothers	Assertiveness
Suicide	Aging
Prayer	Relationships/Conflict
Crisis in Childbirth	Encouragement

Each of these subjects can be supported by the many excellent Christian books that have been written to assist today's pastor. **One caution necessary to offer here is that you must be prepared to issue disclaimers when the need arises, for though these caregivers have been given some initial training in an area, they are not licensed or degreed in any applicable field.** Don't allow your caregivers to presume to be professional counselors or to offer "bad" advice. I have avoided misperceptions by publicly calling these people Barnabas ministers because they encourage and lift during times of trouble or trial.

Prayer ministry

There are two other significant ways that you can do pastoral care. One is through a prayer ministry.

- One aspect of this ministry is the development of the **pastor's prayer partners**. Ask individuals in your fellowship to join you in praying on Sunday morning and Sunday night before you share in the worship service. They continue to pray during the service.
- You may also form a **prayer network** so that anytime someone is going to the hospital or there is an emergency situation in the church family, within just a matter of minutes every person on the prayer chain is notified and is praying. In a matter of minutes, dozens of people are praying about one concern, lifting the need to the throne of God for his grace and tender mercy. Once you have established this group of prayer partners, you will never want to preach again without them.
- Additionally, a **24-hour prayer** chain that happens once per quarter is a great tool in drawing power from above.

Phone ministry

Another very important aspect in pastoral care networking is a phone ministry. This is an excellent opportunity for encouragers to get involved. Besides asking them to contact guests within 24 hours of their visit, assign them lists so that every member of the church is contacted at least once per quarter for prayer requests only. This Phone a Friend ministry can transform gossipers into caring individuals.

When I was pastoring in Nashville at a church of 2,000 members and an even larger extended family, this idea of **Phone a Friend** seemed like a monumental task. But with methodical scheduling and willing cooperation, we were able to complete it in one quarter. You should have read the notes I received from the first experience. "This is the first time, Pastor, my church has called me in the years I have attended here when they didn't ask me for anything." Now that's intensive care!

WHY SMALL GROUPS WORK

Why do small groups of laypersons work? A Gallup poll showed that 40 percent of American adults belong to at least one small support group, and 63 percent of those report that they attend a meeting at least twice a month. The findings indicated that 73 percent join in order to grow as persons, 46 percent join because they want a more disciplined spiritual life, 28 percent join for emotional support, and 18

percent join because of personal problems. Members of groups (82 percent) report that their group helps them dispel feelings of loneliness, while 72 percent report receiving encouragement when feeling down. Groups also help people celebrate, handle emotional crises, and make decisions.

Small groups meet needs.

Small groups meet needs. Using the second verse of the familiar 23rd psalm as a catalyst, “He makes me lie down in green *pastures*” (emphasis added), one of my former pastoral staff members, David Slamp author of *Side by Side*, developed an acronym that might help you develop a working philosophy of small-group ministry in terms of pastoral care:

Small groups encourage PERSONAL involvement. “He . . . gave . . . pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Small groups encourage caring for ABSENTEES. “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Romans 15:1-2).

Small groups enhance SPIRITUAL growth. “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Small groups provide TRAINING for service. “He . . . gave . . . pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11) for the equipping of the saints.

Small groups facilitate UNLIMITED growth. “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Small groups aggressively REACH the lost. “Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23, NASB).

Small groups provide immediate ENTRY and acceptance. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7).

I am convinced that the best way you can do pastoral care is to facilitate it with the laity of your church.

People need a shepherd.

Following up on that metaphor is another acronym to help you profile the role of a shepherd. A shepherd . . .

- Studies God’s Word regularly. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105).
- Honors God with holy living, honoring his day, respecting his tithe, obeying his will.
- Enables the people to apply God’s Word daily, explaining and exposing the truth, exploring the personal meaning.
- Prays faithfully for those in his or her care. “We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9b, NASB).
- Helps lead others to Christ, in his or her home and neighborhood.
- Equips others to serve, teaching them how, modeling leadership before them, leading them to spiritual maturity.
- Represents Jesus to his or her family, friends, and coworkers.
- Disciples others to become true Christ-followers. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19 NASB).

Shepherds should have contagious enthusiasm. Their positive attitude projects that nothing is impossible with God. They should be able to give a clear and direct witness to what Christ has done within their lives, dedicated to living by the Bible and being led by the Spirit and being guided by the

mission of the church. Not only should they be filled with the Holy Spirit, but they should fellowship daily with Him as well. Shepherds should not be bogged down in their own problems, but should be free to serve wholeheartedly and effectively, sensitive and committed to others – loving them, caring for them, and ministering to them whenever needed. To these ends, the following job description is designed to help each shepherd build the kingdom of God.

SHEPHERD/CAREGIVER JOB DESCRIPTION

1. Make a home visit or phone call to all prospects, group members (upon need) and referrals from the church office.
2. Work with host or hostess to make people in the one-hour weekly group meeting comfortable and relaxed in the home.
3. Talk and pray with the host or hostess before each week's meeting.
4. Report to the pastoral staff each month on the progress of growth.
5. Initiate conversational prayer.
6. Lead the Bible application and discussion.
7. Be responsible for the report of the meeting.

The ministry of the shepherd in the small group setting is largely one of simply *paying attention*. It involves noticing when those in the class or group are not as cheerful as usual, not present, not attending to their personal ministries at the church, and so on.

Because people are so important, shepherd tasks are people-centered. One of the first things a shepherd does, then, is to *build a care* list of 8 to 10 Sunday school class or small group members and develop a personal relationship with each one, learning about their families, jobs, and backgrounds. If the shepherd misses them at church, he or she should let them know that early in the week. When there are unusual needs in their lives, the shepherd does what he or she can to meet those needs, at least by letting appropriate people know about it when necessary.

