X/52

Great Commission Skills for

Pastors & Church Leaders

*A Biblical “Formula” for Church Revitalization*

Judges 5:2

Ken Priddy, PhD

**Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to the hundreds of pastors and church leaders who have connected with me in a variety of ways in the service of the King of kings and Lord of lords. You have helped me understand, test, develop and improve my resources and my ministry in this challenging undertaking of church revitalization, and it is my hope and prayer that the ministry God has birthed in me has been, and will continue to be, helpful to you. May God bless us all as we co-labor to move the Gospel forward for the harvest continues to be plentiful. May the lost be found, may our churches thrive, and may God be glorified. Amen.

**Judges 5:2**

That the leaders took the lead in Israel,

that the people offered themselves willingly,

bless the Lord! (ESV)

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*O do thou bring in great numbers to Jesus!*

*let me see that glorious day.*

*and give me to grasp for multitudes of souls;*

*let me be willing to die to that end;*

*and while I live let me labour for thee*

*to the utmost of my strength,*

*spending time profitably in this work,*

*both in health and in weakness.*

*It is thy cause and kingdom I long for,*

*not my own.*

Excerpt from *The Valley of Vision:*

*A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*

*“God’s Cause”*

**Foreword: Prophet, Priest, King, & Pastors**

Jesus Christ is described in numerous ways in Scripture and in evangelical doctrine and theology that have been drawn from Scripture. We could speak of the person and work of Christ, the attributes of Christ, or the mission of Christ, for example. *X/52: Great Commission Skills for Pastors & Church Leaders* is not a book about theology per se, but all that comprises X/52 derives from Scripture and emerges, at least in part, from theology and doctrines that are included there. Be sure to examine the Scriptures Referenced recorded in the back pages of X/52.

I’ve decided to open X/52 with a brief look at the Offices of Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfills the Offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, as attested by Scripture, and treated by leading theologians throughout the centuries, particularly since the Reformation some 500 plus years ago. Old Testament prophets carried enormous responsibility as mediators between God and His people. They represented God and His word to the people and they represented the people before God. Aside from encouragements or warnings over matters of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, their primary message was a Gospel message, the Good News that the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Savior would come as the great healer and liberator. Isaiah records, “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away,” (Isaiah 35:10).

That Messiah, that Redeemer, that Savior, of course, is Jesus and, upon His coming, the role of the OT prophet ceased. Jesus was and is the ultimate Prophet, the ultimate Mediator between God the Father and His people. Calvin states, “We see that [Christ] was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father’s grace. And that not in the common way – for he is distinguished from other teachers with a similar office. On the other hand, we must note this: he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel. This, however, remains certain: the perfect doctrine he has brought has made an end to all prophecies,” (*Institutes* *1*: Calvin, p. 496). Note that Calvin directly ties the Office of Christ as Prophet to the preaching of the Gospel. For me, this calls to mind the statement of Jesus in His encounter with Zacchaeus, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,” (Luke 19:10), and His directive to the disciples when they pressed Him to respond to the expectations of the crowd that He had served the evening before. Jesus informed, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose,” (Luke 4:43).

Indeed, Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, the ultimate teacher and preacher of the Gospel, and He is the eternal High Priest, sanctioned in both the Old and New Testaments as being after the order of Melchizedek as follows:

The LORD says to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

Your people will offer themselves freely, on the day of your power, in holy garments,

from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind,

“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:1-4)

The writer to the Hebrews affirms:

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For where there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 7:11-17)

In explaining the Office of Priest, Hodge offers, “That Christ is our only Priest follows from the nature and design of the office: (1) No man, save the Lord Jesus Christ, has liberty of access unto God. All other men, being sinners, need some one to approach God on their behalf. (2) No other sacrifice than His could take away sin. (3) It is only through Him that God is propitious to sinful men, and (4) it is only through Him that the benefits which flow from the favour of God are conveyed to His people,” (*Systematic Theology*: Hodge, p. 371).

Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, the eternal High Priest, and He is the Almighty King. Psalm 103 informs, “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all,” (Psalm 103:19). Paul, in closing his first letter to Timothy, issues this charge, “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, who in his testimony before Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen,” (1 Timothy 6:13-16).

Berkhof takes a deep dive in building the case that the kingship of Jesus Christ is a spiritual kingship. He explains, “The spiritual kingship of Christ is His royal rule over the *regnum gratiae*, that is over His people or the Church. It is a spiritual kingship, because it relates to a spiritual realm. It is the mediatorial rule as it is established in the hearts and lives of believers. Moreover, it is spiritual, because it bears directly and immediately on a spiritual end, the salvation of His people. And, finally, it is spiritual, because it is administered, not by force or external means, but by the Word and the Spirit, which is the Spirit of truth and wisdom, of justice and holiness, of grace and mercy. This kingship reveals itself in the gathering of the Church, and in its government, protection and perfection,” (*Systematic Theology*: Berkhof, p. 406).

Jesus, now ascended, continues to fulfill His three-fold Office of Prophet, Priest and King. Horton summarizes with, “In his heavenly exaltation, Jesus Christ exercises all three offices. As prophet, he continues to declare both his law and his gospel, judging and absolving sinners through the frail ministry of human beings. We have been given rest in a greater land through the gospel, led by a greater prophet than Moses (Heb. 3:1-19) or Joshua (4:1-12) and with a greater priest than Aaron or his descendants…Through his heavenly reign, with the Spirit leading the ground war, Jesus Christ loots Satan’s kingdom and sets the prisoners free…From his incarnation to his reign at the Father’s right hand, Jesus is not only the Lord who became the servant, but the servant who is Lord and continues even in this exalted state to serve his Father’s will and his people’s good. From eternity to eternity, he offers his ‘Here I am’ to the Father on behalf of those who have gone their own way. For now, Christ reigns in grace; when he returns in judgment and vindication, his kingdom will be consummated in everlasting glory,” (*The Christian Faith*: Horton, pp. 531-533).

Wow! I don’t know about you, but I’m excited! I can’t believe that I’m actually part of this, serving under the lordship of Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Prophet, the Highest of High Priest, the Almighty King of kings and Lord of lords. So, what has this got to do with your being a pastor? What has all this got to do with X/52?

Have you noticed that the Offices of Jesus Christ, Prophet, Priest and King, have ties to the Great Commission? The message of the OT prophets was a messianic message, a message that proclaimed Good News. Calvin notes that Jesus, as the Prophet, is engaged in the continuing preaching of the Gospel. Hodge amplifies the Gospel significance of the Offices of Christ in his explanation of the Office of Priest. He informs that the sacrifice of Christ is the only sacrifice that could take away sin, that it was only through Christ that propitiation is realized, and that only through Christ are God’s favorable benefits applied to His people.

Regarding Jesus as King, Berkhof speaks of the mediatorial rule of Christ being established in the hearts and lives of believers. How is that possible apart from regeneration? Further, he references a spiritual end that is the salvation of God’s people. Finally, in reiterating Horton’s commentary, the Prophet declares His gospel, the Priest is identified as greater than Aaron or Joshua, and the King reigns from heaven as the prisoners are set free. Free of what? Free of sin; free from the penalty for sin. This is how disciple-making begins.

As a pastor, you serve in the wake that Jesus stirs up as Prophet, Priest, and King. I want to suggest that you have a prophetic role to play, a priestly role to play, and a kingly role to play. Your prophetic role is to bring the Word of God to your church and your community, a Gospel message that the Spirit will use to regenerate, and biblical instruction that the Spirit will use to sanctify and mature. Your priestly role is to serve as a mediator between God and His people, representing Him to them and representing them to Him. In your priestly role, you’ll guide people into and through conversion and baptism as they are cleansed from sin literally and by sign and seal, and you’ll nurture them in the Word of God and in faith through that Word in their hearts and minds. In your kingly role, you will lead them as an under-shepherd while they navigate God’s journey for them through life, a journey that will receive the Gospel, live the Gospel, and share the Gospel.

As you serve in these roles as pastor, you must devote yourself to ministry that finds its heartbeat in commitment to the Great Commission. You must move in the authority of Jesus Christ to go and make disciples. You must baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You must teach people that God places under your care to observe and obey all that Jesus commanded. And He will be with you to the end of the age, (Matthew 28:18-20). All of this will be multiplied through the leaders of the church.

*X/52: Great Commission Skills for Pastors and Church Leaders* will equip and empower you in Great Commission ministry. The skills that will be built through X/52 are Great Commission skills. As your understanding and application of these skills increases, you will see your ministry become more and more effective in both a growing congregation and in the plentiful harvest.

May God bless you abundantly as you turn the page and begin the X/52 journey.

For the Harvest,

Ken Priddy, D.Min., Ph.D.

Executive Director, GO Center

**Introduction**

When you were called to be a disciple of Christ you were called to go and make disciples. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent by God the Father to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus told His disciples that, just as the Father had sent Him, He was sending them (John 20:21). He made that clear in His pre-ascension address with a mandate that we have come to know as the Great Commission:

*All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is still on His mission to seek and to save the lost, and we are co-missioned to work with Him, co-laborers with Him and each other in the harvest fields that are white for harvest (Matthew 9:35-38; John 4:34-38). When you were called to pastoral ministry or to church leadership, you were called to lead in the sanctified task of gathering this harvest of souls to the glory of God. Jesus is, indeed, building His church (Matthew 16:18). Yet, the American evangelical church today is largely a church in plateau and decline, steadily losing its influence in American culture and failing to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission.

**The X Factor:**

Why is it that some churches seem to thrive with vitality while others are caught in plateau or decline? Why is it that some churches are very effective at promoting the Gospel and see significant conversion growth while others rarely see a profession of faith? Why is it that the people of some congregations are mobilized for neighborhood and community ministry while the people of other congregations remain passive toward the community and are more spectators than participants?

Many factors contribute to the condition of a given church, some internal and some external, but there is one X Factor that is a clear difference maker, a catalytic game changer, a bright hope in an often-resigned ministry environment. That X Factor is the pastor’s strong commitment to Great Commission ministry coupled with strong leadership skills and working in tandem with church leaders of the same heart, mind, and skillset. These skills can be learned and sharpened over time as pastors and leaders are equipped, encouraged, and empowered to fulfill the important role of Great Commission leadership. X/52 trainingis a resource for becoming an effective Great Commission pastor or leader.

With that in mind, be aware that the manuscript you are reading is more than information; it’s a training manual. Years ago, I trained to become certified as a corporate trainer. I wasn’t working in a corporation and didn’t plan to do so, but I had come to understand that my training ministry was built more on *ministry* than on the art and science of *training*, and that it would be of great benefit to me and those I serve if I took the time and effort to study the discipline of training. One important distinction I discovered is the distinction between teaching and training. Teaching is information-driven and the objective of teaching is the acquisition of knowledge. Training is implementation-driven or execution-driven and the objective of training is the acquisition of skills. Effectiveness lies in what is done, not in what is known or even planned. 4DX offers this insight, “After working with thousands of leaders and teams in every kind of industry, and in schools and government agencies worldwide, this is what we have learned: once you’ve decided what to do, your biggest challenge is in getting people to execute it at the level of excellence you need,” (*The 4 Disciplines of Execution*: McChesney, Covey, Huling, p. xxiii). It isn’t too big a jump to engage James 2 here, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead,” (James 2:17). X/52 has been developed as training, and the objective of this training is the acquisition of skills, Great Commission skills that effectively reach the harvest. Go for it!

**Judges 5.2: A Biblical Formula for Church Revitalization.**

OK – I’ll admit that this might be a stretch. A formula? Really? Over the years of my ministry of training and consulting in church revitalization, I have been repeatedly asked to reveal the secret, the essence, the secret sauce, the formula, if you will, for effective church revitalization. If there is such a formula, it would have to be a biblical formula to be truly credible. For many years, my biblical starting place for understanding revitalization has been the Book of Nehemiah, a biblical reference point for the process of revitalization that I still use as a cornerstone of training. But Nehemiah offers more of a model than a formula.

A few years ago, while reading through a one-year Bible, I came upon the Book of Judges, admittedly a scriptural address I rarely visited. Judges 4 records the dynamic leadership of the prophetess, Deborah. Once again, the people of Israel had fallen away from God, His blessing had been lifted, and they were in bondage, finally crying out to the Lord for help. Under Deborah’s leadership, the people of Israel were delivered. Judges 5 records a song sung by Deborah and Barak, her military commander. The opening lyric of that song reads:

*That the leaders took the lead in Israel,*

*That the people offered themselves willingly,*

*Bless the LORD!* Judges 5:2

Suddenly, I realized that I had stumbled upon something important that I have come to appreciate as a combination of elements that are as close to a biblical formula for church revitalization as we are likely to get. These elements, seen in the light of my years of experience, observation, reading, and study, truly capture the heart and soul of revitalization – and it’s so simple. Pastors and leaders must strongly lead a congregation in Great Commission-focused ministry. People of the congregation must give themselves sacrificially to the Great Commission effort. When these two initiatives are wholeheartedly embraced, God is not only praised and blessed, but He blesses. Take a look at the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, for example. Note how many times a phrase such as *because the hand of His God was upon him* appears. God was blessed by the faithfulness and commitment of Ezra and Nehemiah, and God’s blessing was upon them (e.g., Ezra 7:6, 9; Nehemiah 2:8, 11-15, 17-18).

**The X/52 Triangle**:

Proactive Great Commission leadership coupled with congregational Great Commission sacrifice brings blessing, glory, honor, and praise to God, and His hand upon such leaders and congregations blesses them and their ministry in the harvest. Acquiring and activating Great Commission skills moves such a church away from the program-driven culture of conventional church-as-usual churches into being among those few that truly make a redemptive difference in a community.

The people of God in the American evangelical church need pastors and leaders to take the lead. When leaders lead and people sacrifice deliverance comes, and there is no greater deliverance than the freedom and excitement that comes from making disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Pastors and leaders must lead *from* the Great Commission and the people of God must offer themselves willingly *for* the Great Commission. X/52 combines orthodoxy with orthopraxis and puts Great Commission tools in your hands. The content of X/52 is centered on six Key Skills and each Key Skill contains six Key Elements. These skills and elements are listed in the Table of Contents and I’ll list the Key Skills again here:

Key Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision

Key Skill 2: Casting Vision & Creating Ownership

Key Skill 3: Setting Objectives & Establishing Accountability

Key Skill 4: Managing Ministry Time

Key Skill 5: Working with Staff & Leaders

Key Skill 6: Leaving a Gospel Footprint

**Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative**

The Ministry Model that serves as a backdrop for X/52 is a model that emerges from the Book of Nehemiah, outlined in Nehemiah Chapter 1 and revealed throughout the balance of the book. That model is Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. Revitalization is a combination of spiritual dynamics and strategic dynamics working in tandem with pastors and leaders who are fully aware of and engaged in both. Either without the other is going to lead to failure of the revitalization effort. The spiritual without the strategic typically results in momentary spiritual pep rallies that briefly inspire but soon disappear with ministry returning to status quo. The strategic without the spiritual typically results in momentary statistical spiking brought about by methodological manipulation before, again, returning to status quo. Revitalization is spiritual and revitalization is strategic. Pastors and leaders must address and leverage both if sustainable gains in health, growth, and multiplication are to be experienced.

A quick run through Nehemiah 1 spotlights the model. Nehemiah receives the results of an assessment of how the people of God are faring back in Jerusalem after surviving the exile. The report is not good. The text reads, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire,” (Nehemiah 1:3). This might be one way of metaphorically describing a church that is in steep decline.

Nehemiah’s response is a spiritual response. We’re told that, for some days, he wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed (Nehemiah 1:4). The nature of his prayer, as revealed in Chapter 1, is spiritual as he confesses sin before God and intercedes on behalf of his family and the people of Israel. Clearly, Nehemiah is heartbroken over the condition of the people of Israel in Jerusalem and over their failure to be faithful. He seeks spiritual renewal.

However, the closing statement in Chapter 1 is of a completely different genre than the rest of his prayer. Why? What’s going on here? At the end of Chapter 1, Scripture reveals the seed of strategic initiative. Nehemiah prays, “give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now I was cupbearer to the king,” (Nehemiah 1:11). Apparently, as Nehemiah has sought the Lord during these days of weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying, something has begun to occur to Nehemiah, something that is going to grow into being a revitalization strategy. He has come to understand that someone needs to go to Jerusalem to lead restoration, and he has concluded that he is that someone. But, as cupbearer to the king, he doesn’t have the option simply to leave. He needs permission and even help from the king, so he prays for God’s mercy in regard to “this man,” the king. Spiritual renewal with strategic initiative is what Nehemiah modeled for us and, as it was with Nehemiah, is our path to revitalization.

**X/52 Training with the GO Center**:

X/52 Training is available through the GO Center as a tool for fulfilling its mission in accordance with its mission statement included below:

***THE GO CENTER MISSION STATEMENT***

*The GO Center inspires hope, instills vision, informs strategy, and invigorates action in pastors, leaders, and congregations as they serve God by finding who’s missing and bringing them home.* Stated simply, the GO Center helps pastors and church leaders revitalize their congregations while impacting their communities.

**The GO Center** is a Virginia not-for-profit corporation that trains, coaches, and consults with ministry leaders in gaining, sustaining, or regaining Great Commission effectiveness. Led by its Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Ken Priddy, the GO Center works throughout the U.S. and occasionally beyond through on-site and online interaction.

**Inspires Hope**: Statistics indicate that over 80% of American churches are in plateau or decline. The typical congregation is a shrinking, aging congregation that struggles with a lack of funding, a lack of leadership, a lack of young adults and families, and a lack of energetic, relevant programming. Many of these congregations have lost hope that revitalization is possible and are resigned to a future beyond their control. The GO Center inspires hope by presenting a future that is biblically guided by the truth that Jesus Christ Himself is building His church and that God’s blessing can spark health, growth, and multiplication.

**Instills Vision**: Congregations in plateau or decline have often lost their sense of vision and leaders wonder what God’s vision might hold for them. The GO Center encourages leaders to seek a vision ***of*** God before seeking a vision ***from*** God. Rather than beginning with the question, “What is God’s vision for our church,” the GO Center encourages leaders to ask, “What is God’s vision for Himself,” and then, “How can our church serve that vision?” With this big picture firmly in place, leaders are then led to a Key Vision Question that captures the application of God’s big vision in the context of a local church. That question is, “How does God want to express Himself through our church in our community at this time?” This perspective, and the exercise of finding answers to this question, instills godly vision into church leaders of a clear direction toward a godly destination.

**Informs Strategy**: In the King James Version, Proverbs 29:18a reads, “without a vision, the people will perish.” Here’s another truth, “without a strategy, the vision will perish.” Discerning and developing God’s vision for a congregation is a vital and necessary investment, but words on a page do not make ministry happen. Articulating vision is an important first step, but other steps must follow. The GO Center informs strategy with a process that flows from self-discovery through assessment to the practice of congregational Great Commission disciplines, from forming a Vision Team that is surrounded by Prayer Teams to nuts and bolts strategic planning through a proven strategic tool called the Great Commission Matrix. This strategic matrix channels Great Commission ministry through a congregation and into the surrounding community.

**Invigorates Action**: With hope inspired, godly vision instilled, and a Great Commission strategy informed, leaders are positioned to take action. The GO Center invigorates that action by challenging leaders and congregations to step out in faith in a proactive and timely way, and by supporting those leaders with ongoing coaching, consultation, and training reinforcement. As pastors and leaders work the process, the process works!

**Finding Who’s Missing & Bringing Them Home**: Simply stated, the mission objective of the GO Center is to equip and empower pastors, leaders, and congregations in **finding who’s missing and bringing them home**. The lost are the missing and Jesus came to seek and save the lost. As the Father has sent Him, so He is sending us. We are to go and make disciples of the lost, the missing, and the harvest is plentiful with fields ripe for harvest. We are to be His witnesses. The GO Center promotes finding the missing and bringing them home through outreach and evangelism, and, once home, they are to be discipled in their faith en route to becoming true worshipers who worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Father is seeking such people to worship Him. Hallelujah! Amen! *(Luke 19:10, John 20:19-22, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 9:35-38, John 4:34-38, Acts 1:8, John 4:23, Romans 12:1-2)*

**Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision**

Vision in the church is not about creativity; it’s about discernment. Discernment is about discovering the heart of God and the mind of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, accessed through prayer, processed through God’s Holy Word, and confirmed through the counsel of leaders. So, with discernment understood as the first Great Commission skill and the foundation of all that will follow, a preponderance of Scripture will be established as we consider Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision. Brace yourself. You are about to be awash in the Word of God.

**1.1 The Glory of God**: The place to begin in discerning a vision *from* God is to have a vision *of* God and a visionary understanding of God’s vision for Himself. Why does God do what He does? What is the ultimate destination that God has in view? God does what He does to be glorified. He has a vision of His own glory, and a church’s vision must focus on bringing glory to God.

It’s tempting to think that God does what He does because He loves us, that we are His first priority. People are, by nature, egocentric, even when it comes to thinking about God. We tend to think that we are at the center and that God revolves around us. This is simply not true, however. God is at the center and we are to revolve around Him. He is His own priority as the Creator and we are mere creatures. No doubt, God does love us and we benefit greatly from all that He is and all that He does, but we are not in first position. We stand behind God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Make no mistake, God does what He does for His own glory, and our lives exist quite simply to glorify Him; to bring honor and glory to Him. How do we know this? He tells us in His word. Here’s a sampling:

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mathew 6:9-10)

Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all peoples! For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. (1 Chronicles 16:23-25)

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! (Psalm 108:5)

For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. (Isaiah 48:9-11)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (Matthew 25:31)

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

(Mark 13:24-27)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:19-20)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:23).

I encourage you to read through all of these Scriptures prayerfully and thoughtfully.

Matthew 6:9-10; Luke 11:2 Luke 2:8-14

1 Chronicles 16:23-25 John 1:14

Psalm 19:1 John 17:1-5

Psalm 24:7-10 Acts 7:2-3

Psalm 29:1-4 1 Corinthians 10:31

Psalm 72:18-19 Ephesians 1:11-12

Psalm 96:1-4 Ephesians 3:14-19

Psalm 108:5 Philippians 4:19-20

Isaiah 6:3-5 Colossians 1:27

Isaiah 48:9-11 Colossians 3:4

Ezekiel 43:1-4 Hebrews 1:1-4

Matthew 24:29-31 Hebrews 13:20-21

Matthew 25:31 Revelation 4:9-11

Mark 13:24-27 Revelation 21:23

One way that we honor and glorify God as individuals and as churches is to discern and develop His vision for us. In *Visioneering*, Andy Stanley writes, “Honoring God involves discovering his picture or vision of what our lives could and should be. Glorifying God involves discovering what we could and should accomplish. We were created and re-created with his purposes in mind. And until we discover his purpose – and follow through – there will always be a hole in our soul,” (*Visioneering:* Stanley, p. 13).

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision begins with God’s ultimate purpose of displaying His glory and being glorified.

**1.2 Our Seeking God**: Our God is a seeking God; seeking what? Rather, I should say, seeking whom? Scripture informs that God is seeking two categories of people. He is seeking the “lost” and He is seeking “true worshipers.”

Luke 19:10 is a familiar and often quoted verse that is tied to the call to evangelism. In the words of Jesus at the close of His encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,” (Luke 19:10). With this statement, Jesus identified the very purpose for His Incarnation. This purpose and divine commitment are seen much earlier in Scripture through the Prophet Ezekiel, who served hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. In Ezekiel 34:1ff., we learn that the word of the Lord had come to Ezekiel and, in that word, God stated, “My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them,” (Ezekiel 34:6).

What, then, was God to do? His sheep, meaning His people, were widely scattered and there was no one to search or seek for them. God determined to take on this challenge Himself. He declares, “Behold: I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land,” (Ezekiel 34:11-13a). God the Father commits to a search and rescue mission to find who’s missing and bring them together and into their own land.

With the Incarnation of Christ, we witness the passing of this search and rescue mission from God the Father to God the Son. Jesus informs that seeking and saving the lost is at the very core of His mission. First, God the Father took it upon Himself to search for His sheep and seek them out. Now, God the Son takes on that responsibility.

So, God, as Father and Son, is about the business of seeking the lost, but what else, or whom else, is God seeking? John 4 renders the account of the exchange between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. This encounter is jam packed with opportunities to learn, but I’m going to zero in on one aspect of the dialogue. John 4:23 records these words of Jesus, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth? Whole books have been written on this subject but I will offer a brief comment. My text is Romans 12:1-2. To get a grip on worshiping in spirit, I turn to Romans 12:1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” To worship God in spirit, then, is to engage life as a living sacrifice, living for God rather than self; living in obedience. This takes us back to the reality that God’s ultimate vision is His own glory, and, when we live sacrificially in Him, for Him, with Him, we give Him glory and we worship in spirit. It is only through the Spirit that we are enabled to live sacrificially because, in the flesh, we are trapped in self-centeredness. This is not about a service of worship but defines a life of worship in service.

To get a grip on worshiping in truth, let’s read further into Romans 12:2. The Apostle Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” What is it that renews our minds? The Word of God renews our minds. What is the Word of God? In short, the Word of God is truth. To worship God in truth, then, is to engage life in obedience to God’s Word that tells us what we are to believe and how we are to live. In combination, to worship God in spirit and truth is to live a life that is righteously sacrificial and that is driven, in both belief and behavior, by obedience to God’s Word. Concerning this verse Morris comments, “One must worship, not simply outwardly by being in the right place and taking up the right attitude, but in one’s spirit… The combination of ‘spirit and truth’ points to the need for complete sincerity and complete reality in our approach to God,” (*The Gospel According to John*, Revised: Morris, p. 239).

In the opening sentence of this section, I mentioned that God is seeking two categories of people, the “lost” and “true worshipers.” I’ve come to realize that, though these are two different categories of people, both categories exist in the same person. Consider this question: Why is God seeking the lost? Certainly, He is seeking the lost so that they might be found, that they might be saved from their sins and marked for eternal life in heaven. As important as this is, however, it’s not the top priority. Remember, it’s all about God’s glory. God is seeking the lost so that they might become true worshipers, worshipping Him in spirit and truth, now and forever. Salvation, being found, is the starting point. Becoming a true worshiper for all eternity is the ultimate destination. Understood in this light, then, outreach and evangelism are not primarily about salvation; they are about eternal worship. To borrow from a popular praise song, *Awesome God,* let me tinker with the lyric: *Our God is a* ***seeking*** *God, He reigns from heaven above with wisdom, power and love, our God is a* ***seeking*** *God* (sung to the tune of *Our God is an Awesome God*).

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision incorporates God’s commitment to seeking and saving the lost and growing them into becoming true worshipers.

**1.3 The Seeking Church**: Ezekiel 34 revealed that God the Father originally took the lead in the search and rescue mission to gather the scattered and bring them home. Luke 19:10 revealed that this responsibility had been passed to God the Son, who came to seek and to save the lost. Corroboration is seen in other places in Scripture such as Luke 4. The setting here is that Jesus had gone to the home of Simon Peter and had discovered that Peter’s mother-in-law was ill. He healed her. Later in the evening, people brought those who were sick to Jesus and He healed them and cast out demons. The following morning, we see that Jesus had gone off alone to a desolate place, but people sought Him out for obvious reasons. The text reads, “And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea,” (Luke 4:42-44).

Jesus was sent by whom? He was sent by God the Father. Why was He sent by God the Father? He was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, which is another way of saying that He was sent to seek and to save the lost.

Now, let’s shift the scene. We’re no longer in the vicinity of Simon Peter’s house near the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It’s the evening of Resurrection Day as seen in John 20. The Apostle John writes, “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit,’” (John 20:19-22). Twice Jesus pronounces, “Peace.” Why? I’m sure they were miles from being at peace at that moment, and the assignment they were about to receive was going to rattle their foundations. Still, the peace of God, the shalom of God, would be upon them. He would be present with them through God the Spirit.

The disciples were sent by God the Son, just as God the Son had been sent by God the Father. God the Son had been sent by God the Father to seek and to save the lost, to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Therefore, the disciples were being sent by God the Son to do what? They were sent to take on the responsibility of the search and rescue mission to seek and to save the lost; to take on the responsibility of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. It’s extremely important to grasp that the objective of this search and rescue mission was to seek and save THE LOST, and that the objective of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God was to deliver this good news to THE LOST. As THE LOST were found, they would cross the starting line of salvation and begin the journey to the finish line of true worship through discipleship.

The band of disciples and the believing community around them were the first Christian church, and they were called to be a seeking church. That mission is still in play today and the churches of today are equally called to be seeking churches. What guarantee do we have that our seeking will be fruitful, that the lost are, indeed, reachable, that maturing true worshipers will, in fact, come to pass? Our guarantee of productivity rests on two truths: 1. Jesus Himself is building His church (Matthew 16:18) and 2. The harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37).

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision incorporates God the Father’s sending of the Son and God the Son’s sending of the church, empowered by God the Spirit, to seek and to save the lost, growing them into becoming true worshipers, all to the glory of God.

**1.4 Great Commission Central**: I have come to understand that the Great Commission is central to both the vision and the strategy of the church. A much broader treatment of the biblical underpinning of vision is available in my book, *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization,* so please go there for additional scriptural input. In this section, our focus is on the striking simplicity and clarity that church leaders can find in embracing the Great Commission as the core vision and core strategy from which all else flows. God has a vision of a church that goes in the authority of Jesus Christ and makes disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that He has commanded, resting in and empowered by His continual presence through His Holy Spirit.

The church that follows through on this commitment is a church that is effective at reaching the lost among the harvest and is effective at bringing glory to God. The visionary question, then, for a given church, is, “What will ministry look like if our church commits to being a Great Commission church, centering our ministry on the mandate of the Great Commission.” This commitment will drive the articulation of vision and will become the primary criterion for decision-making, resource-allocation, and ministry evaluation. It will, also, influence the selection and development of staff and lay leaders and will determine the direction that leaders prescribe for the congregation. Strategy, again in striking simplicity and clarity, will focus on the HOW. The question that will be framed is, “How are we going to go and make disciples?” As that question is answered, strategy will emerge.

The following is an adaptation concerning the Great Commission Model from *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*:

**The Great Commission Model (The Great Commission Triangle):**

**OUTREACH**

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 2:42-47/Eph. 4:1-7; 11-16

Ezra 7:1-10

**REACH – TEACH - PREACH**

REACH/PREACH = Come to Faith

PREACH/TEACH = Grow in Faith

**DISCIPLESHIP**

**EVANGELISM**

I want to offer the Great Commission Triangle as a strategic tool, a model for how Great Commission ministry operates. As such, I have developed a particular nomenclature that drives the application of the Great Commission and have cited several closely related Scripture passages.

We’ll begin with the simple rhyme scheme, REACH – PREACH – TEACH. We’ll use these three rhyming words as shorthand for the full Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20. Align these three words with the three-word phrase, GO MAKE DISCIPLES. Though this association is not without challenge, connect REACH with GO, PREACH with MAKE, and TEACH with DISCIPLES. Going one step further, connect REACH and GO with OUTREACH, PREACH and MAKE with EVANGELISM, and TEACH and DISCIPLES with DISCIPLESHIP. These connections produce the following table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| REACH | PREACH | TEACH |
| GO | MAKE | DISCIPLES |
| OUTREACH | EVANGELISM | DISCIPLESHIP |

Again, REACH – PREACH – TEACH is our shorthand for the Great Commission, also represented by the short phrase, GO MAKE DISCICPLES. Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship are typical headings for programs in the church, but in our usage of these terms, these three will not be positioned as programs but as ***movements*** within the church. A ministry area becomes a movement rather than a program when it’s positioned as a thread that runs through every ministry area, or every program, of a church. In the Great Commission Model, Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship are ministry elements that are present in every ministry or program of the church. So, we will treat them as ***movements*** and not as programs.

God has a vision of a church that goes and makes disciples. Moving from vision to strategy, the question becomes, “*How* will our church go and make disciples?” Answer: We will REACH, we will PREACH, and we will TEACH.

REACH creates and leverages the *going* ministries of the church, going into the plentiful harvest to make connections and build relationships. These connections and relationships provide the opportunity to walk alongside people in their journeys through life, positioning ourselves to be at the right place at the right time when they become open to the Gospel, and when the Holy Spirit begins to draw them to faith, to the church, to Jesus. Each ministry area of the church develops its unique reaching strategies through which insiders GO, creating OUTREACH to outsiders. We know from Scripture that the harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37) and that Jesus is building His church (Matthew 16:18). Our responsibility, our opportunity, is to REACH, to GO, to OUTREACH into that harvest, finding who’s missing from the family of God and bringing them home by the grace and to the glory of God. We do this strategically through congregational ministries and, individually, on our own.

PREACH creates and harnesses the proclamation ministries of the church and its people, and this is much wider and deeper than a pastor’s preaching from a pulpit. Pulpit preaching is an important element, but there is much more to proclamation. PREACH includes the verbal sharing and explaining of the Gospel, whether it be from a pulpit or over coffee at a local café. PREACH also includes the witness of our lives as we mingle with others in the neighborhood or at work or in times of recreation or during our participation with any kind of affinity group. In other words, for the Christian, all of life is a proclamation of what we believe and know to be true. The challenge, of course, is to live up to our beliefs such that our witness is a ***positive*** witness that truly reflects the character of Jesus Christ. Again, we do this congregationally and individually.

Several Scriptures come to mind. I’ll cite a couple. 1 Peter 2:9 says this, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” You are who you are in Christ in order that you might proclaim Christ, that you might share what He has done in your life with others. This is how you PREACH, how you offer proclamation through what you say and through how you live. When a congregation corporately grabs hold of this reality, our collective witness, our collective proclamation, can be used mightily by God to build His family. Paul spells out the effect of this kind of proclamation with the stairsteps of Romans 10:13-15, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” First, we REACH, then we PREACH, and God quickens the hearts and minds of whom He will. When we strategically operate in this manner as a congregation, the movements of OUTREACH and EVANGELISM are truly alive and become fruitful.

TEACH, as a parallel to PREACH, is something we engage both congregationally and individually. As a product of the western movement of the church, our approach to teaching tends to be academic and intellectual, the acquisition of knowledge. However, the emphasis in developing Christian maturity needs to focus on obedience to what we know and not just on knowing what we know. With REACH having done its job of connection and relationship and PREACH having done its initial job of clarifying the Gospel and leading the missing home, TEACH grows both new and seasoned believers in their faith through DISCIPLESHIP that is experiential as well as intellectual, and that centers on developing a disciplined and obedient life.

Notice the small, upside-down triangle in the center of the Great Commission Triangle. Two phrases are prominent: Come to Faith and Grow in Faith. The text box to the left connects a couple of REACH – PREACH – TEACH dots. REACH and PREACH work in tandem in helping people Come to Faith, while PREACH and TEACH work in tandem to help people Grow in Faith. So, PREACH has a role in both EVANGELISM and DISCIPLESHIP. The text box to the right features several important Scripture references. Matthew 28 is listed because it’s our baseline Great Commission reference. Acts 2:42-47 and Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 are listed together to frame a picture of the Acts 2 – Ephesian 4 Church, a tag I have been using for over twenty years. It’s my perspective that these two passages give us a description of the first century church and a prescription for the twenty-first century church, or the church of any time for that matter.

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision places the Great Commission front and center with the commissioning of the disciples by Jesus Christ established as the root of both vision and strategy. What is our vision? We will go and make disciples. What is our strategy? We will actually go, centering our actions on going. In so doing, we will reach the lost and grow the found in their faith, all to the glory of God.

**1.5 A Reached Community**: *Vision is a picture of a desired future; a snapshot of a preferred future*. In considering the future, we can choose to be passive and simply wait for the future to happen, i.e., we can *let* the future happen, or we can choose to be proactive and design our future, i.e., we can *make* the future happen. God has a vision of a church that goes and makes disciples. We can choose to be that church and we can, by the grace of God, make that church happen.

God has a vision of an eternal church, an eternal family, that lives with Him forever. By design, He will be their God and they will be His people. How do we, as a local church, fit into God’s plan and purpose? God envisions a gathered family. We can envision a reached community, a harvest that is gathered from the community that is part of that eternal family. God gives us a glimpse of how He will make His family happen when we look to Genesis and see His mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). He gives us a glimpse of what He ultimately envisions when we look to Revelation and view God’s gathered family through the lens of the Apostle John. He writes, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen,’” (Revelation 7:9-12). Once again, we see the two-fold *Missio Dei*: 1. the salvation of the lost and 2. glory to God!

This might be a good time to assert that vision and strategy go hand in hand. In fact, we might argue that strategy is a part of vision. On the face of vision, we see our WHAT and our WHY. WHAT are we trying to accomplish and WHY is that what we’re trying to accomplish? In short, we are trying to go and make disciples because Jesus commanded that we go and make disciples. The strategic question is, “HOW are we going to go and make disciples?” It’s such an important element that it should be included in the vision itself. So, vision breaks out into three dimensions, 1. What are we going to do, 2. Why are we going to do that, and 3. How are we going to do that? With those questions answered, a vision becomes clear.

In sweeping terms, God is moving from the “multiply” of Genesis to the “multitude” of Revelation. He’s doing so through the regeneration of men, women, and children all over the globe each and every day. That’s where the church fits in. In large part, God is using His visible church to grow His invisible church. As a local church, we exist in an exact place and time with the responsibility to labor in our exact community, our domestic harvest or mission field. This is the community that we are called to reach and our vision is of that community reached. As we project what this will look like three years, five years, ten years into the future, we envision, or encapsulate, our vision. As we describe that vision in full narrative, our vision statement emerges, giving us our destination and influencing the path that we will follow to get there.

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision puts us in alignment with God’s plan to move from multiply to multitude and focuses our ministry on realizing the outcome priority of a reached community.

**1.6 Vision in Motion**: A healthy, credible vision is organic, meaning that it lives, it breathes, it develops, it matures, and is fluid and flexible enough to make course corrections. This is important for two reasons. First, despite our best efforts at rightly discerning God’s vision for our churches, more than likely we won’t nail every element of that vision on the head. We are trusting God to move us in the right direction, but not everything will turn out exactly as expected. At best, our view of God’s future for us will be incomplete. Second, as we move forward toward that desired future, we’ll encounter new elements that we didn’t anticipate. Perhaps we’ll discover an opportunity that we didn’t realize would be there. Perhaps a new person or family will come into our church with particular skills, interests, and experiences that are outside of what we planned, but with this new human resource, new possibilities open up. Regardless, a healthy vision, in order to sustain, must have the capacity to adapt or pivot. The rule of thumb, stated in the negative, is don’t be rigid and don’t ever fall in love with your methodology because it will undoubtedly need to change at some point.

I use two overarching questions to drive the vision discernment process. Key Vison Question 1: How does God want to express Himself through our church in our community at this time? This question, which can be framed as a prayer, looks forward into the future and discerns, or imagines, what God will do. There are four key elements to this question. First, it’s God’s vision that we seek and not our own. Vision is not about creativity, it’s about discernment. There’s plenty of room for creativity once God’s direction is determined, but the starting place is to pursue what’s on God’s heart and mind. Second, the focus is on our church. There is no need to look to other churches that seem to be doing well and try to mimic what’s happening there. Giving the benefit of the doubt, whatever is happening positively in such a church is God’s vision and plan for that church and community, and it’s doubtful that the success of that church in that community will transfer into success at our church in our community. God is a never-ending resource so, while we might be inspired by what God is doing in other churches, there’s no need for mimicry because God has plenty of vision to go around.

Third, the mission field that is in view is our community, not some other community. Again, each community has its unique character and characteristics, so one size doesn’t fit all. We must get to know our community inside and out if we’re going to be effective at reaching the harvest that resides there. Finally, we have to minister like it’s right now and not some previous time in the history of the church. Again, stated from the negative, you can’t minister effectively in the 21st century with outdated 20th century programming, perspectives, and methodology. Time only moves in one direction and a church can’t go back. One of my principles is that the church lifecycle is a one-way street. It only moves forward; never backward. To be clear, the content of our faith, meaning our doctrine, our theology, the truth of God’s Word, is never-changing, but our approaches to ministry, our methodology, must be continuously adapting to new community conditions.

That brings me to Key Vision Question #2: What did God mean by that? As a church is moving toward its rightly discerned, godly vision, there will be those moments of encounter when something or someone enters the scene unexpectedly. My church in Phoenix was searching for a new location of approximately four acres of land, picturing ourselves as a church that would max out the potential that four acres would allow. God delivered nine and a half acres of developable land. Question: What does God mean by that? Apparently, God’s vision for us had a larger shoe size than what we had discerned originally. In another instance, we sensed God’s calling us to be a church that planted other churches, so, we went into northern Mexico through Nogales with a vision of starting a network of Mexican church plants. On the second day of our first reconnaissance trip into Mexico, we met leaders from a church plant in Mexico that were part of a network of Mexican church plants. Question: What did God mean by that? We realized that God had NOT sent us to Mexico to START a network but to FIND this network. We shifted our vision, put our resources behind that network, and saw it expand from eight churches to eighteen over the next three years.