A HANDS-ON APPROACH

I am convinced that the best way you can do pastoral care is to facilitate it with the laity of your church. But a more hands-on approach you might find productive and effective is the

90-minute-a-day care. In an hour and a half you can minister personally to seven individuals in a way that will not only bless you immensely but also have a great impact on your congregation.

One-on-one

The first hour is spent one-on-one with one person in your church or community. It is sixty minutes of encouraging, building up, and praising. Sometimes this can be done in your office when that is most convenient or comfortable for the individual, but most often, I think, it is wisest to do this outside the church walls. You don't want to spend this precious time conducting church business, so removing yourself from that setting eases the temptation.

I have always liked to take a person to a local restaurant for breakfast or lunch, and I always pick up the tab. This casual setting affords an opportunity for both light conversation and meaningful dialogue to take place, and if prayer becomes natural, nobody minds.

Most people love to have an interested party listen to them, so refrain from agendas or self-talk as much as possible. This should be that person's time to tell you what is on his or her mind and heart.

Meaningful notes

Another fifteen minutes is spent writing three short notes to three people. I also send birthday cards, anniversary cards, and I invite volunteers (senior adults do perfectly) to come in and address all the cards. When I have had staff members, they also sign the card, and it becomes quite a unique gift in the mail.

Unfortunately, when you have handwriting like mine, you have to have your own church card with the church logo so people will know where it came from!

Norman Vincent Peale said some years ago when talking about writing notes, “Christians ought to be in the business of building people up, because there are so many people today already in the demolition business.” These notes should be directed by four things that start with the letter “S.” 1) They are *sincere*, 2) they are *short*, 3) they are *specific*, and 4) they are *spontaneous*.

Personal phone calls

The final dimension of this 90-minute-a-day care is the fifteen minutes spent making three brief phone calls to three people. This is best done, I think, when done systematically. You might want to consider calling each church member on his or her birthday and anniversary, and keep a record of it.

A skilled administrative assistant or even a volunteer senior might do this for you by writing down each member’s phone number in your pocket calendar on the appropriate day. For example: “Jeff Downs BD, 555-6859.” Then, when you turn the page, the phone numbers are there, and all you have to do is call and say, “Hi, Jeff. This is Pastor Goodfella. I just wanted to wish you a happy birthday because I love you. I hope you have a great day.”

If you have no birthday or anniversary calls, then make the calls in alphabetical order, three a day, until you have spoken to every member that year. This opens the door for others in the church to come see them or call them. It’s not sacrificing or giving up pastoral care – it’s fine-tuning it in order to make it a feasible process without exhausting the pastor.

ACTION STEPS

1. Analyze the level of pastoral care in your church. Are you trying to do it all yourself? What would happen if you trained others to do pastoral care?
2. Make a list of people in your congregation who, in your estimation, have shepherd hearts. Consider approaching them about becoming lay shepherds.
3. Consider the 90-minute-a-day pastoral care approach. Where would you begin? Who could help you get organized?

Chapter Nine WORSHIP

A Church that Has Meaningful Worship

A vibrant church is always striving to improve the worship experience.

Worship is not “something done to us or for us, but by us.”
—ROBERTWEBBER⁷⁴

As I have already expressed, I have been a fan of the Olympics for as long as I can remember. One of my favorite moments in Olympic history occurred during the 1996 Games in Atlanta, Georgia. I will never forget the gymnast from Belorussia, who had nearly lost his wife a few months before in a car accident, competing for her and her alone. And who can forget the swimmer who gave her medal to her best friend, who was dying of a terrible disease? But one of the most poignant of those seventeen days occurred at half-time of the gold medal basketball game between the United States and Yugoslavia.

Most everyone will agree that Muhammad Ali was the greatest boxer in the history of the sport. In the Rome Olympics of 1960, Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) won a gold medal in the light heavyweight division, but somewhere along the line he lost that medal. When the Olympic Committee learned of this, they decided to replace that medal in an appropriate setting, during the '96 Olympics. Millions of us watched as this icon of athletics, trembling under the involuntary force of Parkinson's disease, hobbled to center court for the ceremony, and we remembered. We reminisced. We returned to Rome. We looked at that bloated but still unmarked face; we recalled the moments of his dominance two and three decades ago, the sense of awe and amazement we felt as he “floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee” on his way to winning the world championship an unprecedented three times. We celebrated in our minds and hearts again the Rome Olympics when this brash unknown pummeled the favored Russian boxer into submission and brought the gold medal to America. For 10 minutes in the summer of 1996, we relived the spirit of Rome in 1960.

This is what our worship service ought to have! When we come to church and enter that sanctuary, we are recalling the divine life of God, the Creator of the Universe, who came to earth in the form of a man, who conquered death so that we might have eternal life with him in Paradise. We need truly and openly to celebrate the most amazing and awesome victory history has ever known. We need to stand as one and commemorate this incredible event as if it were happening again at that very moment – *because it is*.

According to Elmer Towns, 82 percent of our church guests rate worship as the most important reason for joining a church, and I think you'll agree that is one of the, if not *the*, most important reasons a church exists in the first place.

HOW TO MEASURE AN EFFECTIVE WORSHIP SERVICE

How can we measure the effectiveness of worship services?

By the number of people involved in the worship leadership.

If your church is small and you have a small platform, you may think it's too difficult to include several people in worship. But if you move people on and off the platform, one layperson to lead in prayer, one to read the Scripture, another to receive the offering, others to sing solos, you will increase your leadership involvement. When the platform is full of the people, the worship center will be full of people. Guaranteed!

One secret to growth is to decrease the number of things you personally do during your worship times.

If your church is small, you may feel that you have to do everything, but one secret to growth is to decrease the number of things you do in your worship times. I knew of a pastor who drove the church bus, led the congregational singing, taught a class, made all the announcements, led the prayer, and sang solos – not to mention preached the sermon and pronounced the benediction. And his wife played the piano. They did *everything*. He even drove everyone home on the church bus after services. People applauded their energy and commitment, but nobody got involved in worship because they were never expected to. (*I was that pastor.*) I know that initially you must do some of that out of necessity, but there comes a time, no matter how big or small a church is, when you need to realize that if you do too much, you will die from *overexposure* and your laypeople will stagnate from *underexposure*.

By the total number in your service.

Another way to measure the effectiveness of worship seems obvious: count the number of people sitting in the auditorium. If you have empty chairs everywhere, then it may indicate you need to do something different!

By the invitation patterns of your parishioners

Do your people invite their friends and neighbors to attend? If they don't, then you have to do something about making worship a positive, uplifting experience.

By listening to your people.

It is important to know what our people are thinking, to hear from the men and women who shake your hand as they exit the worship service. It always strengthens the worship service when you listen to your people.

HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE WORSHIP SERVICE

What are some practical ways to build an effective worship service?

Plan a dynamic worship celebration.

A worship service that is dynamic, that celebrates the life of Christ, and promotes the lifestyle of the Christian, will be an attraction few can ignore. The world has music, for instance, that is upbeat and moving forward. It may not always be positive in its message, but it certainly has some type of “pick-me up” in it. Some part of your service deserves that kind of “lifter,” spiritually speaking, something that will make people want to clap their hands and tap their feet. That is not to suggest moving to a completely contemporary praise service, discarding the great hymns of the Church, but it is important to mix the tempo of the music and service so it will have interest to a broader base of people.

Build a worship team.

That's why it is so imperative to build a worship team, a group of people who meet regularly, who know something about music and worship, who are in tune with the Spirit and can sit down and talk about it. It involves your musical and pastoral team. One reason churches don't have a sense of celebration is that they don't *plan* for any celebration. The worship team can be an immense help in this area – from the worship team on the platform to the choice of songs, even to choosing the people who will lead the various aspects of worship.

If you are looking at praise songs in a traditional church, do your best to blend them in. On the other hand, if you have a church that loves hymns but you are trying to reach the younger people of your community, you might start an optional service that would have a more contemporary sound.

Have a theme in mind for the service.

Each service ought to have a theme in mind. If you are pastoring a church and the Olympics are currently in season, you might plan a service dealing with victory, with running the race. If tragedy befalls the community, you might have a theme about fear, planning every song and aspect of worship to

deliver your people from anxiety and worry. Even if you plan your sermons a year in advance or a quarter in advance, it helps your worship leaders a great deal in deciding what needs to happen thematically in that worship experience.

Pray for the presence of God

But no amount of planning, no amount of singing, no amount of changing will work if you don't build all of it at the throne of God, kneeling in prayer, and asking for his guidance.

TIPS FOR BETTER PREACHING

Much of what happens in worship is predicated on the sermon, so spending ample quality time in sermon preparation is vitally important.

Remember the source of your authority.

We need to understand that our authority does not come from our degrees posted on the wall or our title posted on our door; our authority comes from above. Not long ago during a credential committee meeting, a man came seeking ordination. As he interviewed, there was a great deal of discussion about whether this man should be ordained or not, and it came to the point at which someone on the committee asked him, "How would you feel if we did not ordain you this year?"

The man looked the committee members in the eye and said, "Brothers, that would be all right. God has already ordained me, and he's just waiting on you boys to get the paperwork done."

Remember why you teach/preach.

You're not just teaching for instruction; you're preaching for decision. It is not your calling only to build up the believers in the faith and to feed them spiritually, you are also called to win the lost for Christ. Paul summarized his ministry in the 15th chapter of Romans by saying that he had a ministry not only to the saved but also to the unsaved and that he needed to give a moment for people to come to know the Lord.

Know your audience.

Do you have a group of senior citizens to whom you are speaking? Then think about what should be said to them. Is your crowd full of teenagers? What do they need to hear to survive the turmoil of growing up these days?

Keep it short.

The best message is a brief message. The late George Burns once quipped, "A good sermon should have a good beginning and a good ending, and they should be as close together as possible." Some sermons are absolutely too long. A few years ago I went to the 30 fastest-growing churches in America and noted that the average sermon was 25 minutes long, many of them much shorter. If you want to reach the younger generation, particularly, then you only have a 30-minute time span in which to do it. They check out after that amount of time because, like it or not, they were raised with a television schedule that is built in 30-minute increments. It's the same way with small group lessons, so let your teachers know what every elementary and secondary school teacher already knows – 30 minutes and they're out!

Lenny Luchetti advises:

Less is more when it comes to preaching today. Reduce your sermon length by cutting out the soap-box rants and unnecessary repetition. God will, I promise, still love you even if you reduce the length of your sermons. And, your congregation will love you even more for developing tighter, more precise sermons that do not waste their time with redundant ranting.⁷⁵

Better preaching requires better research.

The key to better preaching is not long harangues; no, the key to better preaching is better research. Most ministers know how to outline and do a pretty good job organizing, because they have been taught in schools and in religion departments to have good homiletics and hermeneutics. However, too frequently they forget to put *substance* into their style. Begin to build a file of resources to which you can go and find notes and articles on any topic from grace to mercy to justice. Through the use of profitable, but disciplined, time on the Internet, you can read up on current issues, trends, discoveries, and movements. Don't rely on the same five sources you've always used. If you want your churches to grow, then you, personally, must grow. Listen to great preaching, and model yourself after that. Read books voraciously. Use computer technology. Subscribe to good periodicals.