Rightly discerning and developing a godly vision requires us to acknowledge that vision is organic, that it is in motion. Key Vision Question 1 gets us started on the right path, while Key Vision Question 2 allows us to adjust along the way. In so doing, the lost in the community are reached and God is glorified.

**A Discerning & Developing Vision Compilation:**

**1. The Glory of God**: Discerning and developing a godly vision begins with God’s ultimate purpose of displaying His glory and being glorified.

**2. Our Seeking God**: Discerning and developing a godly vision incorporates God’s commitment to seeking and saving the lost and growing them into becoming true worshipers.

**3. The Seeking Church**: Discerning and developing a godly vision incorporates God the Father’s sending of the Son and God the Son’s sending of the church, empowered by God the Spirit, to seek and to save the lost, and grow them into becoming true worshipers, all to the glory of God.

**4. Great Commission Central**: Discerning and developing a godly vision places the Great Commission front and center with this commissioning of the disciples by Jesus Christ, then and now, established as the root of both vision and strategy. What is our vision? We will go and make disciples. What is our strategy? We will actually go, centering our actions on going. In so doing, we will reach the lost and grow the found in their faith, all to the glory of God.

**5. A Reached Community**: Discerning and developing a godly vision puts us in alignment with God’s plan to move from multiply to multitude and focuses our ministry on realizing the outcome priority of a reached community.

**6. Vision in Motion**: Discerning and developing a godly vision requires us to acknowledge that vision is organic, that it is in motion. Key Vision Question 1 gets us started on the right path, while Key Vision Question 2 allows us to adjust along the way. In so doing, the lost in the community are reached and God is glorified.

**BONUS: The Vision Statement**

Local church ministry began for me in the mid-80s when a church planter invited me and my family to join with him and his family in planting a church in southern California. My role was in music and the arts, and, not surprisingly, grew into many other aspects of ministry as our church plant grew. I was thirty-five years old at the time and smack in the middle of the baby boomer movement into becoming leaders in the typical church. Professionally, boomer culture was a corporate culture, and one of the central elements of that culture was the presence in any and every organization of a vision statement. That included, and still includes, the church. My reading, study, and training (as both trainee and trainer) often highlighted the necessity of a vision statement. This has been so prevalent throughout my time in ministry that I’ve had the opportunity to develop what you might call a Philosophy of Vision Statements and a protocol for vision statement development. I’ll briefly share that with you here.

Let me begin with a quick look at what a vision statement is NOT. A vision statement is not a doctrinal statement or a statement of faith. Often, pastors and/or leaders have presented a statement within their vision statement such as, “We have a vision of a church that recognizes the authority of Scripture,” or, “We are a church that honors the divinity of Christ.” These are important statements, no doubt, but they are not vision statements. Rather, they are statements of doctrine or statements of faith. Churches should identify their doctrine, their theology, their affiliation, etc., but these are not vision statements. Remember: *Vision is a picture of a desired future; a snapshot of a preferred future.* A vision statement, then, reveals what’s included in that picture, that snapshot.

Also, a vision statement is not a short, pithy phrase that is a church’s tag line or catch phrase. The objective is not to come up with what might pass for a radio jingle, e.g. “Things go better with Coke,” or, “You deserve a break today.” These might look good at the foot of the church bulletin or on a brochure or website, but this is more about marketing than it is about godly vision.

When developing a vision statement for a church, I recommend a three-tiered approach. Tier 1 is the ***Story***, Tier 2 is the ***Synopsis***, and Tier 3 is the ***Slogan***. Here’s how this works:

**The Story** is a full narrative of all that leaders project as being in that picture of a desired future, that snapshot of a preferred future. It’s highly detailed, probably spread over multiple pages, and identifies a church’s WHAT, WHY and HOW, with a glimpse into desired outcomes that should result, by the grace of God. This full narrative will provide motivation, direction, and accountability. It provides motivation because it takes what’s vague and fuzzy and brings it into focus so that people can see it, can envision it. It provides direction because it defines and describes the church’s ministry destination, therefore it implicitly reveals the path the church should follow. It provides accountability because, at any given moment, leaders can measure progress against the vision to determine how far they’ve come, how far there is to go, or if they’ve veered off course.

In addition, the Story informs congregants about the vision of the church and can be leveraged to build ownership of that vision. Similarly, when newcomers arrive, they can be indoctrinated (in a good way) into the vision and, since the vision statement is in narrative form, they can develop a good understanding of the vision early in their engagement with the church.

**The Synopsis** is a paragraph or two that captures the essence of the full narrative in short form. It becomes the “script” for giving a brief description of the vision in vision casting moments that don’t allow for the full narrative. Once folks are familiar with the Story, every time they come across the Synopsis, it will open the full narrative for them, reinforcing the full vision with the shorter form.

**The Slogan** is that short, pithy, handful-of-words version of the full vision. Yes, it resembles the radio jingle, tag line, or catch phrase I cautioned against earlier, but arriving at the Slogan through the Story and the Synopsis places it in a much more strategic position. For those in the know, every time they see the Slogan, it will open the full Story and the Synopsis, again, reinforcing the full vision in the shortest of forms. It should be compelling and interesting to the uninitiated, who are likely to encounter the Slogan before they encounter the Story or the Synopsis. However, once they encounter the larger forms, perhaps in a forum such as a newcomers’ gathering, the Slogan will be seen in context and the full value of the Slogan will be appreciated.

So, begin developing your vision statement with the Story, then pare it down to a Synopsis, and, lastly, wordsmith it into a short, but meaningful, Slogan. Finally, remember to let doctrine be doctrine and let vision be vision. Don’t blur the two in an out-of-focus, so-called vision statement. Accurately capture God’s vision for your church in the Story, the Synopsis, and the Slogan. This will serve you well.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Introduction: The X/52 Formula

1. In the Introduction to X/52, the X Factor is described as a pastor’s strong commitment to Great Commission ministry coupled with strong leadership skills and working in tandem with church leaders of the same heart, mind, and skill set. If you are a pastor, consider the following questions:

What is your perspective on this description of the X Factor?

In what ways do you find it on target? In what ways do you disagree?

How do you see yourself in light of this description?

How would you describe your commitment to ministry that is centered on the Great Commission?

What is your perspective regarding your leadership skills?

Do your leaders have a strong commitment to ministry that is centered on the Great Commission?

If this exercise has revealed any gaps that you think need closing, what are those gaps, and how might they be closed? What could be your first steps? When will you get started?

2. If you are a leader in the church, what is your perspective on the X/52 description of the X Factor?

In what ways do you find it on target? In what ways do you disagree?

How would you describe your commitment to ministry that is centered on the Great Commission?

If this exercise has revealed any gaps that you think need closing, what are those gaps, and how might they be closed? What could be your first steps? When will you get started?

3. Pastors and leaders, plan a time to get together to discuss your responses to Questions 1 & 2. This might be good material for a dedicated meeting where no other agenda items are on the table. Perhaps this could serve as the core element of a leadership retreat or something similar.

4. Pastors and leaders, what outcomes might you anticipate if you worked together on building ministry that is centered on the Great Commission?

5. Consider Judges 5:2 and respond to the following questions:

What might a more intentional or proactive “taking of the lead” toward Great Commission ministry in your church look like?

In what ways is your congregation being challenged to sacrifice now? In what additional ways could your congregation be challenged to sacrifice?

How would stepping up proactively in leadership and in challenging your congregation to sacrifice bring blessing and praise to the Lord? How might God bless your Great Commission leadership and sacrifice?

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision

**The Glory of God**: Begin to process the idea that God’s vision for your church is not centered on your church but is centered on His glory. God has a vision for Himself, to be gloried forever in His relationship with His eternal family. Your church has the opportunity to serve God in fulfilling His vision of being gloried. Make a few preliminary notes regarding what that might look like as you place more and more emphasis on the Great Commission as the core of your ministry.

**Our Seeking God**: Revisit Ezekiel 34:1, 6, 11-13a and Luke 19:10. What do these Scriptures tell us about God’s commitment to reaching the lost? Revisit John 4:23 and Romans 12:1-2. What do these Scriptures tell us about God’s commitment to developing true worshipers? Respond to the comment that evangelism’s ultimate objective is not salvation but worship in spirit and truth.

**The Seeking Church**: God is a seeking Father; Jesus is a seeking Son. Today, the seeking Holy Spirit works in and through us to seek and save the lost and grow them into being true worshipers. Revisit John 20:19-22, Matthew 16:18, and Matthew 9:37. What do these Scriptures tell us about our commitment to God’s search and rescue mission?

**Great Commission Central**: In what ways is the Great Commission central to both the vision and the strategy of a church? Revisit the Great Commission Triangle (GCT). What takeaways does the GCT provide for you? What actions might you take regarding these takeaways?

**A Reached Community**: Respond to the observation that, in looking to the future, we can choose to be passive and simply wait for the future to happen, i.e. we can *let* the future happen. Or we can choose to be proactive and design our future, i.e. we can, by God’s grace, *make* the future happen. What are your thoughts about God’s redemptive journey from the “multiply” of Genesis to the “multitude” of Revelation? What role might your church play in God’s redemptive plan?

**Vision in Motion**: What are your thoughts about the organic nature of vision? Is this a concept you’ve considered before? Why is this perspective strategically important?

BONUS: The Vision Statement

Revisit the descriptions of the structure, roles, and relationship of the Story, the Synopsis, and the Slogan. What ways is this 3-tiered concept of vision statements beneficial to you? One word of caution: More than likely, your church has some form of vision statement that has already been articulated and that has buy-in from leaders and congregation. If so, there might not need to be a wholesale abandoning of that vision statement. As long as the contents are appropriate, your existing statement might simply be upgraded by embracing the grid of Story, Synopsis, and Slogan. Give your existing statement a chance to work. If it doesn’t, clearing the deck and starting over can be, in and of itself, revitalizing.

*Congratulations! You can now discern and develop vision!*

**Skill 2: Casting Vision & Creating Ownership**

In the King James Version of the Bible, Proverbs 29:18a is rendered, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” As such, we might consider that Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision, is, at its most basic, necessary to keep people alive, perhaps not literally in a biological sense, but surely in terms of interest, motivation, and drive to stay the course and move forward. Mancini remarks, “What’s special about God’s vision is how it becomes ours and lives as ours. We can never forget God as the sources of vision; but we also cannot strip it of personal, visceral, and concrete reality in the leader’s life…We live in it,” (*Church Unique*: Mancini, p. 73).

Consider Proverbs 29:18a in reverse and you’ll find another truth, “Where there are no people, the vision perishes.” What separates true vision from being simply wishful thinking or even delusion? Gathering people around that vision and mobilizing them into actions that move the vision forward are what propels vision from theory to practice, from hopes and dreams to desired and measurable outcomes. This gathering and mobilization is the focus of Skill 2: Casting Vision & Creating Ownership.

Vision Casting is the means by which Creating Ownership takes root, so, casting vision ineffectively fails to create ownership. The objective of Vision Casting is not simply to distribute information but to solidify support for and ownership of the vision that is being cast. Successful Vision Casting demands that the vision being cast is fully heard, understood, and embraced. Again, this is far more than just getting the vision out; this is getting the vision out in such a way that it is well received by the person, team, or group that is being recruited into the vision. Once a vision is discerned and developed, it must be cast properly so that there is maximum opportunity for people to receive and embrace ownership of that vision. Remember: without the people, a vision will perish.

**2.1 Private Vision Casting**: Vision casting to create ownership is much more effective in the private rather than the public setting, yet church leadership tends to cast vision through platform communication in large group settings and large-scale email blasts. This approach will get the word out to many people in an efficient way, but efficiency is not the same as effectiveness. One-on-one, one-on-couple, and one-on-small group or team are much more effective if the objective is sustainable ownership.

Consider, for example, the proverbial town hall or congregational meeting. Such a setting, though well intentioned, is fraught with problems. The rationale is that bringing everyone together at the same time is an efficient way to cast vision and to afford everyone the opportunity to ask questions or make comments. The reality is that many people, perhaps most people, will not speak in a large public gathering, so, they, in fact, have NOT been given the opportunity to ask their questions or to make their comments. When those people leave at the end of the meeting, vision casting leaders have no accurate read on what these people are thinking and whether or not they are willing or able to provide sustainable ownership. On the flip side, there are some people that will never NOT speak in a large public gathering, but will seize the moment to grab center stage and dominate the room. Often such people, by virtue of their strong opinions, wield strong influence among the crowd, and, if their perspectives are negative toward the vision, the crowd can be swayed negatively. This is the antithesis of what vision casting seeks to accomplish.

Another flaw in the large-scale presentation has to do with time and exposure. Leaders who have discerned and developed the vision have done so over a period of time during which they have prayed, studied information, and discussed matters among themselves. In other words, they have had time to process information, float trial balloons, and revise formulations before arriving at the polished vision that is to be presented to the full assembly. They have traveled through a journey of discovery that has led them to arrive at their final destination, a discerned and developed vision. However, the assembly has not been on that journey of discovery, has not wrestled with questions and issues along the way, and has a limited context for the vision that’s being cast. While the vision casters have seen the vision emerge over time through serious deliberations, the vision is dropped on the vision receivers out of context and often seems to have come out of nowhere. The large setting doesn’t afford the opportunity for deep discussion, so, toward the end of the large public unveiling, vision casters call for support and ownership when the assembly, as individuals, is not ready to make that kind of commitment. So, either they express their concerns and fail to offer support, or, due to pressure, they offer support but, rather than coming from commitment, this support actually represents a false positive. The assembly gives apparent support but that support is not true ownership. Vision casters leave the meeting thinking that the mission has been accomplished, but they have, in fact, done more harm than good.

The following elements inform the strategy of private vision casting to create ownership:

**The Divide & Serve Principle**: Divide and conquer has been leveraged over time as a tactic for overcoming an opposing or enemy force. In this context, the goal is not to conquer an enemy but to serve a congregation by uniting around a common vision that has been rightly discerned and developed. Though this objective is quite different, the principle of dividing, or separating a congregation into its component parts, is credible. The concept is to spread a congregation out widely so that vision casters can conduct one-on-one, one-on-couple, and one-on-small group or team gatherings. Though this technique is labor intensive on the front end, it ultimately saves time by avoiding future crises that erupt from shallow broadcast vision casting, lack of information, and/or a lack of understanding. Positive responses to vision in this setting are true positives that do create sustainability as one true positive is added to another and another and so on.

**Conversation NOT Presentation**: In the large setting, vision casting tends to center on information distribution through a platform presentation. Typically, these presentations follow a format that includes multiple speakers, handouts, visual aids such as Power Point projections, statistics, demographics, and the like. The goal is to inform a congregation in a thorough way, building a preponderance of evidence that promotes the vision that is being cast. I won’t repeat flaws already revealed regarding a large-scale meeting of this kind, but I will simply say that evidence from the field of ministry reveals time and time again that this methodology is, at best, unproductive, and at worst, can actually lead to open conflict with the vision.

So, when planning to cast vision to create ownership, it’s far better to frame the information that needs to be both shared with people and then gleaned from people as **conversation** while avoiding **presentation** as the methodology of choice. Conversation engages people in dialogue, in give and take, as opposed to the monologue nature of presentation that leaves little room for information exchange.

**Answering Questions & Removing Obstacles**: The role of the vision caster is to create ownership of that vision. To do so, the vision caster will share information, but will also answer questions and remove obstacles with equal importance. Whenever someone has an unanswered question or is blocked by some obstacle in his or her thinking, that person will be unable to commit to ownership of that vision. As important as sharing the vision is for the vision caster, listening to what people have to say is more important. The vision caster who listens well is able to draw out questions and spot obstacles that need to be removed, even if those questions and obstacles are unspoken. Resistance to a vision is often the product of miscommunication, misinformation, misperception, and misunderstanding. These can be exposed and overcome in a small private setting.

**Opportunity for Commitment**: The private setting, where a vision caster is engaged in dialogue with one, two, or a few people, affords the opportunity to ask for commitment to the vision. This is not handled as an ultimatum and no lines in the sand are to be drawn, but when all the information has been clarified, all questions have been answered, and all obstacles have been removed, a wise vision caster can effectively invite someone to get on board to support the vision and, perhaps, even to begin playing a role in further vision casting. If so, great. If not, the vision caster should ask for an opportunity to circle back to continue the conversation at a future time. When all steps have been taken and a person is still not ready to make a commitment, understand that people are wired differently, and some will commit sooner while others will commit later, and some will not commit at all. Allow people the freedom to be who they are and take all the time they need to make an informed decision with which they are completely comfortable. When you get a “Yes,” you want it to be a true “Yes.”

**An Example of Private Effectiveness**: In the early 90s, I was called to pastor a severely declined church whose congregation consisted of a very small remnant. My assignment was to lead that church through revitalization. Part of the decline was the result of the community’s having transitioned to being mostly Hispanic while the church made no accommodation to the community’s changing culture. Before I was called, the church had leased its buildings and property to a Hispanic church and moved into a small storefront nearby, having decided to relocate to a new location upon the new pastor’s arrival. I was that new pastor. These decisions and actions had been undertaken by the elders of the church and simply provided to me as information.

Soon after my arrival, however, I was tipped off by one of the elders that another elder and his wife had a very different vision of what they would like to see happen. They were the oldest in the congregation and lived in a house across the street from the original church site that used to be the church’s parsonage. Their vision was for our remnant to return to the original site and relaunch our ministry with the two of them living directly across the street. Though there had been many group discussions about the relocation, these two had never verbalized any of this to the full group, and I was completely in the dark.

Upon learning of this, I called this elder and scheduled a time to go to their house and meet with the two of them to discuss the future of the church and their role in it. Our time together was a wonderful two and a half hours of their filling me in on their history with the church, their hopes, dreams, and fears, and their perspective on what they would like to see unfold in the months and years ahead. Did you catch that? We’re talking about a two and a half-hour conversation with two people that rarely uttered a word in the larger group setting, even when that larger group was quite small. I was able to lay out the vision that the rest of us had committed to and explain all the reasons why that course of action was best and seemed in line with God’s vision for us. Further, I explained how our moving back into the former building, and putting the Hispanic church out, would interfere with the wonderful ministry that this Hispanic church was forging in the, now, Hispanic community. There was laughter, there were tears, and, in the end, both committed to the new vision and both took on leadership and service roles in moving our tiny church toward that vision.

Vision casting to create ownership is much more effective in private settings rather than in public settings, though most church leadership attempts to mobilize people through platform communication in large group settings and through email or snail mail information blasts. Emphasize Private Vision Casting.

**2.2 Public Vision Casting**: Though I have expended hundreds of words highlighting the horrors of public vision casting, there is an important role for generally casting vision in the public arena. Vision casting in the public setting to larger groups complements and supports private vision casting and contributes to creating ownership.

**High Visibility**: Chip Heath and Dan Heath are brothers and co-authors of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, an insightful book on effective communication. In this book, the Heaths unveil their model of communicating ideas with an acronym of principles – S.U.C.C.E.S. (OK, fine – I, too, struggle with the fact that they left out an S, but it’s a great book nevertheless). The second C is for Credibility; is your idea believable; is it credible (*Made to Stick*: Heath & Heath, p. 17; pp. 131-164)?

Applied to the merits of a revitalization process, credibility must first overcome *incredibility*. Observation tells me that it’s easier for church folks, pastors and leaders included, to believe that revitalization will NOT work than it is for them to believe that revitalization will work. Why is that? Numerous recurring reasons are presented in discussions with decision-makers over whether or not to engage in revitalization. I’ll cite a few:

1. **Revitalization Program Malaise** – Pastors, leaders, and congregants cite engagement in past revitalization programs that failed, leaving a residue of cynicism and mistrust regarding *apparent* new revitalization programs. In their minds, it didn’t work before so why should they trust and believe that it will work now. Hold that thought; we’ll come back to this shortly.

2. **Resource Shortages** – There is often a sense in a given church that the resources necessary to navigate revitalization successfully are not available and won’t become available. The perspective is that there is a shortage of leaders, a shortage of money, a shortage of time, a shortage of energy, a shortage of vision, etc., etc. It seems unreasonable to take on a new, large- scale initiative with resources already stretched to the limit.

3. **Objective Faith vs. Subjective Faith** – Jesus gives evidence regarding the power of faith to do such things as move mountains (Matthew 17:20) or give sight to the blind (Matthew 9:29-30). He also warns that power is hindered by a lack of faith, as when his disciples were in fear of a storm at sea (Matthew 8:26). It’s not simply that people in declining churches have no faith; it’s that their faith is an objective faith and not a subjective faith. They fully have faith in the power of God the Father, Son, and Spirit to bless and even create miraculous manifestations in churches, but they think of these acts of God as occurring in other churches (objective faith) and struggle to see God’s moving in such a way in their church (subjective faith).

4. **Isolation Pastor-Think** – A typical scenario in declined church settings is that a pastor has been called to lead a congregation that has long been in decline and whose membership is largely a longstanding membership that has been part of the church for years. The pastor comes in as the “new” pastor and remains the “new” pastor in perpetuity. I’ve known of pastors with over twenty years of tenure with a church who are still referred to by some as the *new* pastor. When such a pastor connects with me regarding revitalization, some variation of, “I’m all alone here,” surfaces. Among such variations are, “They’re all against me,” and, “I get it but they don’t.” Church leaders and congregants are referred to as “they” and “them” and the pastor doesn’t seem to identify himself or herself with them but stands off as essentially a third party to what’s transpiring.

5. **Clandestine Leader Ops** – When leaders that are in the driver’s seat of revitalization operate more-or-less in the dark, other staff, leaders, and congregants begin to imagine what’s going on, filling in whatever blanks come to mind. No surprise, their imaginings tend to be negative concoctions of worst-case scenarios, thereby heightening concerns, fears, and suspicions. By the time the vision and strategy are brought out from under wraps, a tsunami of mistrust crashes over early efforts to cast vision and create ownership, and any hope of credibility is destroyed.

Note that in my comments regarding Revitalization Program Malaise, I made reference to *apparent* new revitalization programs and promised to return to this reference. My approach to revitalization is not a program approach but is a process approach. This is an important distinction. A program approach suggests a one-size-fits-all, fill-in-the-blanks treatment for pastors and leaders to follow in their attempt at revitalization. This is a 20th century, corporate model that, benefit of the doubt, might have worked in a certain percentage of churches in decades gone by but will not prove effective today. The appearance of effectiveness might present if the church in view was already reasonably stable and was not attempting to climb out of serious decline. Slight bumps in conventional statistics might prompt a reading of success, another version of a false positive.

A process approach recognizes that one size doesn’t fit all and that filling in programming blanks is more problem than solution. Process is about changing the mindset of what biblical ministry is and how ministry thinking should be shaped. For example, pastors and leaders typically shape ministry by asking and answering the question, “How do we minister TO our congregation?” The answer is typically centered on conventional church programming that has an in-reach focus. The GO Center revitalization process, placing the priority on missional ministry, shifts to asking and answering the question, “How do we ministry THROUGH our congregation to reach our community?” The answer to this question is centered on viewing the church as the epicenter of a domestic mission field, thinking like missionaries, and creating Great Commission ministries designed to connect this particular congregation with those outside in this particular community, an out-reach focus. In a sense, this perspective serves as an operating system as a church moves through the process.

Vision casting to create ownership leverages casting vision in public settings to complement and support its efforts in casting vision in private.

**2.3 Levels of Commitment:** Moving people toward vision ownership guides them through Levels of Commitment from less committed to more committed to completely committed. This is typically a gradual process that requires short steps from one level to the next over a period of time. X/52 leverages a construct that can generally be applied to creating ownership in any number of scenarios. I’ll incorporate the wide-angle view that considers a person’s journey from being completely outside the orbit of a church’s ministry to being an insider that is fully on board.

**1. Observing** – The journey begins with observance. A person becomes aware of a church’s presence in a community and simply sees or observes what that church seems to be doing from a distance. Of course, a church that is actively engaged in a community is much more likely to be observed, but that’s a different discussion. Observing by a distant outsider is an extremely low level of commitment on that outsider’s part, but at least a church is on his or her radar screen.

**2. Considering** – When an observer begins to consider engaging with a church, a deeper level of commitment has been reached. Newcomers don’t mindlessly stumble into a church service or some other offering in a church’s ministry without giving it some degree of thought. So, the fact that a church is on a potential newcomer’s mind is a positive step.

**3. Visiting** – A still deeper level of commitment is reached when a considering outsider visits a church, moving from complete outsider to newcomer. This is a very significant step and wise church leaders will be prepared to receive such newcomers well. It’s challenging to get someone to visit the first time, but getting someone to return is even more challenging. The newcomer has overcome the fear of the unknown in order to breach the threshold the first time, but now, that newcomer is informed and has experience to draw from. Often, the fear of the unknown is replaced by fear of the known as the first-time visit is not pleasant and doesn’t meet the newcomer’s needs or expectations. Still, that visit marks a deeper dive in commitment.

**4. Attending** – When the first-time visitor becomes a repeat visitor, at some point he or she moves beyond visiting and steps into being a regular attender. Since churches have differing points of view and different criteria for formal membership, I’m not going to address membership per se. That’s a matter for individual churches and their respective denominations to consider. My focus here is on Levels of Commitment independent of how membership might be handled in a given church. Note that attendance is a leading data point for churches so they tend to be aware of the numbers when it comes to attendance. In fact, attendance might be considered the most important data point in a large percentage of churches. These numbers would incorporate both the Visiting and the Attending levels, but would not take into account Observing or Considering.

**5. Connecting** – Attending, though important, is essentially a passive posture that is more about spectating than participating. Connecting moves the needle forward. In order for the regular attender to deepen his or her commitment, connection must take place. That connection consists of two elements, people and ministry. To move the regular attender forward, there needs to be a strong connection with several people, such that this attender begins to sense a relational belonging, and there needs to be a strong connection with a ministry area or two that meets his or her needs. When this attender connects with a few special people and connects with a need-meeting ministry, commitment deepens.

**6. Serving** – The deepest single plunge of commitment for that newcomer turned connected attender is the move from Connecting to Serving. When a person takes on a service responsibility, a mindset shift has taken place that indicates strong commitment. That shift is from spectator to participant and to a sense that this is now “my” church. Ownership is taking root with the sense of belonging maturing into a sense of wanting to be a partner and take on a piece of the ministry workload. Wise church leaders will recognize that this is truly a more significant data point than attendance. Attending only indicates who is showing up. Serving indicates who is participating and growing in ownership. So, the quicker someone can be assimilated from first-time visitor to Serving, the quicker that person’s ownership will take root and grow.

**7. Inviting** – The deepest Level of Commitment and the highest level of ownership is revealed when someone begins to invite other outsiders into the ministry of the church. Such a person is making a pronouncement to those outside, saying, “This is my church and it should be your church, too.” This is a high risk for those issuing such invitations and only the most bought-in will take such a risk. At one point in my last pastorate, our leaders conducted a study to see what or who had brought folks to our church the first time. It was discovered that one woman was responsible for bringing twenty-two families into our church. That is truly a remarkable example of commitment and ownership.

Church leaders should maintain a consciousness of these Levels of Commitment at all times, tracking as best as possible where a given person is in terms of these levels. This awareness enables leaders to become more and more adept at creating strategies to help people move from one level to another more quickly. People in our culture are prone to relocate often to follow career paths or economic advantage, so the average engagement of a given person with a particular church is shorter than in previous times. That being the case, the quicker a person can be assimilated through the Levels of Commitment, the greater his or her experience and contribution can be before having to make a move. Plus – you’ll be sending a missional participant to a grateful church.

Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that deep levels of commitment in people are developed through a process of moving them from less committed to more committed over time. The primary pivot level is the Level of Serving.

**2.4 The Dynamics of Change** – Change is difficult and complex, and it’s helpful to note several dynamics of change. There is more to navigating change than these four dynamics, but understanding these four provide a baseline for approaching change effectively.

**1. Willingness to Change** – When leaders are endeavoring to move a congregation through change, their thoughts tend to focus on the willingness to change. Are our people willing to change? With that question at the forefront, leaders follow a logic that says, “If you can reach the point where people are willing to change, you’re home free.” Not so fast. In reality, the willingness to change is just the starting line of change; it’s not the finish line. Yes, people do need to become willing to change, but the willingness to change doesn’t tell the whole story. My study, observation, and experience tell me that people can legitimately be willing to change and still not make the change. Willingness operates in the theoretical, the hypothetical. Folks reason that, when the time comes, “I’ll make the change because I know we need a change, and I am willing to change.” However, when reality hits, i.e., when the change moves from theory to practice, some folks, though willing, are not able to make the change. It’s not what they thought it was going to be in theory. Yes, they are willing to change, but they can’t.

**2. Ability to Change** – On the heels of the Willingness to Change is the Ability to Change. There are many times when people who are legitimately willing to change are not able to change when the actual change arrives. As they projected into the future, having recognized the need for change, they got on board and enthusiastically signed on for the new and improved ministry. However, when the actual change arrived, they were disillusioned and unable to follow through. Wise leaders understand that there is more to effecting change than simple willingness but that actual change requires ability, a much more advanced dynamic. The willing are not always able.

**3. Substance of Change** – Change has two faces. First, what are we changing FROM? Second, what are we changing TO? Changing FROM is much easier to navigate than changing TO. When change is being considered by a group of leaders, and ultimately their congregation, what a church is changing FROM is well understood. More than likely, this element is very well known and has been witnessed or experienced many, many times over a period of years. So, when speaking of changing FROM, everyone engaged in such a decision is well informed and knows exactly what the element to be changed is and how it functions. For example, if there is a group of ten leaders discussing changing FROM a given element, all ten know exactly what that element is, and it’s reasonable to push for a consensus among leaders such that all ten come to agreement. However, once changing FROM is decided, it’s much more difficult to garner unity about what to change TO, or what should replace the element that is being changed. Continuing with this example, ten leaders who unanimously agree in regard to changing FROM might offer ten different perspectives on what to change TO. Even when choices are narrowed down to a final selection, there will be ten different projections as to what that final selection will look like on the field of ministry. At the point of selection, the change replacement is a theory, an idea, something to be tried. Often, the projected change turns out to be quite different when applied that when it was being discussed as a hypothetical idea. At this point, leadership might find itself suffering in the gap between willingness to change and ability to change and is subject to both “buyer’s and seller’s remorse.”

**4. Pace of Change** – The Pace of Change wrestles with the questions, “How much change can our congregation handle,” and, “How fast can our congregation process the change?” There are dangers on either side of this issue. Too much, too soon can throw a congregation into conflict and crisis. Too little, too slowly can leave a congregation stagnant with the promise of change not being forthcoming and confidence in and credibility of leaders waning. There is no set formula for determining how much is too much or too little, and there is no set formula for determining what pace is too slow or too fast. It’s vitality important that leaders know their congregation well and that the application of change be continuously monitored to gauge where the congregation is in its acceptance or resistance of change. To be clear, I’m not suggesting that leaders allow a congregation to, in essence, hold a dynamic missional vision hostage by withholding acceptance of needed changes. I am suggesting that change be navigated with awareness and sensitivity to congregational reaction in order to avoid careless conflict or passive aggressive behavior from the congregation toward the implementation of wisely discerned changes. Think back to our discussion regarding Discerning & Developing Vision and to what’s already been covered regarding Casting Vision & Creating Ownership.

Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that change is difficult and complex, and approaches change through four principal dynamics: Willingness, Ability, Substance, and Pace.

**2.5 People Types** – People are complicated creatures that have been subjected to in-depth analysis over centuries of time. This analysis has produced tools such as the DISC Profile, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Gary Smalley’s Lion, Otter, Golden Retriever, Beaver Personality Classification, Tom Rath’s StrengthsFinder, and many, many more. All to say, by way of disclaimer, that I know that people are complicated and it is not my intent to take a deep dive into all of those complexities in an empirical, scientific manner. However, I have been working with people as they have encountered change for several decades and I have observed that, when processing change, they tend to gravitate intuitively toward one of four types that can be described quite simply.

**1. Theorists** – A theorist is someone who is able to evaluate a proposed change in its theoretical form and form a firm conclusion. Therefore, though this change is only an idea, if the idea is compelling, the theorist is able to commit. The theorist is able to project into the future, make certain predictions or assumptions as to how that idea is going to play out, and fully commit on the idea alone. Note that, on average, a given population is rather thin on theorists and, if that population is the remnant congregation of a declining church, the presence of theorists in that congregation is typically even lower. Theorists are very valuable to vision casters as they are the most likely to reach buy-in early in the vision casting process since all they need is the idea, but, again, in the case of a declining church, they are typically in short supply.

**2. Realists** – A realist is not going to be able to commit on the strength of the idea alone. He or she needs to see the proposed change in reality. So, for example, if the change has to do with a hot button church issue such as a change in the style of worship music, the idea of changing the music is not enough. The realist needs to know and experience the proposed change in an actual, real-life setting. What style of music is being proposed? Will there be a choir and organ or piano, or will there be a pop band with singers, or will there be a guitarist singing folk Scripture songs, or will there be monks singing Gregorian chant? The list could go on and on. The point is that, in the case of the realist, a simple idea will not suffice. Even if changing FROM makes perfect sense to the realist, changing TO is vitally important. While the theorist can buy-in early, the realist will need more time because the change must be tried on for size and then evaluated.

**3. Pragmatists** – A pragmatist is not going to be moved by either the idea or the reality but will need to know, “Does this work?” Is the proposed change actually resulting in the positive outcomes that were predicted and promised? If so, the pragmatist can get on board. If not, the pragmatist is out. For outcomes to be revealed, of course, a significant amount of time must pass. The proposed change has to operate sufficiently for an outcome to be determined. Therefore, while the theorist can buy-in early based on the idea, and the realist can follow in time based on the reality, the pragmatist will require even more time in order for outcomes to be realized.

**4. Preservationists** – A preservationist is someone who is so married to the former way of doing things, the proverbial status quo, that he or she is not likely to make the change ever. The idea, the reality, even positive results, are not enough to sway the preservationists. Typically, a preservationist will stay with the enterprise thinking or hoping that the change will fail and that life will return to the way it was. If not, the preservationist might well leave the enterprise altogether. There are several important issues to note regarding preservationists. First, a preservationist might be able to overcome preservation-ism and join in if there is some higher-ranking motivation in the mix, such as an older preservationist whose son or daughter and family attend and have fully embraced the change. Second, one significant challenge to effecting change is when a key leader in the church is a preservationist that exerts negative influence or strong resistance. Third, the wise leader will be aware of who the preservationists are before rolling out a proposed change and putting that change at risk prematurely.

Remember: Private Vision-Casting, the Divide & Serve Principle, and the importance of avoiding the Town Hall Meeting too early in the process.

Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that people are wired differently and must be allowed to be who they are when adapting to change.

**2.6 Team-Casting** – As noted earlier, proper vision casting with a view toward creating ownership is a labor-intensive process that demands time, energy, effort, and diligence on the part of the vision caster. It’s unreasonable to think that a single pastor should serve as the lone messenger. So, it’s important to distribute the responsibility for vision casting to many people. These folks should be gathered into a team, resulting in a team-casting approach to casting vision and creating ownership. Team deployment will prove more effective than simply having multiple individuals who are more or less doing individual vision casting. Ideally, all leaders in the church will serve as vision-casters, and the concerted effort of a team will maximize impact. In connecting some dots, such a team first functions under the heading of Private Vision Casting. Each of these vision casting leaders will engage with people one-on-one, one-on-couple, or one-on-small group or ministry team. This is a reflection of the Divide & Serve Principle in action, operating in tandem with the Division of Labor Principle. We haven’t addressed Division of Labor as a formal principle, but the application is self-evident. As a structure, this approach could work without vision casters necessarily working as a team. However, the team approach will be much more effective in creating ownership. How so?

It’s important that the vision being cast, and its component parts, be consistent from caster to caster to caster in terms of content. Don’t simply leave it up to each vision-caster to determine exactly what the vision is, how it should be articulated, and what salient points need to be brought forth. This will result in a grab bag of concepts being distributed throughout the church with no central and unified core of understanding. A team leader, often a pastor but not necessarily, should develop a vision casting Fact Sheet or Information Sheet. This sheet should include the Slogan Vision Statement (maybe the Synopsis as well) and a list of key Talking Points or Bullet Points that capture the heart of the vision. There are no rules here, but 6-10 such points is a good rule of thumb. The vision caster should make sure that this vision and the accompanying points are clearly covered in vision casting conversations. When every vision casting session covers a prescribed set of vision statements and talking or bullet points, the common message being delivered with common language will begin to permeate the church and will begin to impact church culture. When the same message is clearly being heard in all quarters, clarity, understanding, and unity will prevail.

During these vision casting sessions, opportunities for questions and comments should be given to recipients, as well as opportunities to voice objections or present obstacles. The vision casting team should meet together regularly to debrief and share what’s happening in congregational conversations with each other. In that way, vision casters learn from each other and find both encouragement in success stories and insight into dealing with negative situations that some other team member might have encountered.

Public Vision Casting should use the same content that is being covered in private conversations to reinforce discussions that are taking place in these private settings. In that way, Private and Public Vision Casting work together. One final tip is for vision casters to be so familiar with their vision casting content that they can cast vision in short, medium, and long conversations and can do so in both informal and (sometimes) formal settings.

Vision casting to create ownership is most effective when a team of vision casters is mobilized, leveraging the Divide & Serve Principle to provide consistent and unified vision casting.

**A Casting Vision & Creating Ownership Compilation:**

**1. Private Vision Casting:** Vision casting to create ownership is much more effective in private settings rather than in public settings, though most church leadership attempts to mobilize people through platform communication in large group settings and through email or snail mail information blasts. Emphasize Private Vision Casting.

**2. Public Vision Casting:** Vision casting to create ownership leverages casting vision in public settings to complement and support its efforts in casting vision in private.

**3. Levels of Commitment:** Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that deep levels of commitment in people are developed through a process of moving them from less committed to more committed over time. The pivot level is the Level of Serving.

**4. The Dynamics of Change**: Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that change is difficult and complex, and approaches change through four principal dynamics: Willingness, Ability, Substance, and Pace.

**5. People Types:** Vision casting to create ownership recognizes that people are wired differently and must be allowed to be who they are when adapting to change.

**6. Team-Casting:** Vision casting to create ownership is most effective when a team of vision casters is mobilized, leveraging the Divide & Serve Principle to provide consistent and unified vision casting.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 2: Casting Vision & Creating Ownership

**Private Vision Casting**: X/52 cautions against relying on large group, Town Hall settings as a strategy for effective vision casting. Identify scenarios known to you where this perspective proved on target. Have you used the large group setting in the past to cast vision? What were the results? What do you see as the value of the Divide & Serve Principle? How might Conversation Not Presentation promote effectiveness in vision casting?

**Public Vision Casting**: Identify 4-5 ways in which public vision casting can be leveraged to complement and support private vision casting. Cite several examples of when you have seen private and public vision casting work in tandem effectively in the past. Project several examples of how they could work in tandem effectively in the days ahead.

**Levels of Commitment**: Use the following chart to select 12 people in your church that represent a broad cross section of the congregation. Place a checkmark at the Level of Commitment he or she seems to have reached at this time. Consider how each person might be impacted in such a way that he or she might move one level deeper in commitment.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NAMES | Observing | Considering | Visiting | Attending | Connecting | Serving | Inviting |
| 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

What take-aways do you draw from this exercise? (Later, multiply throughout the congregation.)

**The Dynamics of Change**: What is the danger of relying too heavily on the Willingness to Change? Have you experienced a negative result from making this mistake? How so? Cite several reasons as to why some people might be genuinely willing to change only to find that they are unable to change. X/ 52 identifies two faces of change: Change FROM and Change TO. Have you experienced a time when a group of people was united in agreement to Change FROM but in conflict regarding Change TO? How so? Why is the Pace of Change an important consideration? Have you experienced a change scenario when the pace was too fast? Have you experienced a change scenario when the pace was too slow? What were the results in each case?

**People Types**: It’s helpful in vision casting to understand the temperaments of the people you are trying to mobilize around a vision. Use the chart below to evaluate top leaders.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NAMES | 1.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 4.0 |
| 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Key: 1.0 Theorists 1.5 Theorists/Realists

2.0 Realists 2.5 Realists/Pragmatists

3.0 Pragmatists 3.5 Pragmatists/Preservationists

4.0 Preservationists

What take-aways do you draw from this exercise? (Later, multiply throughout the congregation.)

**Team-Casting**: Who among your current leaders would serve well as a member of a Vision Casting Team? How so?

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*Congratulations! You can now cast vision and create ownership!*

**Skill 3: Setting Objectives & Establishing Accountability**

I’m going to open this section of X/52 by importing a short piece I developed some years ago. I’ve used it in multiple publications since and I’m going to use it again here. It’s titled, *The Program-Scripted Church*.