Use humor.

Another key to good preaching is the use of humor. Researcher Anne Belli Gesalman reported her discovery that if a pastor wants the flock to move up to the front and carefully listen to the message, the pastor should pepper his or her preaching with a pinch of humor.^{lxvii} For some it comes more naturally than for others, but as one church leader in Dallas said, "Much of what we're about as people of faith is discovering the joy of our relationships to God and each other, and I think humor is an important dimension of who we are as human beings."

Francis of Assisi said, "Do you want to know one of the best ways to win over people and lead them to God? It consists of giving them joy and making them happy."

Pope John Paul II said, "Christ came to bring joy: joy to children, joy to parents, joy to families and friends, joy to workers and to scholars, joy to the sick and joy to the elderly, joy to all humanity. In a true sense, joy is the keynote of the Christian message and the recurring motif of the church."

Billy Graham joins that spirit: "People go to a football game today and shout their heads off, or go to a circus and cheer act after act. They become enthusiastic about everything conceivable, but when it comes to spiritual matters, they think we are supposed to become sober and wear black, and never have a good time or enjoy a religious event."

Circus founder P. T. Barnum wrote, "Men, women and children who cannot live on gravity alone need something to satisfy their lighter moods and hours, and he who ministers to this want is in a business established by the author of our nature. If he worthily fulfills his mission and amuses without corrupting, he need never feel that he has lived in vain."

Martin Luther suggested, "If you're not allowed laughter in heaven, I don't want to go there."

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "God cannot endure that un festive, mirthless attitude of ours in which we eat our bread in sorrow, with pretentious, busy haste, or even with shame. Through our daily meals he is calling us to rejoice, to keep holiday in the midst of our working day."

John Holbert, professor of preaching at Southern Methodist University's School of Theology, pointed out that there is a biblical precedent for the use of humor in worship, beginning with the Book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve wearing fig leaves. "Fig leaves feel like sandpaper," he said, chuckling. He said he recently delivered what he thought was a very powerful message, interjected with humor, when he was a guest speaker in Washington, D. C. He framed his sermon around this story of Adam and Eve, but no one in the congregation smiled, much less laughed out loud. This was a first for him. Afterward, one of the church members told him that he enjoyed the sermon so much that he almost laughed.

"Why didn't you?" Holbert asked.

"Oh," the man replied, "we don't laugh here." Holbert suggests that "society as a whole has become darker in its humor. But I hope that churches could use humor as a way of looking at themselves honestly, to build up the community."

Plan your preaching schedule to include special seasons.

With the Evangelical church especially, there seems to be an appalling lack of interest in this area. If we say we believe in Holy Spirit power, then why don't we celebrate Pentecost? If we really believe in the Advent, then why don't we teach people that Advent is a season of waiting and anticipation? Christmas is

the season of joy. Epiphany is the season for evangelism and mission. It is important that we have that kind of form and develop that kind of interest in our churches. People enjoy the seasons, and they enjoy listening to sermons that remind them why Jesus came. In the season of Lent, they love to think introspectively about Christ's suffering, about his sacrifice on the cross, and his joyous resurrection. Lent is the season of spiritual renewal. Holy Week is the season to enter into the major events of our salvation. Easter is the season to celebrate the power of Christ to overcome evil. People enjoy the celebration of rituals, and these are important celebrations to the church, so your sermons should be strategically planned accordingly.

A HEART-FELT RESPONSE

Now I'm not trying to make you raise one hand or two, or trying to make you say, "Amen!" or "Ah-men," or anything else. What I encourage you to do in worship is to bring people to a sense of response to what has been presented, so that when the songs have been sung, when the prayers have been prayed, when the message has been delivered, people will walk out of the sanctuary saying, "Praise God. He was in this place today, speaking and listening to my heart."

ACTION STEPS

1. Rate the effectiveness of the worship experience in your church. How many people are involved in worship? Is the number in attendance growing or declining? How would you assess the invitation patterns of your people?
2. Think about the theme of your three most recent worship services. Was the theme consistent throughout the service? How did the worship music fit with the sermon topic? Blended? Clashed?
3. As you prepare to preach, ask yourself the eight questions suggested by Rick Warren.

Chapter Ten STEWARDSHIP

A Church that is Developing Committed Stewards

A vibrant church is one that has a process for developing committed stewards.

If you ask for a dollar, you must be willing to give a dollar. A leader must model giving.
—MELVIN MAXWELL

During the audit of a taxpayer, an IRS agent made a mid-afternoon visit to the man's church. The receptionist asked if she could help him. "I'm here to inquire about a donation that a member of your church has made." The receptionist answered, "I'm sorry, sir, our donations are strictly confidential. If you would like, I can have you talk with our executive pastor. "Of course," the agent replied.

When the executive pastor came to the office the IRS repeated the purpose of his visit, and then he said, "A Mr. Clyde Cleppenheater has reported a seventy-five-thousand dollar donation to your church's building fund. Can you verify that?" The pastor replied, "Well, our policy is to not divulge the giving patterns of our members, but I can say that we are expecting a sizeable contribution from one of our constituents very soon."

If any man in history understood giving, it was John Wesley. It is no exaggeration to say that Wesley was one of the most productive Christians who ever lived. God enabled him to multiply his effectiveness throughout his lifetime. One of his most admirable traits was his sense of stewardship.