*The American evangelical church of the past one-hundred years is highly vested in program ministry. Whether those programs are traditional or conventional in nature, the modern attractional model or seeker model, or the post- modern casual, rock band, low-key teaching model, the central organizing motif is the same - ministry-by-programs. This might be identified as the Program-Scripted Church.*

*As the name implies, there is a script that is followed, not necessarily by design, but surely by default. Without even considering alternatives, the church’s ministry is program-driven. Staffing is determined by programs, space is allocated according to programs, budgets are formulated according to programs, and volunteers are recruited to man the programs. There is a sense that effectiveness is a product of well-run programs, and the seemingly well-run program follows a very predictable path that has been laid out over decades of historical and habitual program patterns.*

*Giving the benefit of the doubt that this program-scripted approach to ministry worked in the past, it no longer works today. Simply put, if most churches are program-driven, or at least aspire to be, and most churches are in plateau or decline, it stands to reason that the program-scripted approach to ministry must give way to something different, something new, something fresh, something innovative.*

*Ironically, to go forward we must go back, not back to the ministry of the past fifty years, but back to the ministry of the apostles who were commanded to go and make disciples. The church must focus anew on the making of disciples and not the running of programs. For most churches, this will require a significant change.*

In the context of the current conversation, I want to point out that the *Program-Scripted Church* is often a church that is devoid of clear objectives and accountability regarding effective ministry, especially effective missional ministry. Measurement of ministry is informal at best and tends to lean on activity rather than results. Programs are scattered throughout the church calendar and seem to multiply until there is no room left on the calendar. As long as the calendar is full and everyone is as busy as possible, we reason that we are working as hard as we possibly can and doing all that we possibly can. This can be reflective of a high level of commitment, which is admirable, but the bottom line is not busyness; the bottom line is effectiveness. Ministry needs to produce results, not just a flurry of activity. Ministry needs to be guided by right objectives and measured by relevant metrics, and, with Great Commission ministry in view, I prefer designating right objectives as Great Commission Objectives (GCOs). We must develop the skill of Setting Objectives and Establishing Accountability for these GCOs.

**3.1 Life Transformation Focus**: The objective of Great Commission ministry is not to see churches improve but to see lives transformed by the Gospel. Holding ministry accountable to life transformation keeps the church on a Great Commission track. Ministry is not meant to be transactional but transformational. Scripture says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is transformation in its ultimate sense.

A giant transformative step is taken when a person is regenerated and steps into the family of God as a follower of Christ. This person has passed from darkness into light and has begun a new life with Jesus as Savior. But that’s just the beginning of transformation. Once that first step is taken, a journey of thousands of steps follows toward maturity in Christ, toward the fullness of Christ. Paul, in one of his famous run-on sentences, says it like this, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes,” (Ephesians 4:11-14). It is in this growing to maturity that we fully discover the Lordship of Jesus Christ who is both Savior and Lord of our lives.

The Great Commission, as expressed in Matthew 28, is typically our most prominent proof text for evangelism. After all, Jesus says that we are to go and make disciples. However, going and making disciples is bigger than evangelism alone; it engages discipleship and growing in maturity. How so? The Great Commission continues to say that we are to teach followers of Christ to obey all that Jesus commanded and it’s in this obedience that maturity is rooted.

One particular Scripture passage that zeroes in on transformation is Romans 12. It reads, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect,” (Romans 12:1-2). Effective GCOs for missional, i.e., Great Co-Missional ministry, begin with life transformation in mind, and accountability of such ministry leverages metrics and analysis that focus on transformation.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability is focused on life transformation, guiding a church in its mission to reach, nurture, and grow people in their faith.

**3.2 Simple & Measurable**: Effective GCOs are articulated in simple, clear terms with measurability built in. When it comes to objectives, simplicity is a virtue because simplicity fosters clarity and understanding so that there is no confusion or ambiguity as to the substance of an objective. Leave no room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation in your statement of objectives so that all parties engaged in a particular objective are intellectually and intuitively dialed in accurately from the moment the objective is made known. Of course, there should be a clear link in a GCO to vision that was in view in our discussion of Skills 1 and 2.

A simple and solid GCO should include the ingredient of measurability, a metric that succinctly identifies whether or not an objective has been reached, fulfilled, or achieved. Without measurability, objectives float in the category of hopes or dreams or wishful thinking that is vague and ill equipped to drive decisions and actions toward completion. Consider these two contrasting objectives:

1. My objective is to hike to the summit of a mountain in Virginia.

2. My objective is to hike to the summit of Mount Rogers, the highest mountain in Virginia by elevation, by October 1, 2020.

The first objective is simple, but it’s vague and open ended with no measurability applied. Its shelf life could be forever as there is no metric attached that creates a timeframe expectation. An objective such as this could sit on a list of objectives until the end of time without driving any decisions or actions. The second objective is simple, clear, and measurable. What is going to be done? Hiking to the summit of a mountain. Which mountain? Mount Rogers. When? By October 1, 2020. With this clear objective in play, hikers will make many decisions and take many actions between the articulation of the objective and its completion, driven by the demands of the objective. Hikers must think through what must be done between now and October 1, 2020, to equip and enable them to meet this objective. These decision steps and action steps could be laid out as a plan that most likely demarcates the what, who, how, and when of the project to enable the fulfillment of the objective. When October 1, 2020, arrives, either this objective will have been met or not, and everyone engaged will know one way or the other. This is how a simple and measurable objective can prompt positive progress in most any endeavor.

Note that objectives exist to serve people, not the other way around. In other words, objectives need not be held over people’s heads in a legalistic or oppressive way. Objectives shed light on the disbursement of time, money, energy, and other resources. They provide a destination and even a path to that destination, but objectives are linked to vision and that vision is the ultimate destination. Therefore, significant progress toward an objective can be seen as a win, even if the result is somewhat shy of the objective. For example, let’s say that a given church’s leadership has determined that small groups ministry is to play a significant role in both the discipling of its congregation and the mobilization of that congregation for ministry in the community. At present, 28% of the congregation is engaged in small groups ministry. Leadership establishes an objective that by January 1 of the coming year, 75% of the congregation will be engaged in small groups.

Numerous decisions will have to be made and many action steps taken for this GCO to be reached. For example, this will require identifying, recruiting, and training a cadre of small group leaders to serve as leaders of the many small groups that will need to be created. This will, also, require finding multiple homes to serve as host sites for small groups gatherings. This list goes on and on, but a plan and a timeline will be developed to ensure that the ministry capacity required for this objective to be met is in place. So far, so good. However, when January 1 comes, only 62% of the congregation, let’s say, is engaged in small groups. Is this a failure? Well, it’s a failure in the sense that the stated objective was not fully realized. However, moving from 28% to 62% is a significant increase, an increase of more than double. By any measurement standard, that’s a huge win. So, rather than seeing this as a failure, this should be seen as a resounding success. What this points out, perhaps, is that going from 28% to 75% by January 1 was allotting too short a time period for this objective. The objective could be reset with something such as moving from 62% to 75% by June 1. The point is not that every GCO target needs to be hit as a bull’s-eye, but that steady progress needs to be made.

One final word regarding measurability: Be reasonable about quantitative metrics over stated time periods. Serious thought and prayer should be given to numbers and timeframes so that random pie in the sky numbers aren’t thrown out that set the bar so high that reaching them is highly improbable. Yes, exercise faith in your GCO projections; just don’t go absurdly overboard. GCOs must be seen by leaders and congregants as credible.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability effectively begins by carefully and prayerfully crafting GCOs that are simple and measurable; simple to provide clarity and understanding; measurable for accuracy in evaluating progress.

**3.3 Quality & Quantity**: Broadening our discussion of quantitative metrics, effective Great Commission Objectives address quantity as well as quality. Dealing with numbers in ministry can be tricky as we surely don’t want to fall into the trap of thinking that bigger, or more, is better, and that the biblical idea of growth is simply about growth in number or size. However, there is danger in ignoring or shunning numerical realities. Consider that the vision of John in Revelation 7:9 is of a great multitude that no one could number, the massive body of Christ, the innumerable family of God. Is that vision about numbers? No! It’s about souls; it’s about eternal lives, yet, the number of them is so large that they can’t be counted. At least, they can’t be counted by us, but they are counted by God, just as He counts the stars in the heavens and even names them (Gen. 15:5; Ps 147:4).

Tension regarding numbers has often surfaced over the course of my ministry. The two poles on the numbers continuum position those who fight for numerical growth in their churches with a whatever-it-takes attitude that can lead to compromise on one end, and those who virtually boast of the ever-declining smallness of their churches as a red badge of courage that testifies to their unwavering faithfulness on the other.

I found this issue so important and so conflicting that I dedicated my Ph.D. dissertation study to this one central concern. My guiding questions were these: 1. *What does God say in His word about numerical growth?* And 2, *What does God mean by what He says in His word about numerical growth?* Let me save you about four years of study by zipping to the bottom line. God says a great deal about numerical growth in His word, so to dismiss the importance of numbers is to be unbiblical. However, as you might suspect, these numbers are not about numbers, per se. Rather, they are about names, names that are recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life, written before the foundation of the world. These names form a roster of the saints, the ultimate family tree of God’s family. All throughout time, redemptive history will feature the gathering of these saints from the plentiful harvest of souls that Jesus had in view in Matthew 9. One by one they will be gathered until the full number is brought into the family of God and that innumerable multitude is assembled for worship in the throne room of heaven. My findings and more are included in my book, *Vacancy: Finding Who’s Missing & Bringing Them Home*.

Indeed, quantity is important and should be reflected in GCOs. Also, quality is important for several reasons. First, God makes a clear distinction between good and bad, between good and evil, between right and wrong. For example, one of the first things we learn about God in the opening verses of Genesis is that He created light and says that the light was good (Gen. 1:4). When tracing the rule of kings in 1 Kings, a leading metric in God’s evaluation of kings is that they either did what was right or what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. In short, God has qualitative expectations for His leaders and for His church.

Second, Paul explains in his first letter to the Corinthians that all things, regardless of what they are, are to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). All things, even the smallest and seemingly inconsequential, are to be done to the glory of God. Great Commission Objectives are neither small nor inconsequential because they contribute to the gathering, nurturing, and growing of the saints. Surely, then, GCOs must reflect quality that is glorifying to God.

Third, there is a strong relationship between quality and quantity. I want to take you back to our discussion of Levels of Commitment included under Skill 2.3. We noted that the deepest Level of Commitment and the highest level of ownership is revealed when someone begins to invite other outsiders into the ministry of the church. Studies have shown that there is one element that stands above all others as to whether or not someone in the church will invite someone from outside to attend. That one element is *confidence*, meaning, people on the inside are inhibited from inviting folks from the outside if they are not absolutely confident that their guests are going to have a very positive, first-time-visit experience. What is it that bolsters their confidence? Being certain that everything that happens during that first visit is of high quality from the initial greeting to the child care to the worship service, etc., etc. If the quality is not consistently there, the confidence will not be there, and, without the confidence, the invitation will not be extended. Since the largest percentage of first timers to a church comes through personal invitation, if those invitations are not being extended, a church will not grow, the harvest will not be gathered, and the potential for increased quantity will be handcuffed by the lack of quality.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability effectively requires that consideration be given to quality and quantity in the crafting of GCOs. Quantity might be easier to address in actual GCO statements, but high quality should be built into the ministry culture so that, over time, quality is embedded into all that a church does, including its GCOs, to the glory of God.

**3.4 Completed Actions**: Accountability is greatly enhanced when GCOs are viewed as completed actions rather than as hopes or dreams or even targets. What’s important is what is accomplished, not what is intended. There is an expression that proclaims, “actions speak louder than words.” Taking that concept one step further gives you, “completed actions speak louder than intended actions.” A tactic that is purposeful in pushing toward accomplishment of GCOs is the use of the past tense, articulating desired outcomes as completed actions.

I use this technique in a variety of ways to push progress forward. For example, I’m currently working with churches in an initiative called the GO PROJECT. It’s a revitalization process that is designed to be completed in eighteen to twenty-four months on average. Over this timeframe, churches move through five markers and each marker is further defined by a set of checkpoints, checklists, and outcomes. In short, to complete a marker, the church will hit each checkpoint, check off all the items on a checklist, and will achieve a set of prescribed outcomes. All of this information is captured and tracked in the GO PROJECT ROADMAP Tracker. The following is an excerpt from the Tracker of one of our GO PROJECT churches:

**MARKER 2 Checklist of Checkpoint OUTCOMES: Date Completed:**

GO Leader Team (GLT) Identified & Mobilized March 15, 2020

Training for GLT in Four Leadership Dynamics for Vitalization Conducted July 25, 2020

Vision Team Selected & Mobilized August 10, 2020

Prayer Teams to Support Vision Team Recruited & Mobilized August 19, 2020

Notice that each action is articulated in past tense. The protocol for using the Tracker requires that an action be thoroughly completed before a date is entered. It’s in the completion of each action that progress is made. Intended actions or partially completed actions don’t count. To check them off before completion registers a false positive and gives the illusion of progress that, often, serves to impede progress rather than advance it.

There are numerous challenges to establishing accountability and I won’t try to list them all. I will, however, include several prevailing challenges. First, there is the culture of a particular church, and, I might add, the culture I am about to describe is common to many churches. In part due to the *Program-Scriptedness* that we discussed earlier, the history of how the church goes about conducting leadership meetings, and the actions that should follow such meetings is a history of habitual slow pace, no need to rush, approaches to strategic planning and execution. There is no sense of urgency and the leadership culture of the church is content with these slow- paced habitual patterns. It’s important to note, again, that over 80% of churches are in plateau or decline, with most experiencing little to no conversion growth. Yet, there is little sense of shifting to a higher gear and truly starting to make things happen. Ironically, organizational leadership books by the dozen include reference to the fact that the first step in navigating change or revitalization or turnaround or whatever you want to call it is to establish a sense of urgency.

For example, John Kotter, a leading authority on organizational change, says a great deal about urgency in his back-to-back books, *Leading Change* and *The Heart of Change*. In each of these books, he unveils his Eight Stage Process for navigating significant change in an organization. The first of these Eight-Stages is “Establishing a Sense of Urgency.” He writes, “Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation. With complacency high, transformations usually go nowhere because few people are even interested in working on the change problem. With urgency low, it’s difficult to put together a group of people with enough power and credibility to guide the effort or to convince key individuals to spend the time necessary to create and communication a change vision,” (*Leading Change*: Kotter, p. 36).

Second, church leaders are inclined to set ministry apart from other organizations or businesses that are not ministry, so the kind of catalytic, high accountability strategy they might undertake in their business or professional world doesn’t make it across the threshold of the church. Somehow, ministry is supposed to be “spiritual” or “other worldly” so the common sense, strategic engagement leaders might undertake in other walks of life are thought not to apply to ministry.

Third, pastors and leaders are largely, if not exclusively, working with a volunteer ministry workforce, and it’s reasoned that volunteers can’t be held to high standards, but that the church must simply settle for what it gets from folks. In truth, though, people are drawn to challenge, particularly when that challenge is meaningful. Also, let’s not forget about doing all to the glory of God.

These and many more challenges can be overcome when strategic urgency and diligence are, first, modeled by key leaders and, second, promoted by those leaders. If key leaders will shift the culture, new habits and disciplines can be formed, and the bar of accountability can be raised.

**Accountability Tracking**: “Keeping track of yourself and others is the essential flip side of the action process. There is no other way to be sure that commitments are honored, deadlines met, calls returned, and long-term projects tracked through their various stages. Failure to keep track can result in any number of serious consequences.” Stephanie Winston – *The Organized Executive*, p. 48.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly enhanced when GCOs are viewed as completed actions. What’s important is what is accomplished, not what is intended.

**3.5 Calendar Commitments**: It’s helpful to assign calendar targets to your GCOs. Think of it this way: deadlines are your friends. When a calendar target arrives, it’s easy to determine whether or not a GCO has been reached. Either an objective has been reached or it hasn’t, and the simple application of calendar deadlines provides accountability. Steven Griffith, in his book, *Time Cleanse*, coins the term *Return on Time – ROT*. He writes, “How, when, and with whom you reinvest your time is the key to reaching the goals you are committed to having. Just as you want to invest your money for the highest return, you want to be thinking about your time from that same investment perspective of getting the highest Return on Time, your ROT,” (*Time Cleanse*: Griffith, p. 111). Calendar targets, setting and meeting deadlines, with increase your ROT.

Procrastination is a widespread reality, common to virtually all of humanity. Though the maxim, “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today,” is sentimentally appealing, the practice regarding time usage typically looks more like the reverse, “Don’t do today what you can put off until tomorrow.” By nature, and by virtue of being overly busy, people tend to engage a given assignment, in this case a GCO, at the last minute. If there is no calendar target, there is no identified last minute, so that GCO might be rolled over again and again until forever. At the very least, create an actual *last minute* by assigning a calendar target. (Note: We’ll look more deeply into time usage in Skill 4: Managing Ministry Time.)

Two issues are significant in this regard: 1. The Time It Takes vs. The Time You Have and, 2. GiANT Worldwide’s 5 Gears. Let’s take a quick look at each.

**Time It Takes vs. Time You Have**: In 1955, *The Economist* published an essay by Cyril Northcote Parkinson that included the phrase, “work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.” This became known as Parkinson’s Law. The reality is that people rarely reach completion of any assignment, project, task, etc., in advance of a deadline. People are busy, so they tend to work on matters that are exerting pressure, and one of the greatest producers of pressure is the deadline. If a deadline is still off in the future, it exerts little pressure, but, as the deadline gets closer and closer, pressure tends to rise proportionately. So, on any given day, people are typically working on whatever is exerting the most pressure, not on what’s most important, and approaching deadlines produce pressure.

This dynamic offers a basis for Parkinson’s Law as it is being driven by the Law of Procrastination. My observation is that the work doesn’t really expand to fill the time available for completion, but, rather, work is put off over time until an approaching deadline begins to exert higher and higher pressure, such that it can’t be put off any longer. So, for example, let’s say that a given assignment has a deadline of completion in six weeks from the time the assignment is made. Giving the benefit of the doubt, let’s acknowledge that the deadline will be met, right on time, and not a minute sooner. Does that mean that six weeks are required to complete the assignment as those responsible work tirelessly throughout the entire six weeks? Probably not. What’s more likely is that the assignment will sit dormant for five plus weeks, and those responsible will work feverishly for the last few days to meet the deadline. Perhaps, then, this is an assignment that should be given a deadline of a few days, maybe a week at the most, rather than a deadline of six weeks.

While I encourage the use of deadlines or calendar commitments, projecting them too far into the future doesn’t necessarily produce higher quality work. Rather, it produces a drag on the pace of moving forward and the quality of work will be much the same. In practice, then, I continue to encourage making calendar commitments, but I, also, encourage shorter over longer deadlines. Use deadline pressure to your advantage by removing dead time from the equation. Set short calendar commitments and get to work right away. This creates momentum and quickens the pace of progress. This one dynamic can make a significant difference in the progress of a church’s ministry as church leaders, as mentioned before, tend to move at a slow pace with no sense of urgency.

In planning your use of time in light of this Time It Takes vs. Time You Have dynamic, consider this perspective, for example: If a given task requires six hours of concentrated effort, you must decide which six hours to use. You could use six hours sooner or six hours later, but you’ll need six hours regardless. What tends to drain us of energy is leaving the task hanging over our heads for extended periods of time, giving the illusion that it’s taking far more than six hours to get the job done.

**The Power of Deadlines**: “Deadlines can be one of the most effective supervisory and management tools in your arsenal. A well-chosen and steadily enforced deadline is a great way to help your people prioritize, increase motivation and productivity, and eliminate downtime. A series of deadlines percolating throughout the organization can also improve overall coordination and cooperation. But getting the most from deadlines requires two important supervisory and management disciplines: setting fair deadlines and enforcing them.” First Books for Business Series, *Supervising and Managing People*, p. 94.

**5 Gears**: GiANT Worldwide describes itself as a *global media and content development company specializing in leader transformation*. I invested in a year of training with GiANT to learn their approach to leader development and to assimilate their tools and methodology into my training and consulting ministry. One construct I encountered was GiANT’s 5 Gears. For a thorough treatment, I refer you to the book, *5 Gears: How to Be Present and Productive When There Is Never Enough Time* by Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram. Here’s a quick rundown of the five gears:

Gear 1: Recharge Mode – Personal recharge, completely unplugged

Gear 2: Connect Mode – Being present with family or friends without work

Gear 3: Social Mode – Present with people and can shift up or down easily

Gear 4: Task Mode – Task Mode, Multi-tasking; working hard in various ways

Gear 5: Focus Mode – Focus Mode; Task-Centered, fully focused and moving quickly

As it relates to our discussion, Gears 4 and 5 are in view. GiANT studies show that people at work tend to spend most of their time and energy in Gear 4. This Task Mode features multi-tasking in an attempt to juggle many balls at the same time. Working on everything at once often means working on nothing in a focused, efficient, and effective way. In explaining his disdain for multi-tasking, Gary Keller, in his #1 Wall Street Journal Bestseller, *The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*, offers, “People can actually do two or more things at once...but, like computers, what we can’t do is focus on two things at once. Our attention bounces back and forth,” (p. 45). Focused attention is the key. As long as we are engaged in multi-tasking, wading through day after day with a split focus, we tend to lag behind, rising to the occasion to reach completion when pressure spikes, meeting deadlines that we push out as far as possible, but making slow progress with compromised quality.

How do we turn that around? We have clear GCOs that are scheduled in sooner rather than later calendar commitments and we hold ourselves accountable to meeting those deadlines. We work on our objectives in Gear 5 when we are focused on one thing at a time. In that way we make quick progress and our focused attention produces higher quality.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly supported by clear deadlines that firmly root high respect for calendar commitments into a church’s ministry culture.

**3.6. Checkpoints & Partners**: It’s helpful to divide the distance between the present date and the calendar target date into shorter time segments, creating checkpoints along the way. This breaks a GCO down into shorter steps that can indicate what progress is being made. Human nature is to procrastinate, so don’t lose sight of Parkinson’s Law or the Law of Procrastination. Checkpoints and accountability partners help leaders overcome those natural human tendencies.

First, let’s focus on checkpoints. For the sake of simplicity, let’s imagine that there is an objective that needs to be completed in six weeks, say, on Friday of week six. Let’s call it *Friday 6*. One simple way to approach this objective might be to break it down into six steps that can clearly be distinguished from one another, each step being considered a checkpoint. We might, then, set up a checkpoint schedule that targets completion of requirements for the first checkpoint by *Friday 1*, completion of requirements for the second checkpoint by *Friday 2*, and so on until requirements for all six checkpoints are completed by the calendar target of *Friday 6*. Simple, right?

Using this technique causes numerous good things to happen. First, we have a plan that, if followed, will guard against Parkinson’s Law and the Law of Procrastination. Second, by spreading the workload evenly over six weeks, we avoid the last-minute crunch that often accompanies completing objectives. Third, by using calendar spacing and workload pacing, we avoid having to work under pressure which often lowers the quality of our efforts. Fourth, if we do fall behind, we discover we’re off-target early in the timeframe rather than at the bitter end.

Let me share a small example from my own experience at meeting objectives. While in seminary, one course that was required during my third and final year focused on the spiritual development of pastors. On the first day, we were given the standard course syllabus that laid out all assignments for the entire course, which was, in this case, the fall semester. This course met once a week from late August to early December.

One of the assignments was to submit five two-page papers throughout the semester that reflected on something that had been covered in the class session during a given week. We had the freedom to select from all classes and from any topic covered in those classes. The catch, though, was that these papers had to be turned in at the next class following those selected for papers. In other words, you couldn’t wait until the last week and then rush to turn in five papers on topics from throughout the semester.

My habit throughout seminary was to wait until I had attended all of the first sessions of each course that I was taking in a given semester. At the end of that week, I would sit down with my calendar and all of that semester’s syllabi, and I would plan out all of my assignments for the semester and write them into my calendar – reading assignments, presentations, papers, examinations, etc. When it came to papers, I would note actual deadlines, but then I would assign myself slightly sooner deadlines with a view toward finishing papers before the actual deadlines. I might add that, as a second career pastor, I enrolled in seminary at forty years old. It’s very unlikely that I would have been this disciplined had I started seminary in my mid-twenties. Live and learn!

In the case of this course, I designated the next five class sessions as the sessions I would use for my five two-page papers. For the next five weeks, upon getting back home after those classes, I went straight to my desk, pulled out my notes from the class, read through them, selected a topic, and wrote my two-page paper. So, six weeks into the semester, that assignment was completed. The professor for that course was also my faculty advisor, so late in the semester I happened to be meeting with him and we chatted a bit about this particular assignment. He informed me that I had been the first in the class to complete that assignment and, with only a couple of class sessions left, some in the class would not be able to complete the assignment because there weren’t enough class sessions left for them to make it to five papers. Amazing! Let me say, though, that my efficiency in the use of the calendar was not simply built into my hardwiring. It reflected a learned skill.

So, what does this skill look like in my ministry world today, three decades after my five two-page papers? Again, let me refer to the GO PROJECT ROADMAP Tracker for an illustration. The following sample is an excerpt from the Tracker that highlights a set of Checkpoints within the GO PROJECT Revitalization Process:

**MARKER 4 – Implementation Checkpoints**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| WHAT? | WHEN? | WHO? | HOW? | WHY? |
| Finalize a Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer throughout the Ministry of the Church | Immediately Following the GO Training 2 Seminar | Pastor/PD, GLT, Vision Team plus Preemptive Prayer Team (optional team) | Review Ideas from GO Training 2, Narrow to Specific Strategies for CNG at Large as well as Ministry Areas | TO move from theory to practice through a Strategic Plan to develop the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer |
| Implement the Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer throughout the Ministry of the Church | When the Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer is Finalized | Pastor/PD, GLT, Vision Team plus Preemptive Prayer Team (optional team) | Determine Division of Labor and Launch Strategies | TO develop the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer throughout the Ministry of the Church |
| Finalize a Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Basic Bible throughout the Ministry of the Church | Immediately Following the GO Training 2 Seminar | Pastor/PD, GLT, Vision Team plus Preemptive Prayer Team (optional team) | Review Ideas from GO Training 2, Narrow to Specific Strategies for CNG at Large as well as Ministry Areas | TO move from theory to practice through a Strategic Plan to develop the Discipline of Basic Bible |
| Implement the Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Basic Bible throughout the Ministry of the Church | When the Strategic Plan for Developing the Discipline of Basic Bible is Finalized | Pastor/PD, GLT, Vision Team plus Preemptive Prayer Team (optional team) | Determine Division of Labor and Launch Strategies | TO develop the Discipline of Basic Bible throughout the Ministry of the Church |
|  |  |  |  |  |

This graphic is a cross-section of a much larger chart and, out of context, might not be completely understandable, but I’m sure you get the idea. The “WHEN” column can be blended with an actual calendar in terms of setting calendar targets.

Let’s shift the focus to partners. There are times when you’re working with a team on an objective, or perhaps, with another party who’s engaged because a couple of objectives are intertwined or dependent upon each other. In this case, partnership is inherent to the process. There are other times when none of these conditions is present such that there is no inherent partnership. In that case, it can be helpful to manufacture a partnership to insert a degree of accountability that might not be there otherwise.

Partnerships tend to generate accountability which, in turn, generates productivity, in this case, meeting a particular GCO. Perhaps, the loosest or worst-case scenario would be to work on an objective with no checkpoints and no partner. In such a case, there would also be the absence of a calendar target. This environment would be so open ended that completing any GCO would be highly unlikely.

What does partnership bring to the table? First, a partner brings companionship and added strength as in, “two heads are better than one,” along with division of labor, shared responsibility; the list goes on and on. Second, a partner brings motivation and a reason to produce on time. It’s one thing to let yourself down, but most of us can live with that far better than we can live with letting a partner down. Note: Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. Military operations are often organized around a buddy system. The exploits of the Three Musketeers with their, “All for One and One for All,” operational ethic rides on the back of the value of partnership in accomplishing the task at hand.

Third, a partnership creates multiplication. I don’t want to go too far with the mathematics of this concept, but a partnership is greater than the sum of the parts. It’s not simply one plus one equals two, but the capabilities of one multiplied by the capabilities of a partner exponentially increases the quantity and quality of what can be accomplished on time regarding GCOs. If a partner is inherently part of the scenario, great, if not, generate a partner to level up and scale up.

Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly advanced and expanded by leveraging checkpoints and partners.

**A Setting Objectives & Establishing Accountability Compilation:**

**3.1 Life Transformation Focus**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability is focused on life transformation, guiding a church in its mission to reach, nurture, and grow people in their faith.

**3.2 Simple & Measurable**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability effectively begins by carefully and prayerfully crafting GCOs that are simple and measurable; simple to provide clarity and understanding; measurable for accuracy in evaluating progress.

**3.3 Quality & Quantity**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability effectively requires that consideration be given to quality and quantity in the crafting of GCOs. Quantity might be easier to address in actual GCO statements, but high quality should be built into the ministry culture so that, over time, quality is embedded into all that a church does, including its GCOs, to the glory of God.

**3.4 Completed Actions**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly enhanced when GCOs are viewed as completed actions. What’s important is what is accomplished, not what is intended.

**3.5 Calendar Commitments**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly supported by clear deadlines that firmly root high respect for calendar commitments into a church’s ministry culture.

**3.6. Checkpoints & Partners**: Setting Great Commission Objectives (GCOs) and establishing accountability are greatly advanced and expanded by leveraging checkpoints and partners.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 3: Setting Objectives & Establishing Accountability

**Life Transformation Focus**: The objective of Great Commission ministry is not to see churches improve but to see lives transformed by the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:16 – In what ways have you become a “new creation?”

Ephesians 4:11-14 – What does the Apostle Paul identify as hindrances to a believer’s growing to maturity?

Matthew 28:18-20 – The Great Commission is rightly known as a mandate for evangelism, but what does the Great Commission mandate regarding growth through discipleship?

Romans 12:1-2 – What is the means by which our minds are to be righteously transformed? How does that transformation equip us for discerning God’s will?

**Simple & Measurable**: Effective GCOs are articulated in simple, clear terms with measurability built in. Connect your current ministry to the Great Commission and craft two short-term Great Commission Objectives that are simple and clear with a built-in element of measurability.

**Quality & Quantity**: Effective Great Commission Objectives address quantity as well as quality. Consider the two GCOs that you developed under Simple & Measurable. In what ways do they address quantity? In what ways do they address quality? Make any adjustments in the articulation of those two GCOs that you find helpful in regard to quantity and/or quality.

**Completed Actions**: Accountability is greatly enhanced when GCOs are viewed as completed actions rather than as hopes or dreams or even targets. What’s important is what is accomplished, not what is intended. Take the two workshop GCOs you have crafted and, perhaps, adjusted, and craft a completed action statement to accompany each one. In past tense, determine how each GCO could be articulated as a completed action.

**Calendar Commitments**: Assign calendar targets to your GCOs, committing to short-term, future dates when each of these GCOs will be completed, and will, therefore, be able to be recognized as completed actions.

**Checkpoints & Partners**: For each of these two GCOs, divide the distance between the present date and the calendar target date into shorter time segments, creating checkpoints along the way. Track your progress in reaching these checkpoints. Engage a partner in your pursuit of these two GCOs, either someone who will work with you or someone who will simply be informed of your plan and will check with you on your progress.

*Congratulations! You have learned to defy the Law of Procrastination and overcome Parkinson’s Law!*

**Skill 4: Managing Ministry Time**

Time is a resource, perhaps the only resource, that cannot be replaced; cannot be replenished. It moves from one second to another and when that second has come and gone, it’s gone forever. When money is lost, other money can be generated. If people pull out of a venture, for whatever reason, other people can be recruited and mobilized. But time, once lost, can never be found or regenerated. Even when time is used wisely, that same time cannot be used again. There is, of course, an expression that speaks of *saving time*, but time can’t really be saved. It can only be used well or used poorly. Managing Ministry Time is about just that, using the time that is available well before it’s lost into the past, never to be seen again.

Churches have multiple rhythms. There is the weekly rhythm driven by Sundays that occur every seven days, there are holiday rhythms driven by Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, and there are seasonal rhythms driven by the four seasons of the year with their established patterns, such as the start of school in late August or September and the unique dynamics of summer vacations. For many there is the ebb and flow of monthly, quarterly, and/or annual responsibilities associated with regional or national denominational commitments and affiliations. These rhythms can dominate a pastor’s or church leader’s time, if that pastor or leader allows such domination, or time can be intentionally harnessed and leveraged for maximum wise usage. The bottom line is that using ministry time well is a disciplined choice, and using ministry time poorly is the result of not making that choice. Though my focus in this writing is on pastors, the principles and tools I’m about to cover could apply in most any walk of life.

**4.1 Time Allotment**: Pastors are often overwhelmed by a time crunch and, as we have observed, time is a resource that cannot be replenished. Once a minute, an hour, or a day goes by, it cannot be recovered. So, ministry time management is of extreme importance because demands and expectations placed on a pastor will continuously expand, but time will not. Time will remain constant, never expanding to accommodate these increasing demands and expectations. Note that this treatment only addresses the management of ministry time. I’m not going to address a pastor’s total time or how to manage work-life balance. I’m confining my remarks to managing ministry time, whatever that time frame happens to be for a given pastor. I will say this, though. Managing ministry time well typically results in more time for life outside of ministry, so in that sense, we are bleeding into work-life balance considerations.

The place to start with managing ministry time well is by quantifying the amount of time per day or per week that will be devoted to ministry and, then, quantifying the ministry that is to be accomplished within that time frame. By intentionally allocating appropriate time for completing each ministry element, a pastor can begin to take control of time. Consider these Scripture passages:

*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* Ephesians 5:15-17.

*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* Colossians 4:5

I’m not going to dive deeply here into a full exposition of these words from the Apostle Paul. I simply want to draw attention to the connection between wisdom and making the most or the best use of time. Consider these words *about* wisdom to be words *of* wisdom in regard to managing ministry time.

In practical terms, pastors should quantify all that is required of them and quantify the sum total of ministry time that is to be employed to meet these requirements. Chances are, there will be more that is required than there is time for completion, creating tension between the poles of setting some requirements aside in order to keep quality high, or compromising on quality in order to address everything. If so, the next step will be to prioritize these requirements in terms of importance and urgency. Let me refer you to Stephen Covey’s best-selling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, that has become a standard reference in the marketplace. In this book, Covey graphically depicts the Time Management Matrix as follows:

Urgent

Not Urgent

Not Important

Important

Quadrant 1 contains the Important and Urgent. These requirements need to be met because they are Important. Most likely because these requirements weren’t met in a timely manner, they have been put off until the last minute, thereby making them Urgent. (Note: this is a different kind of urgency than Kotter’s *Establish a Sense of Urgency* that we encountered in Skill 3). Of course, we want to invest our time in what’s Important, but, because time hasn’t been managed wisely, urgency has manifested, creating stress and, more than likely, compromising quality. Bottom Line: Wise time management avoids Quadrant 1.

Quadrant 2 contains the Important and the Not Urgent. These requirements need to be met because they are Important, and, because wise time management has led to addressing these requirements before they are Urgent, they are addressed in a manner that is Not Urgent. Consequently, stress is avoided and being able to address these requirements without the pressure of an impending deadline allows time to focus and meet these requirements with high quality. Bottom Line: Wise time management lives in Quadrant 2.

Quadrant 3 contains the Not Important and the Urgent. These requirements aren’t truly priorities, but, because they haven’t been dealt with in a timely fashion, they have pressed up against a deadline, creating urgency. This urgency forces immediate attention, likely driving the Important away from being dealt with while Not Urgent. This will result in the Not Important being addressed under pressure, probably at the expense of quality, while later having to address the Important while Urgent instead of Not Urgent, creating pressure in meeting those requirements and, again, compromising quality. Bottom Line: The worst possible scenario lives in Quadrant 3.

Quadrant 4 contains the Not Important and the Not Urgent. This begs the question, “Why is what’s not important being done at all?” OK, in the real world, there will always be occasions when the Not Important will surface and will simply need to be addressed, but by addressing the Not Important while Not Urgent, at least there is no pressure and the Not Important is not pushing the Important to the brink of urgency. Bottom Line: Wise time management relegates the Not Important to the Not Urgent.

The Bottom Line of Bottom Lines here is that the more ministry time you spend in Quadrant 2, the more wisely you will be using your ministry time.

Managing Ministry Time well is a function of allocating time according to all that needs to be done spread across the designated time frame for ministry activity, further refined by evaluating the importance and urgency of each requirement in order to devote the lion’s share of ministry time to those requirements that are important but not yet urgent.

**4.2 Pro-Active Scheduling**: It’s best for a pastor to schedule ministry time proactively, taking charge of time and not being in a reactive posture of trying to respond to ministry demands as they pop up. By planning out an advanced schedule, leaving some space for the unexpected, a pastor can harness time and avoid becoming a victim of pressing demands and last-minute expectations. If you as a pastor don’t take control of your time, others will take control of it for you.

Use of a pastor’s time is not a zero-sum game, as in, if a pastor wins the time, someone else loses it, or if someone else wins the time, the pastor loses it. Use of a pastor’s time by that pastor and by those who need that pastor’s time can be a win-win proposition. How? By a pastor’s proactive, judicious use of his or her time, thereby keeping control of time while meeting needs placed on that time.

Let me correct one myth: “My door is always open” is not a good policy; it’s a recipe for having others needlessly control your time. While it might seem to be a magnanimous gesture as a leader to make yourself always available to those who need you, or think they need you, it’s actually a compromising gesture that says, “I’m never doing anything important enough that you can’t interrupt me with whatever is on your mind.” Of course, you do need to be available, but you can determine when to be available and make that known so that others will adjust their timetables to yours and not vice versa.

Here’s a brief reminder of our discussion in the previous chapter under 3.5 Calendar Commitments. We took a look at the five gears presented in the book, *5 Gears: How to Be Present and Productive When There Is Never Enough Time* by Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram. Here’s a quick reminder of the five gears:

Gear 1: Recharge Mode – Personal recharge, completely unplugged

Gear 2: Connect Mode – Being present with family or friends without work

Gear 3: Social Mode – Present with people and can shift up or down easily

Gear 4: Task Mode – Task Mode, Multi-tasking; working hard in various ways

Gear 5: Focus Mode – Focus Mode; Task-Centered, fully focused and moving quickly

We made the point that Gear 5: Focus Mode is the gear that is most at risk. Why? Because when we’re at work, ministry work or otherwise, we tend to live in Gear 4: Task Mode, characterized by multi-tasking. Under the heading of multi-tasking, include focus-breaking interruptions that come in the form of office drop-ins, phone calls, text messages, emails with audible notifications, and the like, anything that throws us off focus. Proactive scheduling allows you to establish your own use of time. Schedule your Gear 5 intervals, communicate that you are not to be interrupted during those intervals, and don’t sabotage yourself by allowing any of those aforementioned focus-breaking interruptions to, well, interrupt.

I’ll illustrate the point with a ministry expectation that many pastors must navigate, the personal visit with people in the congregation. Most churches are small in the number of congregants, and most churches have a solo pastor who is the personal pastor to everyone in the church. There is a desire on the part of congregants, and rightly so, to be known by the pastor and to have some level of personal interaction with the pastor. Often, that’s in the form of a visit to the home or perhaps connecting for coffee or even a meal. Personal visits to everyone can add up to a lot of time committed, so pastors tend to put off such visits until there is either a crisis to be attended or until that particular congregant starts putting pressure on the pastor to invest that time. In either case, tension or stress is central to that relational transaction; the pastor is pressed for time and the congregant is left wondering if the pastor cares, questioning when or if the pastor is ever going to connect.

There is a simple solution: Pro-Active Scheduling. Here’s how it works. A pastor can determine how many such meetings need to happen and over what period of time. For example, a pastor might see that there are, say, eighty folks in a congregation, many of whom are married couples. So, there are, say, fifty households among the eighty people. Make a priority list of those households and determine which need to be paid a visit sooner and which can wait until later. Determine when you are going to be available to make these visits; maybe one evening per week. Proactively schedule who will be visited on a given evening and get those meetings set on the calendar. At that point, you and they know when the pastor is coming, and, even if that visit is months away, those folks know they’ll have that moment with their pastor and will know that they are on their pastor’s radar screen.

Not all congregants need to fit into that home visit scenario, some could be met for coffee at a local coffee shop, some could be met in the workplace or in a recreational setting. The point is that the pastor is planning ahead, people’s expectations are being met, and the pastor is preserving Gear 5 time to be in Focus Mode without interruption. Similar proactive planning can be utilized for all meetings, whether staff, key church leaders, community leaders, etc.

Of course, as a pastor, there will always be the need to be available in times of emergency and crisis, but those are usually somewhat sparse in small congregations. In larger congregations, this concept is still applicable but will entail delegation and a division of labor among multiple leaders.

Managing Ministry Time well is greatly enhanced when using the technique of Pro-Active Scheduling.

**4.3 One-Touch Calendar Filing System**: There is a steady stream of documents, mail, email, voice mail, etc., to deal with, and the typical pastor’s desk gets lost in piles that are often searched through numerous times. This can be avoided with a one-touch calendar filing system that was explained to me over thirty years ago that I have been using ever since. My methodology is a bit old school, having learned this technique before personal computers were on the scene, so convert this to a digital system if that’s your preference. What I’m going for here is the organizing principle.