He became one of the wealthiest citizens in England, yet, as his income increased, his spending habits remained remarkably stable:

	Income	Living Expenses	To the Poor
First year:	30 pounds	28 pounds (93%)	2 pounds (7%)
Second year:	60 pounds	28 pounds (47%)	32 pounds (53%)
Third year:	90 pounds	28 pounds (31%)	62 pounds (69%)
Fourth year:	120 pounds	28 pounds (23%)	92 pounds (77%)
Later:	over 1,400	30 pounds (2%)	over 1,400 pounds (98%) ⁷⁷

THE GIVING PRINCIPLE

On the other hand, those who have not yet learned to live frugally and give generously often resort to other methods. Have you heard about the following new invention?

This ingenious invention receives gifts of a dollar or more on a plush cushion with silent graciousness. But when half-dollars are dropped in, it rings a bell; when quarters are given, it blows a whistle; when dimes are slipped in, it fires a shot. But when someone refuses to give, it takes their picture.

— Stewardship Starters by Stan Toler

Without resorting to new inventions, there are time-proven methods to increase your weekly giving. It is imperative that the people of our churches experience the kind of blessings Jesus describes in Luke

6:38 when he says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Most pastors need some guidance in the area of motivating their congregation to give more generously. Unfortunately, many pastors tend to bail out around offering time. “When it comes to preaching on stewardship, clergy tend to be timid, tentative and apologetic. However, the Bible is not timid about money at all. Since financial stewardship is a major biblical theme, . . . clergy need to become bolder about preaching on money.”⁷⁸

A few important lessons will enable you to be an effective leader in this area of ministry.

PLAN YOUR GIVING

Do not go about it in a haphazard manner, but plan what will happen and what is going to be said. Consider the following steps.

Use the Bible at offering times.

It is good for the worship leader to have a meditation, based on a Scripture about giving, printed in the worship folder. If you don’t have a worship folder or you don’t have space in the worship folder you use, you might schedule to have a layperson come to the platform before you receive the offering and read a meditation on giving.

Someone took the time to calculate that the Bible has about 500 verses on prayer, about 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. Of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, almost half tell us how to handle money and possessions.⁷⁹

Even a seemingly small matter like semantics, for example, makes a big difference in the tone of the offering. For instance, pastors don’t *take* the offering – they *receive* it. To use *take* makes it sound as though you’re going to steal it to make a payment on your car, and that’s certainly not the impression you want to leave. People need to have a sense of purpose and cheerfulness about giving.

Christian businessman R. G. LeTourneau was fond of quoting 2 Corinthians 9:7, where we read that “God loves a cheerful giver.” LeTourneau would follow that statement by saying, “I shovel out and God shovels in – but God’s shovel is always bigger.”⁸⁰

People need to have a sense of purpose and cheerfulness about giving.

Another individual in that same church made a commitment during our building program completely on faith, for she had no extra money at the end of her personal budget. Nearly a year later, she testified that not once during that year had she had to dip into her normal monthly income to pay her pledge. Every weekly pledge commitment had been met by an outside source of income provided to her by the Lord since that night she had made the pledge.

No one has ever yet been able to out-give God. All the abundance of the world came from the gracious hand of a generous God. “John D. Rockefeller made his millions in oil, but if a benevolent God had not put the oil on the ground, and hadn’t endowed man with the sense to refine it and market it, there would be no fortunes in oil.”⁸¹

When we consider all that God has done for us, there is no way we should ever think he requires too much of us in challenging us to give through our tithes and offerings. As the poet said:

“But must I keep giving and giving again?

‘Ah, no,’ said the angel, whose eyes pierced me through.

‘Just give till the Master quits giving to you.’^{lxxxii}

Use a brief personal story of God’s blessings.

I like to tell the following story: I was a church planter at one time and felt impressed by the Lord to send \$50 to some missionaries. When I shared with my wife what had been laid on my heart, we took a look at our checkbook and found \$54 in our balance. Not much room for error there.

She said, “Honey, I wasn’t raised quite like you, but I trust you and have faith in your stewardship commitments. Let’s do it.” So I wrote the check and sent it to the Carters in Arizona, who were ministering to Native Americans in a small reservation village. Even though I knew it had been the right thing to do, I did begin to wonder how we were going to manage because at that time we never really knew when our paychecks were going to be delivered.

The next day I went to the post office, and amazingly I picked up a letter from a student at Asbury Theological Seminary who had been one of my roommates at college. The letter read, “I just had you and Linda on my heart and felt impressed to write to you. I’m enclosing a check for you, knowing you will probably put it in the offering plate next Sunday, but it is not for your church. It is for you.” And you already know how much it was made out for. Fifty bucks!

As Paul Harvey used to say, here’s the rest of the story. When the check we sent arrived in Arizona, Doug Carter called immediately. “Stan, your check just arrived. What timing! We had an appointment with the doctor for our daughter, Angie, but we had no money to pay the bill. I was just about to make the dreaded phone call to tell the doctor but I paused to look at the mail first, and there it was. The Lord was right on schedule, wasn’t he?”

How could God touch a poor church planter on the shoulder and say, “Send \$50 to missionaries in Arizona,” even though he knew the church planter needed it, and at the same time touch a student at Asbury Theological Seminary on the shoulder and say to him, “Send \$50 to the Tolers”? A cynical person might ask, “Why didn’t God just impress the Asbury student to send his \$50 directly to the missionaries in Arizona?” To the first question I say, that’s how God works. To the second I suggest that God wanted to pour out his blessings on three families instead of two.

Use constructive humor at offering time.

Have you heard about the preacher who got really desperate for his annual missions offering and went in on the Saturday night before to wire all his pews to an electrical current? He put a little buzzer up on the platform and decided that on Sunday morning when he said, “Those who will give to the missionary offering, please stand,” he would push that button, and they would get a little electrical charge and jump right up to help him. So he got his scheme all ready, and on Sunday morning he said, “I want everybody who will give \$100 to world missions please stand.” He pushed that button, and people all over the church stood right up. They collected the biggest missionary offering in the history of the church. However, that afternoon he was saddened to learn that six deacons of the church had passed away. Electrocutted.