Begin with a filing system that includes thirty-one folders labeled with the numbers 1-31, twelve folders labeled with the months of the year from January-December, and four or five folders labeled with the next four or five calendar years. The key is to “touch” each item that comes to you once and only once. This is accomplished by handling each item properly the first time.

What are the handling options? First, if the item is unnecessary, throw it away or delete it. Second, if the item needs to be handled immediately, handle it immediately and be done with it. Third, if the item needs to be handled within the next month, but not immediately, determine when you want or need to handle it and place it in the proper numbered folder. For example, let’s say you receive a communication on the 6th of the current month that needs to be handled by the 29th of the month. Place it in the folder labeled 29. On the 29th, open that folder and handle what’s inside. Or, with pro-active scheduling, place it in, say, the folder labeled 26. On the 26th, open that folder and handle this item, allowing for a cushion of a few days. Here’s another example; let’s say you receive a communication on the 28th of the month that needs to be handled by the 10th of the following month. That’s within the one-month range, so place that item in the folder labeled 10 and you will encounter it on the 10th of the following month. Using this technique, you’re only touching this item once and then filing it where it can be out of sight and out of mind until it’s time to handle it. No piling on the desk; no wondering where it went; no fear of losing or forgetting it.

Fourth, if the item does not need to be handled within the next month, move to the folders labeled January-December. Determine in which month the item needs to be handled and place it in that month’s folder. For example, let’s say you receive a communication in March regarding an item that requires no action from you until August. Place that item in the folder labeled August. On August 1st, open your August file. Determine which day in August each of the August file items needs to be handled and place each item in the proper folder labeled 1-31. So, if you open your August folder and find an item that needs to be handled by August 17th, place that item in the folder labeled 17. On the 17th, open that folder and handle that item.

Fifth, and final, if the item doesn’t need to be handled within the next year, move to the folders labeled for future years and place that item in the proper folder. For example, let’s say an item arrives in 2020 regarding a conference that will be held in April of 2022. Place that item in the folder labeled 2022. On January 1, 2022, remove that item and place it in the folder labeled April. When April arrives, open the April folder and place that item in the proper 1-31 folder.

It has taken a bit of repetitive explanation to unpack this system, but I know that it works because I have been using it since the mid-80s. Even now as I enter these words into my computer, my one-touch system is approximately two feet away from me in a file cabinet. Each day I begin with prayer, Bible reading, and my 1-31s.

Let me close with a tip from an entertaining and instructive book by Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*. She offers this advice: *Discard ruthlessly!* Managing Ministry Time well is greatly supported by the One-Touch Calendar Filing System.

**One-Touch Calendar Filing System** (a view of files inside my calendar file drawer)

|  |
| --- |
| 2027 |
| 2026 |
| 2025 |
| 2024 |
| December |
| November |
| October |
| September |
| August |
| July |
| June |
| May |
| April |
| March |
| February |
| January |
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| 3 |
| 2 |
| 1 |

**4.4 Email & Voice Mail Control & Response**: Email and voice mail are tools, not tyrants, yet many pastors and church leaders are tied to the never-ending barrage of digital communications that relentlessly comes in throughout the day. This can be controlled through designated checks throughout the day coupled with planned response times. Connecting a few dots in what we’ve covered so far, checking and responding to email and voice mail can be handled through Time Allotment, Pro-Active Scheduling, and/or One-Touch Calendar Filing.

My first recommendation is to eliminate any form of notification that might be in place. This would include computers, smart phones, iPads, digital watches, and others. Eliminate notification visuals, sounds, and vibrations so that you control when you check for email and voice mail. Text messages and perhaps other messaging formats might be included in this elimination. In brief, don’t interrupt yourself by allowing any types of notification alerts to break into your consciousness.

Set the times of day when you will check for emails, voice mails, and other messages. This could be done by setting standard rhythms such as checking at regular times of day, such as 9:00 am, noon, 3:00 pm, and 6:00 pm. Discipline yourself to check in with your messages at only these times. When you do so, if a quick response to a given message can be rendered, do so. That might be in the form of a quick reply, filing to a particular folder, or a deletion. If the message is going to require a lengthy response time, leave it for later, such as a time you have allotted for lengthy responses, or perhaps print it out and file it in your 1-31s.

My recommendation is that you utilize set times of day as a routine practice. However, some days are simply not routine because of travel, scheduled meetings, or projects and activities that need extended time and concentration. On such days, you can vary from your message control and response routine and schedule an alternative plan. For example, let’s say you routinely check messages at 9:00 am, but on a particular day you are going to be in a scheduled meeting from 8:30-10:00 am. Simply shift your routine to check messages just before or just after that meeting. Perhaps, on a particular day, you are working on a project and need an extended period to time in the afternoon for 5th Gear focus. Routinely, you check messages at, say, 3:00 pm, but on this day you decide to alter your routine and spend 1:00-5:00 pm working on your project. So, you skip your routine 3:00 pm message check in favor of maintaining focus, determining to check messages after you wrap up your focus on that project for the day.

The point is to think through your control and response to messages in advance, thereby controlling both your time and your focus throughout the day. Don’t allow your incoming messages to become your master, stealing time and focus away from the planned priorities of your day.

Managing Ministry Time well features a commitment to intentional email and voice mail control and response.

**4.5 Meetings on Purpose**: All meetings should have a vital and clearly stated purpose that is communicated well in advance so that all participants are up to speed coming into these meetings. A vital purpose is a purpose that is truly important to the vision, strategy, and/or operation of ministry. If a meeting’s purpose is not vital, why, then, is such a meeting taking place? A purpose is clearly stated when it is articulated in direct, precise language, and when matters such as actions to be decided or taken, likely outcomes, and an explanation of what’s at stake are highlighted.

Earlier, we commented on the fact that time is a non-replenishable resource and, therefore, should be protected and not wasted. I think most of us would agree that meetings are a leading cause of time being wasted. It’s not that all meetings are unimportant, rather, it’s that’s so many ministry meetings are entered into with poor preparation and are vague and unclear as to their purpose, tending to consume significant chunks of time without producing meaningful decisions, actions, or outcomes.

Here is a list of questions that might be considered in regard to an upcoming meeting: a Pre-Meeting Checklist:

Why are we meeting? What is the meeting’s purpose?

Who will be attending the meeting?

When and where will the meeting be held?

What is the starting time? What is the ending time?

What information should be distributed in advance of the meeting?

What decisions need to be made at this meeting?

What actions will be determined at this meeting?

What will be expected of me at this meeting? What are my responsibilities?

There might be other questions to consider within a Pre-Meeting Checklist. The point is to know why you’re meeting and to be prepared for the meeting in advance. I have attended countless meetings over the years when it was apparent that the agenda was open ended and unclear, and when certain attendees were obviously unprepared for the meeting. If eight people are meeting and an hour is wasted, that’s a total of eight wasted hours. Given that time is short and non-replenishable, that is an unacceptable waste of a most valuable resource.

Managing Ministry Time well is greatly advanced when a Meetings on Purpose mindset drives the culture of scheduled meetings, getting the most out of time spent in meetings while keeping time wasted to the barest of minimums.

**4.6 Teaching & Preaching Preparation**: In many cases, the largest time consumption in a pastor’s week goes to teaching and preaching preparation. This might be reasonable if a pastor is the teaching pastor of a large, multi-staff church. However, most pastors are not and will need to streamline their preparation for teaching and preaching in order to devote time to other priorities. I know that I’m treading on sensitive and, perhaps, uncomfortable territory here, so I’m asking you to withhold judgment on this concept until you’ve thoroughly considered what I have to say.

I’ll begin by explaining what I’m NOT saying. I’m not saying that the teaching and preaching ministry of the church is unimportant. In fact, it’s vitally important. I’m not saying that there is no power or authority in the teaching and preaching of God’s Word. In fact, there is great power and authority in the Word of God and in the teaching and preaching of that Word. I’m not saying that the authority of Scripture should be held in low regard and not serve as a standard for ruling and judging all other ministry. In fact, Scripture is the ultimate authority regarding our faith and practice; what we are to believe and how we are to live; our guide in both orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

I am saying, however, that the *methodology* of preparation for teaching and preaching, for many pastors, is often padded with unnecessary elements that are time wasters that don’t upgrade the effectiveness of the teaching and preaching ministry while stealing time from other ministry priorities that go unattended. Pastors must learn to draw from the reservoir of Bible, theology, ministry, and life experience they have accumulated over the years as they prepare to teach and preach, not starting from scratch with every preparation.

My years in seminary were wonderful years for me and I’m deeply grateful for the opportunity. If I could have figured out a way to make a living as a seminary student I might have stayed indefinitely. When that opportunity surfaced, I was already deep into ministry without the benefit of such training, so I consulted my wise and seasoned mentor. He said this, “Ken, if you have the opportunity to marinate in the study of God’s Word for three years, I advise you to take it.” Take it I did and that investment has paid dividends again and again.

When it comes to teaching and preaching, I learned about hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics. I studied Greek and Hebrew and learned to navigate language resources to get to the bottom of etymology, contextual usages, and the nuances of verb tenses and English translations. I studied theology under gifted theologians who required my reading books written by leading theologians. I took courses in preaching that included both sermon preparation and delivery, and I read and studied sermons by noted preachers such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Charles Spurgeon. I experienced a rich, full, and dynamic evangelical teaching and preaching education for which I am immensely grateful.

Though I consider the training in teaching and preaching that I received significantly positive, I do think that I left seminary with an out-of-balance perspective on how to utilize my ministry time as I stepped into the role of pastor of a small, declining church, as many of us do. I had been prepared to be a Bible teacher and preacher and had pictured myself during three years of preparation as standing behind a lectern or podium or stepping into a pulpit to deliver well-prepared, profound, and God-blessed messages that would change lives. I discovered that, while it was true that I would present messages of this kind, there was more to the role of pastor, much more, and that the luxury of spending hours and hours of time crafting teaching and preaching was a luxury that I could not afford in terms of my usage of ministry time.

Perhaps this is an overstatement, but I came away from seminary thinking that proper preparation for teaching or preaching was to begin each preparation from scratch, almost as if I had never seen a Bible before. Start with the text, study the text in its original language, consult language resources and commentaries, examine the context, check cross references in Scripture, take a peek at how this text had been used in the church historically, and build my presentation from the ground up. This methodology was very thorough and was wonderful Bible study for me personally, but it was also very time consuming as I prepared to teach or preach to a handful of people who already knew Jesus as Lord and Savior. Meanwhile, the harvest outside in the community, for whom the laborers were few, remained unreached. You see where this is going, right?

I came to realize that missional ministry, i.e., being fruitful and multiplying, i.e., going and making disciples, needed much more than teaching and preaching to the proverbial choir. We assume that if we teach enough and preach enough, that somehow the Gospel will automatically overflow from even a very small congregation into the people living without faith around them. That assumption proves faulty virtually every time. Communities are not reached with the Gospel accidentally but through painstaking, intentional strategies and commitments that are prioritized in a church, and that takes time. Given that time is finite and unable to be replenished, significant ministry time must be devoted to ministry outside of the church. Therein lies the challenge, if a pastor needs to pour significant amounts of time into teaching and preaching preparation for the congregation and needs to pour significant amounts of time preparing and leading the congregation into missional ministry in the communities surrounding the church, that pastor soon learns that there isn’t enough ministry time to go around, and that ministry time usage needs to be recalibrated.

Going back to seminary for a moment, let me share one story with you. While in seminary, I studied systematic theology under Dr. R.C. Sproul and, for a short stretch of about six months, was in a small group Bible study that Dr. Sproul led. This was a true privilege for my wife and me, being in a group of ten or twelve people in someone’s home one night a week being led through the Gospel of Luke by such a gifted teacher. One such evening, once the initial chit chat and fellowship subsided, Dr. Sproul opened his Bible to begin his teaching and he said something along these lines. “I have a confession to make,” he began; “in all my years of teaching I have never come into a teaching session without preparation, but certain things happened today that demanded my attention and I did not have time to prepare for this evening.” He paused, perhaps for dramatic effect, and then continued, “however, I am not altogether unfamiliar with the Gospel of Luke.”

Unfamiliar, indeed; he had decades of study behind his teaching ministry, and, every time he opened the Word of God to teach, he drew upon that repository of knowledge, insight, study, skill, and experience, such that he was never starting from scratch. Looking back on that evening as a pastor helped me realize that teaching and preaching can be extremely effective without going through the start-from-scratch methodology that had been my training every time. From my own pastoral experience, and those of many pastors with whom I’ve ministered, I realized that pastors must learn to draw from the reservoir of Bible, theology, ministry, and life experience that they have accumulated over time as they prepare to teach and preach. Properly channeled, this can save an enormous amount of ministry time that can be dispensed into other vital areas of ministry, namely the design, development, and deployment of missional strategies to penetrate the harvest with the saving message of Jesus Christ. Why is the evangelical church of today so weak in terms of conversion growth? Because we are largely talking to ourselves.

Here’s one more story from my long journey down this path. Some years ago, I had been invited to speak to a group of denominational leaders at a conference center, sharing my perspective on revitalization and explaining what our ministry had to offer to those who were interested in going further. I was given ninety minutes to make my case. Following my presentation, the larger group broke out into their respective committees and I was asked to sit in with the Revitalization Committee. There were a few questions and some discussion and then the chairman of that committee asked a question that was truly more statement than question, but was in the form of a question. He essentially said, “Ken, I’m sure there must be a place for strategy in ministry, but isn’t it really all about the Word of God being powerfully proclaimed?”

To cut to the chase, I replied, “Do the ministers in your denomination powerfully proclaim the Word of God?” He emphatically responded, “Absolutely!” I shot back, “Well, if it’s really all about the Word of God being powerfully proclaimed, and your ministers powerfully proclaim the Word of God, why, then, is your entire denomination in plateau and decline?”

That night I was troubled. I had made my point but I didn’t sense that I had really helped anyone. I was up much of the night, praying about the encounter, reading my Bible, asking God to use me in a way that would be, perhaps, less sarcastic and more edifying. In the wee hours of the morning a thought came to me. I’m going to say it was the Holy Spirit. I recalled the riddle: if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? The answer is, “yes.” Sound is produced by vibration and, when a tree falls, the air vibrates and, by definition, sound occurs. This sound is not dependent upon being heard in order for it to be a sound. It’s a physical inevitability. Consider this, though: if the saving Word of God is preached and there are no unsaved ears to hear its message, has evangelism happened? The answer is, “no.” Evangelism demands that the message be heard by unreached people.

Fortunately, I had a chance later that morning to apologize for my terse remarks the previous day and to share this new insight. I ended by pointing out that, while the powerfully proclaimed Word of God is essential to reaching the harvest, missional strategies would place this Gospel message within earshot of the lost, and that proclamation and missional strategy should combine as a one-two Gospel punch.

Managing Ministry Time well calls for pastors to streamline teaching and preaching preparation to give sufficient time to other missional priorities.

**A Managing Ministry Time Compilation:**

**4.1 Time Allotment**: Managing Ministry Time well is a function of allocating time according to all that needs to be done spread across the designated time frame for ministry activity, further refined by evaluating the importance and urgency of each requirement in order to devote the lion’s share of ministry time to those requirements that are important but not yet urgent.

**4.2 Pro-Active Scheduling**: Managing Ministry Time well is greatly enhanced when using the technique of Pro-Active Scheduling.

**4.3 One-Touch Calendar Filing System**: Managing Ministry Time well is greatly assisted by the One- Touch Calendar Filing System.

**4.4 Email & Voice Mail Control & Response**: Managing Ministry Time well features a commitment to intentional email and voice mail control and response.

**4.5 Meetings on Purpose**: Managing Ministry Time well is greatly advanced when a Meetings on Purpose mindset drives the culture of scheduled meetings, getting the most out of time spent in meetings while keeping time wasted to the barest of minimums.

**4.6 Teaching & Preaching Preparation**: Managing Ministry Time well calls for pastors to streamline teaching and preaching preparation to give sufficient time to other missional priorities.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 4: Managing Ministry Time

In this workshop, the objective is to use the next thirty days of ministry to establish ministry time management best practices to steward your ministry time efficiently and effectively.

**Time Allotment**: Make a list of ministry items, issues, and rhythms that currently occupy your ministry time. Rank the entries on this list from highest priority to lowest priority, and, then, consider each entry through the lens of Covey’s Time Management Matrix. What do you see?

**Pro-Active Scheduling**: Project 30 days out from today. List (1) all that***must*** happen between now and then. List (2) all, beyond “musts,” that you ***want*** to happen between now and then. Among your “wants,” list (3) 3-5 hours per week for Gear 5: Focus Mode activities. Plug all items on these lists into a next 30 days calendar and then hold to your 30-day plan. At the end of the 30 days, evaluate your month.

**One-Touch Calendar Filing System**: Create a file system of 47 folders as pictured in Section 4.3 (1-31, January-December, next 4 years). Take all items (documents, mail, email, voice mail, etc.) that are currently backlogged and file them in the appropriate folder, taking action on the appropriate date. Do the same for incoming items over the next 30 days. At the end of the 30 days, evaluate your month.

**Email & Voice Mail Control & Response**: Eliminate any form of electronic notification that might be in place. Set the times of day that you will check for emails, voice mails, and other messages through your ministry day. Upon checking, render short responses on the spot, schedule longer responses for a planned long-response time for later in the day, or file these entries in your One-Touch Calendar Filing System for action on the appropriate day. At the end of 30 days, evaluate your month.

**Meetings on Purpose**: Consider all meetings that are planned over the next 30 days. Evaluate the necessity of each meeting and cancel those that you deem unnecessary. For those that you deem necessary, or that are added as necessary throughout the next 30 days, use the following Pre-Meeting Checklist (or one of your own design):

Why are we meeting? What is the meeting’s purpose?

Who will be attending the meeting?

When and where will the meeting be held?

What is the starting time? What is the ending time?

What information should be distributed in advance of the meeting?

What decisions need to be made at this meeting?

What actions will be determined at this meeting?

What will be expected of me at this meeting? What are my responsibilities?

At the end of the 30 days, evaluate your month.

**Teaching & Preaching Preparation**: Analyze your current teaching and preaching preparation practices to determine the amount of ministry time you are spending in such preparation. What % of your ministry time, then, are you giving to teaching and preaching preparation? Does this % seem reasonable to you, given all of the ministry ground that you need to cover? How so? If the % is 25% of your ministry time or less, determine how you can trim that time by 25%. For example, based on a 40-hour ministry week, if you spend 8 hours or less in teaching and preaching prep, determine how you can trim that to 6 hours. If the % is greater than 25% and less than 50%, determine how you can trim that time by 33%. For example, based on a 40-hour ministry week, if you spend, say, 15 hours in teaching and preaching prep, determine how you can trim that to 10 hours. If the % is 50% or more, determine how you can trim that time by 50%. For example, based on a 40-hour ministry week, if you spend, say, 22 hours in teaching and preaching prep, determine how you can trim that to 11 hours.

Admittedly, these numbers are arbitrary in nature, but I’m sure you get the idea. At the end of 30 days, evaluate your month.

NOTE: Beyond this 30-day experiment, it’s important to install these Ministry Time Management tools and concepts into your ministry life permanently. Adapt them as you need to fit who you are and how you best leverage your ministry time, but don’t allow gains you make over these 30 days to evaporate when this trial period is over.

*Congratulations! Your ministry time is now yours!*

**Skill 5: Working with Staff & Leaders**

As a pastor or church leader, you will be working with other staff and other leaders, many of whom will be volunteers. To get this conversation started, let me share two principles that I have discovered over the years. I remind myself of these principles frequently. Principle 1: People always act like people, so never be surprised by how people act. Principle 2: People are different, so don’t expect everyone to share your perspective. Keeping these two principles in mind will serve you well in working with people in your ministry life as well as in your personal life.

Success or failure in working with staff and leaders, i.e., working with people, depends on how you treat them. Do you treat them well, do you mistreat them; do you take them for granted, expecting them to follow you obediently because you are in the position of authority? Relationships are complicated, so it might be tempting to see these three options as a false trilemma (I don’t think “trilemma” is actually a word but I’m taking “false dilemma” one step further). Consider this simple evaluation grid as you assess your treatment of people:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Am I treating this person well? | How so? |
| Am I mistreating this person in any way? | How so? |
| Am I taking this person for granted? | How so? |

Of course, the Golden Rule will be helpful: *Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 7:12). However, despite the fact that this is a biblical mandate uttered from the mouth of Jesus Himself, I’m going to suggest that it doesn’t tell the whole story. Remember, people are different and the staff member or leader that you are working with is not you. Treating him or her the way that you want to be treated might not be best in a given circumstance. You will need to connect empathetically with your staff and leaders such that you can get inside of what they are thinking and feeling, what they are seeing; walking in their shoes so that you can determine how they want to be treated. If empathy is not a strong suit, you need to decide to become more empathetic and work to develop empathy as a leadership characteristic or even as a skill, not to manipulate, but to understand, relate, and truly care about people. Picture this: when someone is in your office, sitting across from you, what do they see, what do they hear; how do they feel?