MORE TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL STEWARDSHIP

Once the offering time has been planned, be sure to do the following things:

Keep the congregation informed.

This is especially important when significant achievements take place. Informed givers are happy givers. If there is a special offering, they will know about it and help the church with a strong personal commitment. As the information is shared, be sure to praise your congregation for their faithfulness in giving; then allow for the entire church fellowship to praise God openly and publicly in any way they want.

Model the spirit of giving.

No matter who is standing behind the podium they should model the spirit of giving. Whether it is a church leader, a deacon, the treasurer, a board member, or the pastor – if he or she asks for a dollar, they had better give a dollar. If you ask for \$20, you had better have a \$20 bill in your hand. In fact, it is wise to have one of the ushers come to the pulpit to receive the speaker’s gift first, not to appear like a Pharisee, but to say to the congregation, “I’m investing in this place because I really believe in what’s happening around here.”

Appeal to the different “pockets” of giving.

Your church is full of people with varying interests, not only in the church, but in their involvement in its efforts, so it is wise to realize this and appeal to the different “pockets” of giving.

- There are those in the *operations pocket*, who will always give to the operation of the church – salaries, budgets, materials, and so on.
- Then there are those who belong to the *building pocket*, those who give to building projects.
- There are those in the *missions pocket*, the *compassion pocket*, the *education pocket*, and the *evangelism pocket*.
- The whole idea behind these pockets is to remind you that people in the church represent many different backgrounds and emphases, and if you don’t open up to these people during the year, then you won’t get their participation in stewardship.

Develop a realistic budget plan.

Nothing inspires confidence in a giver like a realistic budget plan. This plan is intentional and well-conceived, but you must stick to it in order to earn the respect of your people. But remember that new Christians have to be taught how to give – it’s not a natural by-product of salvation. It’s too easy to see new people coming into your fellowship and presume that the finances are going to become healthier, but it will take time. The principle is this: financial growth follows people growth. Systematically teach your new people in a discipling class about responsible stewardship, as well as having a stewardship emphasis one month every year.

POINTERS FOR STEWARDSHIP MONTH

Here are some practical pointers to help make your Stewardship Month a great success.

Organize a Stewardship Month ministry team.

After all, it’s teamwork that makes the dream work. What a great message you send to the congregation and to the community when it becomes obvious that it isn’t just the pastor who is concerned about giving to God and the Church. Your committed laypeople will be glad to help you with the many details involved in putting together a successful Stewardship Month.

Establish a theme.

One of my friends used the theme “Enlarging our Boundaries,” based on the passage from Isaiah 54:2, “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.” His church had some ambitious projects and needed to raise more money than ever before. So they challenged themselves to stretch, enlarging their boundaries, and they surpassed their goal.

Find a theme – preferably from Scripture – that fits your situation and captures the imagination of your people to give generously.

Send letters each week.

Here is where you can put some of your ministry action team members to work, preparing the letters and sending them out via email. On the last week before you start your Stewardship Month, send out a special letter, telling the congregation that your church will be in the stewardship series the following Sunday. Remind them that stewardship means more than money or talking about money, and only on the last Sunday of the series will the pastor be talking about giving money and about tithing. After all, stewardship is about the way we handle all of life, not just our money.

I read the story of an old prospector who mined for gold in the West. He found what he thought was the Mother Lode. Actually, it wasn’t gold at all, but rather mica – “fool’s gold.” Nevertheless, he loaded down his old burro and started across the desert. He ran out of water and both he and the burro died.

When travelers found his body, they also found a note the old prospector had written: “Died rich.” But all he had in his saddlebags was fool’s gold.^{lxxxiii}

Life is about so much more than financial giving. It’s about living for a higher purpose. But the point of this chapter – and the point of the last message in your stewardship series – does need to be about financial giving.

Stewardship is about the way we handle all of life, not just our money.

Present your church budget on the last Sunday of the Stewardship Month.

Tell your congregation, “This is my one message on giving this year. I will not be preaching on giving again during the next twelve months.” Announce the week before that you will be presenting the budget the next week and informing them how their money will be spent, plus how it was spent last year.

People are always interested in hearing that.

In this final service, ask for a commitment by signing a partnership commitment card with God. It could be in your message outline and printed in the worship folder: “This is between you and God. You can put it in the offering plate if you want to, but I want this to stay in your worship journal all year long, so you can see how you are doing throughout the year.” Ask everyone to join you in making a commitment to God. It will create a very significant moment as you close out that message on giving.

Celebrate the generosity of your people.

Let them know what they have done for the kingdom of God. If it is a special-purpose offering, such as for a city rescue mission, take a camera and bring back pictures of improvements made or lives changed. Let them see the faces of those people helped by their giving. If it is a special missions offering, be sure to schedule a missionary speaker during the year who can attest to the usefulness of their generosity. Before you ask your people for another dollar, celebrate their generosity!

Offer workshops on money management and financial planning.

Often a stewardship series makes people aware that they have not been managing their money well. Perhaps they have used the tightness of their budget as an excuse for not giving as generously as they should. By offering a workshop on money management, you take advantage of this crucial season when people are ready to think about how they can manage their money better, learn to budget better, get out of debt, and have more in their bank account at the end of the month.

THE UNEXPECTED

The late Dr. Charles Allen, former senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Houston, told about receiving a letter from one of his members during a stewardship drive:

Dear Dr. Allen: In reply to your request to send a check, I wish to inform you that the present condition of my bank account makes it almost impossible.

My shattered financial condition is due to the federal laws, state laws, county laws, corporation laws, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and outlaws.

Through these laws, I am compelled to pay a business tax, amusement tax, head tax, school tax, gas tax, light tax, water tax, and sales tax. Even my brains are taxed.

I am required to get a business license, dog license, not to mention a marriage license. I am also required to contribute to every organization or society which the genius of man is capable of bringing to life: women’s relief, unemployment relief, every hospital and charitable institution in the city, including the Red Cross, the black cross, the purple cross, and the double cross.

For my own safety, I am required to carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, burglary insurance, accident insurance, business insurance, earthquake

insurance, tornado insurance, unemployment insurances, old age insurance, and fire insurance.

I am inspected, expected, disrespected, rejected, dejected, examined, re-examined, informed, reformed, summoned, fined, commanded, and compelled, until I find an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire, or hope of the human race. Simply because I refuse to donate something or the other, I am boycotted, talked about, lied about, held up, held down, and robbed until I am ruined.

I can tell you honestly that had not the unexpected happened, I could not enclose this check. The wolf that comes to so many doors nowadays just had pups in the kitchen. I sold them and HERE IS THE MONEY.⁸⁴

ACTION STEPS

1. Think about the offering time in your worship service last Sunday. Were the comments just prior to the offering well-planned or were they “off the cuff”? You spend time preparing your sermon. The offering time also needs careful planning.
2. How well-planned is your church budget? Is it something that is thrown together just before your annual conference or is it well-planned by some of the best – and most positive – financial thinkers in your congregation?
3. When is the last time you celebrated the generosity of your congregation? Is it time to celebrate again? What people and resources could you pull together to plan a time of celebration?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ¹Charles W. Price, "Cracks on the 42nd Floor," *Decision*, January 1990, 8.
- ²David L. McKenna, *Isaiah 1-39: Communicator's Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 274.
- ³<http://www.preachingpoints.com/2010/03/quoted-ravi-zachariason-foundations/>, accessed 10/17/12.
- ⁴Dale Shibley, "Healthy Church Vision," *Ministries Today*, September/October 2000, 47.
- ⁵Phil Stevenson, "An Unowned Vision Goes Unfulfilled," *Seedlings*, an inspirational e-mail message sent periodically by the author.
- ⁶Cited by John Maxwell and Jim Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 131.
- ⁷Alan Nelson, "Vision," *Rev!* Jan/Feb 2006, 47.
- ⁸<http://www.ruskinhistory.org/about.htm>, accessed 10/28/12.
- ⁹Questions adapted from Chuck Swindoll, "Want to Be an Effective Church?" *Rev.*, November/December 2001, 49ff.
- ¹⁰Cited by Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 188-189.
- ¹¹Robert H. Schuller, *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1967), 79.
- ¹²Cited by Stan Toler, *The Model Church Workshop* (San Diego: Injoy, 1996), 3-i.
- ¹³Cited by John Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 6.
- ¹⁴Steve DeNeff and David Drury, *SoulShift* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 125ff.
- ¹⁵<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/29699.html>, accessed Nov. 2, 2010.
- ¹⁶Cited by Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 15.
- ¹⁷Cited by John Maxwell, *Failing Forward* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 39.
- ¹⁸Cited by Gary L. McIntosh, "Handling Criticism Wisely," *Growth Points*, November 2010, 1.
- ¹⁹Cited by Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 167.
- ²⁰Gary L. McIntosh, "Proponents and Opponents," *Growth Points*, February 2011, 1.
- ²¹Cited in "Leadership and Change," <http://moodle.gprc.ab.ca/mod/page/view.php?id=89470>, accessed 12/31/12.
- ²²<http://www.brewsterbaptistchurch.org/making-the-most-of-life/>, accessed 11/6/12.
- ²³Fred Smith, *Learning to Lead* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1986), 78.
- ²⁴http://www.johngoddard.info/life_list.htm, accessed 1/1/13.
- ²⁵http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/paul_j_meyer.html, accessed 3/7/12.
- ²⁶Cited by Harvey Mackay, *Swim with the Sharks* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1988), 78.
- ²⁷Stan Toler, *Minister's Little Instruction Book* (Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1994), item 34.
- ²⁸Robert H. Schuller, *You Can Become the Person You Want to Be* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), 144.
- ²⁹Steve Moore, *The Dream Cycle* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 73ff.
- ³⁰*Ibid.*, 68.
- ³¹H. Norman Schwarzkopf, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/general-norman-schwarzkopf-soldier-who-led-the-coalitionforce-to-victory-in-the-first-gulf-war-8432764.html>, accessed 1/3/13.
- ³²Jim Rohn, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jimrohn_162051.html, accessed 1/3/13.
- ³³Cited by J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 81.
- ³⁴Cited in *New Man*, July/August 1995, 17.
- ³⁵John Mason, *An Enemy Called Average* (Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1993), 67.
- ³⁶Cited by "The Storehouse," http://leadershiptraininginstitute.org/new/index.php?option=com_mojo&Itemid=13, accessed 1/6/13.
- ³⁷Toler, *Minister's Little Instruction Book*, item 26.
- ³⁸John Maxwell, "Creativity – Having Your Cake & Eating It Too," *Injoy Life Club* recorded message, volume 11, number 12.
- ³⁹Cited by Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 85.
- ⁴⁰Cited by Scott DeGarmo, "Hot Ideas: Finding, Seizing, and Exploiting Opportunities," *Success*, June 1995, 4.
- ⁴¹"The Hidden Secrets of the Creative Mind," *Time*, January 16, 2006, 89.
- ⁴²<http://www.thequotefactory.com/quote-by/henry-ford/dont-findfault-find-a-remedy/2790>, accessed 1/7/13.
- ⁴³Mason, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁴http://thinkexist.com/quotation/good_fortune_is_what_happens_when_opportunity/146543.html, accessed 1/21/13.

- ⁴⁵Stan Toler, *The People Principle* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 12ff.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., 14-15.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., 11.
- ⁴⁸Norman Vincent Peale, *Why Some Positive Thinkers Get Powerful Results* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 31-32.
- ⁴⁹Leslie C. Allen, *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Chronicles* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1987), 48.
- ⁵⁰Gary L. McIntosh, "Growth Points," September 2009, 1.
- ⁵¹Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 95.
- ⁵²http://www.angelfire.com/tx5/q_land/source/r.html, accessed 1/20/13.
- ⁵³Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 101.
- ⁵⁴Norman Vincent Peale, "Do It!" *Guideposts*, January 2013, 24 (reprinted from January 1988 *Guideposts*).
- ⁵⁵Cited by Michelle Avery, "Why We Call Bad Days Good," *The Church Herald and Holiness Banner*, April 2012, 16.
- ⁵⁶"State of the Art," an interview with Andy Stanley, *Leadership*, Spring 2006, 27.
- ⁵⁷"The Good to Great Pastor: an interview with Jim Collins," *Leadership*, Spring 2006, 50, 49.
- ⁵⁸"State of the Art," *Leadership*, Spring 2006, 29-30.
- ⁵⁹*The International Thesaurus of Quotations*, compiled by Rhoda Thomas Tripp (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 16.
- ⁶⁰Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King* (New York: Viking, 2001), 236.
- ⁶¹*Youthworker*, Summer 1994.
- ⁶²David J. Schwartz, *The Magic of Thinking Big* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Fireside edition, 1987), 66.
- ⁶³Cited by Stan Toler, *The People Principle* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1997), 86.
- ⁶⁴Bob Benson with Karen Dean Fry, *The Journey Home* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 108-9.
- ⁶⁵"Seniors are fastest growing segment of US population," <http://in.news.yahoo.com/seniors-fastest-growing-segment-us-population-045018711.html>, accessed 1/24/13.
- ⁶⁶"Marketing Theory," *The Times 100 Business Case Studies*, <http://businesscasestudies.co.uk/business-theory/marketing/marketingmix-price-place-promotion-product.html#axzz2ObIMwQjD>, accessed 3/25/13.
- ⁶⁷"Use of Social Media Explodes," <http://arbitron.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=682>, accessed 1/24/13.
- ⁶⁸Ken Heer, "What Are You Making?" *Mandate*, Fall 2002, 15.
- ⁶⁹Cited by Pat Riley, *The Winner Within* (New York: Berkley Books, 1993), 191.
- ⁷⁰Cited by John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1999), 19.
- ⁷¹Cited by Annabel Sutton, *52 Ways to Transform Your Life* (Leicestershire, Great Britain: Matador, 2013), 48.
- ⁷²Cited by Doug Self in *Mastering Pastoral Care*, Multnomah Press, Portland, OR, 1990, p. 20.
- ⁷³Stan Toler, *Stan Toler's Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*, Wesleyan Publishing House, Indianapolis, 2006, p. 103.
- ⁷⁴<http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/robert-ewebber-s-legacy-ancient-future-faith-and-worship/>, accessed 3/4/13.
- ⁷⁵Lenny Luchetti, *Preaching Essentials* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 39.
- ⁷⁶Anne Belli Gesalman, *Dallas Morning News*, April 3, 1996.
- ⁷⁷Matt Friedeman, *The Accountability Connection* (Chicago: Victor Books, 1992).
- ⁷⁸Martin Thielen, "Most Pastors Wimp Out in Stewardship Preaching," *United Methodist Reporter*, July 1, 2011, 6A.
- ⁷⁹Heidi Husted, "The Sermon on the Amount," *Preaching Today*, No. 122, 1993.
- ⁸⁰Brian Kluth, "Understanding the Grace of Giving," *The Wesleyan Advocate*, October 1999, 27.
- ⁸¹Jerry Pence and Ralph Kensell, "The Giving in Thanksgiving," *Stewardship is Worship* (Indianapolis: Wesley Press, 1994), 13.
- ⁸²Ibid., 14.
- ⁸³Adrian Rogers, "The Principles of Prosperity," *Preaching Today*, No. 167, 1997.
- ⁸⁴John C. Maxwell, *Communicator's Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 206.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stan Toler served as a pastor for over 40 years in Ohio, Florida, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. He was elected as the 39th General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene in 2009 at the 27th General Assembly in Orlando, Florida.

Toler has written over 90 books, including his best-sellers, *God Has Never Failed Me, But He's Sure Scared Me to Death a Few Times*; *The Buzzards Are Circling, But God's Not Finished With Me Yet*; *God's Never Late, He's Seldom Early, He's Always Right on Time*; *The Secret Blend*; *Practical Guide to Pastoral Ministry series*; *The Inspirational Speaker's Resource*, *ReThink Your Life*, his popular *Minute Motivator series*, *If Only I Could Relate To The People I'm Related To*, *God Can Do Anything But Fail*; *So Try Para-Gliding In A Windstorm* and his newest book, *Terrific! Learning Five Star Customer Service From Special People*. Toler's books have sold over 3 million copies.

For many years served as vice-president and taught seminars for John C. Maxwell's INJOY Leadership Institute, training church and corporate leaders to make a difference. Further, several colleges have named leadership institutes for Toler around the world.

Stan and his wife, Linda, an educator, reside in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and have two married sons and four grandchildren.