**5.1 Spiritual Authority**: Positional authority and respect for that authority are important, but effective leadership is not gained by pulling rank and leveraging the hierarchy. In the church of Jesus Christ, the weight of **spiritual authority** is truly where effective leadership is grounded. A Great Commission pastor or leader is disciplined and committed to personal spiritual development and to leading from a posture of spiritual authority.

Several years ago, I was blessed with the opportunity to spend one-year in training with an organization called GiANT Worldwide ([www.giantworldwide.com](http://www.giantworldwide.com)). Tom Nebel, GiANT Worldwide Senior Associate, led our cohort through twenty-four training sessions as we studied GiANT’s approach to leadership development, developing the leader in us while preparing us to develop the leader in others. I will be drawing from GiANT’s rich curriculum throughout this section of X/52, beginning with GiANT’s SUPPORT/CHALLENGE MATRIX.

SUPPORT CHALLENGE MATRIX

***HIGH SUPPORT***

***HIGH CHALLENGE***

***LOW CHALLENGE***

***LOW SUPPORT***

Working with staff and leaders from a posture of spiritual authority can emerge from a platform of leading with High Support and High Challenge. Jesus, the ultimate spiritual leader, offers very High Support for His disciples as He explains that all authority from God the Father has been given to Him. He is sending them out in that authority. Further, He assures them that He is always with them, through God the Spirit, to the end of the age. At the same time, He issues a daring, High Challenge. He challenges them to go and make disciples, to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey all that He has commanded them. Wow! There could be no higher support and there could be no higher challenge.

In framing this discussion, we will be using a leadership construct from GiANT WORLDWIDE, a global enterprise that is dedicated to leadership development, and we will examine these two dynamics in tandem. Since I personally trained with GiANT WORLDWIDE, I gained insight into their tools and permission to use them.

This construct, or tool, is the SUPPORT CHALLENGE MATRIX. The four-quadrant matrix is formed by the crossing of a vertical axis with a horizontal axis. The vertical axis ranges bottom to top from Low Support to High Support while the horizontal axis ranges left to right from Low Challenge to High Challenge. This creates four quadrants that indicate four different leadership styles and four different organizational cultures. The issue for us as church leaders is to determine how we should lead, meaning, first, “What leadership style do we want to establish,” and, second, “What congregational culture do we want to nurture?”

In considering leadership styles, here’s a quick overview of the four quadrants:

Quadrant 1 features a leadership style of Protector that provides High Support with Low Challenge.

Quadrant 2 features a leadership style of Liberator that provides High Support with High Challenge.

Quadrant 3 features a leadership style of Abdicator that provides Low Support with Low Challenge.

Quadrant 4 features a leadership style of Dominator that provides Low Support with High Challenge.

I’m sure you’re already beginning to see where this is headed and which quadrant is the optimum quadrant. So, let’s move in closer.

In considering the distinctions among these leadership styles, and the culture that each engenders, let’s begin by zooming into Quadrant 3. This leadership style is tagged with the descriptive title, Abdicator. The Abdicator style, of course, is tied to the behavior of abdication, failing to provide either High Support or High Challenge. Key leaders simply tend to allow ministry to happen on its own, going in whatever direction casual leaders permit. There is no sense of unity or alignment among ministries as each ministry is its own universe or silo. The culture is one of apathy, complacency, resignation, low expectations, and/or ambivalence. Leaders have no sense of making a dynamic future happen but are content to wait for the future to happen and see what arrives.

Denial is often present, either the denial of not recognizing problems or refusing to take ownership of the problems. Whatever has gone wrong is viewed as coming from external sources. These problems are not seen as the product of anything that leaders or the congregation have done, but as the result of outside forces. As such, there is often a victim mentality that pervades. For such a church to begin to forge a productive future, leaders must intentionally begin to establish a new leadership style and intentionally begin to establish a new culture. This requires more than improvement of the status quo. It requires transformation.

Quadrant 4 features a leadership style that carries the descriptive title, Dominator. The Dominator style, then, is tied to the behavior of domination, characterized by High Challenge but Low Support. In local church ministry, this dynamic typically emanates from a domineering senior pastor, but occasionally from another highly influencing leader. Even in denominational contexts where polity mitigates against such practices, domineering leaders tend to isolate from such checks and balances, maintaining a firm personal control on ministry at the local level. This dominance creates a culture of fear and manipulation as people are afraid to say “no” to a challenge or are afraid of not performing well and being chastised or humiliated. They often feel manipulated as they are held hostage because of that fear.

Dominators tend to see their agendas or visions as paramount, and everyone else in the sphere of that agenda or vision is viewed as a servant. The Dominators are the generals and all others are foot soldiers. Ironically, churches of this type often generate impressive statistics that, when viewed from afar, don’t portray the dysfunctional inner workings of the church. This is the result of strong alignment in a singular direction, the direction that the Dominator has established. This pseudo-unity can seemingly be very productive for a season, but, inevitably, there will be a collapse. For such a church to forge a productive future, leaders must overcome the Dominator leadership style, which often means overcoming a dominating senior pastor or other highly influential leader. Needless to say, this is a rough road that, in the case of a Pastor Dominator, will typically require that pastor’s exit.

Quadrant 1 features a leadership style that carries the descriptive title, Protector. The Protector style protects or guards or shields, and is characterized by High Support but Low Challenge. In the case of local church ministry, from what is the congregation being protected? Folks are being protected, guarded, or shielded from High Challenge, in other words, from responsibility. There is a concern among protective leaders that expecting too much of their congregations will result in decreased attendance as well as slowing the pace of newcomers plugging in. So, a small core of the truly committed take on all the responsibility, all the challenge, and provide stellar support for everyone else. Initially, this creates a culture of entitlement, as rank and file attendees get the benefit of High Support without the responsibility of High Challenge.

As the church grows, however, it becomes more and more difficult for that small core to carry the load of high support. To achieve a better balance by moving away from this 95/5 application of the 80/20 principle, high support beneficiaries begin to be challenged to step up and carry their fair share. Culture can begin to shift at this point from entitlement to mistrust. Entitlement is now being violated by the challenge to serve. This can be perceived as a classic bait and switch scenario. Benefits that used to be there with no apparent strings attached are seen to have strings after all. For such a church to forge a sustainable future, it must intentionally make the journey from Low Challenge to High Challenge while maintaining High Support, a formidable challenge in and of itself.

At last, we come to Quadrant 2 that features a leadership style that carries the descriptive title, Liberator. Obviously, this is the quadrant we need to live in, providing people with both High Support and High Challenge. GiANT WORLDWIDE promotes the phrase, “Become a leader worth following; become a liberating leader.” Of course, people need and want High Support, but the truth is, people also need and want High Challenge, even if they don’t know it. They want to have a role in something important, something bigger than themselves. The church can provide that, joining Jesus in His mission to seek and save the lost and developing true worshipers. The local church is in the perfect position to offer High Support with High Challenge in an enterprise that stretches into eternity.

The culture that emanates from leaders that liberate is a culture of empowerment where people have the opportunity to level up to their maximum potential while being fully supported in their efforts. This is a culture of true unity and alignment with an ALL-IN mindset. The objective for a church that currently operates in Quadrant 2 is to work intentionally to sustain the ministry of the Liberator. Over time, both internal and external forces will surface that could derail such sustainability and move the church toward a different quadrant. It’s up to Liberating leaders to tend and nurture High Support with High Challenge to maintain a healthy ministry edge.

Another relevant construct in the GiANT playbook is called the POWER TEST. The GiANT formula is POWER X HUMILITY = TRUE INFLUENCE. In the ministry setting, I prefer to use the concept of AUTHORITY in place of POWER. So, the formula would be AUTHORITY X HUMILITY = TRUE INFLUENCE. When a staff member or a ministry leader is looking toward the pastor, he or she is wondering, “Are you for me? Are you against me? Are you for yourself?” Sure, we’d all like to think that the dynamics of human frailty are not at work in the case of church staff or leaders, and that everyone is always loving, kind, forgiving, humble, responsible, and honest. But remember, people always act like people, and it doesn’t take long after interacting with staff or leaders up close for the first time that chinks in the armor start to become visible. This is not an indictment but an observation. Staff and leaders should give pastors their trust and the benefit of the doubt, but there will always be some wariness, and the wise pastor understands that dynamic.

Pastors and other senior church leaders must prove themselves in terms of how they leverage their authority. Connecting the dots, here, one way to gain godly influence is by serving as a Liberator, a leader that provides both high support and high challenge. Combining the leadership style of the Liberator with proper leveraging of Authority X Humility will, indeed, foster true influence. Note that in the church, the intent of a pastor or leader who wields such influence is to be a godly leader, a biblical leader who properly represents God’s interests.

**Types of Authority**: There are four fundamental types of authority. A well-rounded pastor or leader will operate in two or more of these types, and I suggest that each be considered an area to be developed to its maximum capacity in a given pastor or leader.

**1.** **Positional Authority** is authority based on the hierarchy of an organization or a church. Authority is held by virtue of the placement of a given position on the organizational chart. The most extreme form of positional authority would be a coercive enterprise such as the military with its chain of command. The major has more authority than the captain who has more authority that the lieutenant and so on. The assumption is that experience and expertise accompany the rise to higher and higher levels of positional authority, but, often, that assumption is faulty. However, experienced or not, expert or not, when someone holds positional authority that authority will be respected.

In the evangelical church, we understand that Jesus Christ is the head of the church and rightly so, but, in terms of mere mortals, the senior or solo pastor holds a position of authority, as do officers such as elders or deacons, and, perhaps, department or ministry heads, etc. It’s reasonable and appropriate for a positional leader to leverage positional authority, but note that, of the four types of authority we will consider, positional authority, by itself, is the weakest form of authority in terms of effectiveness with those who serve under that authority.

**2. Expert Authority** is authority based on a person’s expertise in a certain discipline. Such people are known in the marketplace as SMEs (Subject Matter Experts). Sometimes SMEs work or serve inside of a church or organization on staff or under contract, while other times SMEs are brought in from outside, usually in the form of consultants or, perhaps, as speakers or trainers at conferences. There is, of course, a certain degree of subject matter expertise that any positional leader is expected to possess. He or she would not have been selected for a given position otherwise. Generally speaking, inside positional leaders have to operate in multiple fields, though most will have a specialty area or two where they possess high level expertise and might qualify as SMEs.

A question to ask is, “How does one become a Subject Matter Expert, a SME?” Many years ago, when I was in seminary working toward a Master of Divinity degree, I had the joy and privilege to study under Dr. Roger Nicole, noted French theologian and professor. He was a man of great faith and brilliance who could run with the world’s top theologians, but he was also a very warm and practical man. I distinctly remember one class session when he advised us that, as pastors, we would be similar to General Practitioners in the medical field. We’d work with all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances, so we would need to be able to do a little bit of everything. However, he encouraged us, perhaps even exhorted us, to find one particular ministry area of strong interest and calling to pursue deeply and, in essence, become a Subject Matter Expert in that particular ministry area. For me, that has become the field of church revitalization.

The development of SME capability incorporates many elements. On the nature side, there are personal wiring and natural tendencies that guide or lean someone in a particular direction. To some degree, there are circumstances that one is placed in that can tip toward one discipline or another. On the nurture side, there is study and application that begins to develop experience. Experience leads to more study and application that develops more experience. Dr. Steven Childers introduced me to the term *Reflective Practitioner* during my years of study toward a Doctor of Ministry degree. He encouraged us to become Reflective Practitioners, meaning that we would be active on the field of ministry as practitioners, but that we would stop to think through all that we experience in reflection. I would say that the Subject Matter Expert is, indeed, a Reflective Practitioner, up to the elbows in real ministry, but deep in study and reflection in order to understand fully why things work or turn out the way they do. There is no substitute for experience and there is no better complement to experience than study and reflection.

**3. Relational Authority** is authority based on personal relationships. Perhaps you’ve heard the expression, “People won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Effectively exercising authority with a person or a group of people is greatly enhanced when that person or those people know that this authoritative person in their lives really cares about them. To be candid, I struggle in this area. It’s not that I don’t care about people; it’s that I tend to be rather undemonstrative and I can give off the impression of being aloof or disinterested. Over the years I’ve had occasion to complete the D.I.S.C. Profile as well as Myers-Briggs and other assessments, and the findings always indicate that, among other attributes or characteristics, my wiring is *results oriented*. As such, I have to work hard with people so that they know I care about them and not just the project objective.

GiANT Worldwide has a shorthand construct that captures this dynamic – INTERESTED *before* INTERESTING. You must show that you are interested in people before they are going to be interested in what you have to offer. In other words, build solid relationships with people, based upon their needs and interests, and you will find that they are much more responsive to your authority in their lives. Having authority *over* them positionally will not get you nearly as far with them as having authority *with* them relationally. Add your subject matter expertise to the mix where appropriate, and you really have something to build on.

**4. Spiritual Authority** is based on the perception that others have of you in terms of your being a true man or woman of God, a person of strong conviction, well-versed in Scripture and theology, reflecting the fruit of the Spirit. The list could go on and on but, perhaps, a bottom line could be that you are a person of faith who truly lives that faith and is completely safe and trustworthy. As such, your authoritative interplay with them is first and foremost as a brother or sister in Christ, and you have their best interests at heart even as you work with them toward larger objectives.

How is spiritual authority developed and established? An entire book could be written in answer to this question, but I’m going to make it simple. First, a leader that exhibits true spiritual authority is a person of the Word. Second, a leader that exhibits true spiritual authority is a person of prayer. Third, a leader that exhibits true spiritual authority is a person who provides high support for the people he or she leads. Fourth, a leader that exhibits true spiritual authority is a person who provides high challenge for those people. I refer to these four mandates as Four Leadership Dynamics for Greater Church Vitality in my church revitalization curriculum – the Ministry of the Word & Prayer plus the Ministry of Leading with High Support & High Challenge. They form a foundation for spiritual authority.

Working with staff and leaders effectively requires establishing a foundation of positional authority, expert authority, relational authority, and spiritual authority. No one person will possess high levels of all four, but some level in each of the four coupled with steady improvement will create greater effectiveness. All four in combination create a best-case scenario.

**5.2 Spiritual Development**: One of the top leadership priorities of a Great Commission pastor is the spiritual development of those being led. As they develop spiritually, the impact of the Great Commission in and through them will move the church toward Great Commission ministry. Of course, there are many pathways that might be taken in developing staff and leaders spiritually. At the GO Center, our approach to spiritual development is rooted in the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church.

These four disciplines are meant to be embraced both individually and corporately at any and all levels of ministry, from individuals to ministry teams to small groups to committees to task forces all the way to entire congregations. We recognize that other disciplines are important and might be candidates for inclusion in such a designation, but with a view toward keeping things simple and aligned, we have settled on a baseline of these four.

**Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church**:

**Discipline 1: Preemptive Prayer** – A Great Commission Church is a praying church. The methodology that we enlist in the GO Center might be thought of as a ship outfitted with a set of sails. This vessel might be wonderful in terms of its design and structure, and those who man this vessel might have a glorious sense of destination and a map that clearly shows how to get there, but without the power of the wind, this magnificent vessel isn’t going anywhere. The power of the wind that fills those sails and moves the ship toward its desired destination is the power of prayer, the power of Preemptive Prayer as its taps into the power of the Holy Spirit. Consider this description from Acts 2, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all gathered in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting,” (Acts 2:1-2). That mighty rushing wind is still coming from heaven as it moves the Gospel into the harvest where the souls of the lost are gathered.

Every true Christian and every true Christian church are already engaged in prayer to some extent, and we’re not implying otherwise. Our focus is on highlighting the primacy of prayer that is utilized in a particular manner. Prayer is to be utilized preemptively. Meaning what? Meaning that prayer is not a last resort, as is often the reality, but prayer is the first resort. Consider the wordplay of preeminence, preeminent, and preemptive. Preeminence is about superiority as in the preeminence or supremacy of Christ. Preeminence is about putting first things first and, in this case, prayer comes first, it is preeminent. Tie this idea of superiority and supremacy to being first in line, anticipatory, before the fact, event, action, or element that follows. This brings us to the discipline of Preemptive Prayer. Prayer is first in line, it’s preeminent, preceding whatever follows. For example, if a meeting is to be held to discern God’s missional vision or to develop strategic plans, leaders in a Great Commission Church pray first. If an event is scheduled in an effort to connect with the people of the harvest, leaders in a Great Commission Church pray first. Again, prayer is the first resort, the spiritual wind in the strategic sails. It preempts all that is to follow in fulfilling God’s vision to go and make disciples.

**Discipline 2: Basic Bible** – A Great Commission Church is a church of the Word. The Great Commission, of course, is part of the Word of God and it addresses the Word of God. In the Great Commission Jesus instructs His disciples, then and now, to teach His new and growing disciples to observe or obey all that He has commanded them (Matthew 28:20). The commands of Christ are the Word of God. Jesus is the Living Word. To follow Christ is to follow His Word; all of His Word. At the GO Center, we refer to this Word in its entirety as Basic Bible.

Here’s the challenge: we have observed that in the 21st century church, even regular church attenders seem to lack a comprehensive knowledge of the Word and lack a true conviction that the Word of God is authoritative in all matters of faith and practice, in all matters of belief and behavior. Knowledge is spotty and the content of Scripture, such as the commands of Christ, seem to be viewed as a matter of personal option. The Lordship of Christ, then, is set aside in favor of the lordship of self or of peers or of culture in general.

Scripture is our most reliable guide, our compass in navigating the dangerous terrain of life. Revitalization demands a return to Basic Bible as our source of truth.

**Discipline 3: Cost Commitment** – A Great Commission Church is a sacrificially committed church. The tendency today is to lower the bar of commitment for church-goers in that hope that they will remain church-goers. With the competing demands on people’s time, and the increasing options people have for differing worldviews, philosophies and faiths, there is often a fear among church leaders that if we raise the bar too high that we will drive people away. Consequently, we tend to soft-pedal the commitment that we are called to as followers of Christ to make church engagement comfortable and easy.

Perhaps you’ve heard the expression, “Ask for a high commitment and you get a high commitment. Ask for a low commitment and you get no commitment.” As far as I know that’s not in the Bible, but it does resonate with, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap,” (Galatians 6:7). What are we sowing in terms of the commitment we are placing before people concerning their relationship with and obedience to Jesus Christ? He speaks of sacrifice when He says, “Do not think I have come to being peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,” (Matthew 10:34-39). Wow! Does that sound like a low bar commitment? I think not.

So, what’s the point? The point is that we, as pastors and church leaders, must help people realize that the bar for following Christ is truly set very high and that the cost of following Christ is a very high cost. We do no one a favor by allowing him or her to think that following after Christ is without cost. Yes, we don’t earn our salvation by paying a cost. Jesus paid it all, as the hymn exclaims. But there is a very high, sacrificial cost to being a true disciple of Christ, our King of kings and Lord of lords. A Great Commission Church is filled with people who are willing to make that investment.

**Discipline 4: Missional Multiplication** – A Great Commission Church is a multiplying church. The original covenantal decree, found in Genesis 1, was to be fruitful and multiply. In the end, as seen in Revelation 7, the Apostle John envisions a multitude, too numerous to count. The movement from the multiply of Genesis to the multitude of Revelation is a movement of multiplication, a movement of the Holy Spirit, working through the people of God, to gather the plentiful harvest as the Son of Man seeks and saves the lost (Luke 19:10).

Missional Multiplication is the natural outcome of congregations that are truly committed to going in the authority of Christ to make disciples and grow them in their faith. Numerical growth is not an objective or target per se, but it’s the logical, spiritual consequence that manifests when a congregation makes laboring in the harvest a strategic ministry priority. My observation is that most churches acknowledge the need and desire to reach people in the harvest with the Gospel, but few make doing so a ministry priority. A Great Commission Church truly does.

To move from intent to spiritual development strategy, consider these two questions:

How is the impact of the Great Commission **in** disciples developed?

How is the impact of the Great Commission **through** disciples developed?

The collective strength and power of a congregation that is growing in the disciplines of Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment, and Missional Multiplication is a force that effectively promotes the Gospel in the harvest and that effectively fosters spiritual development in that congregation. The greatest spiritual development within a congregation doesn’t occur as preparation for laboring in the harvest, but takes place *through* laboring in the harvest. A congregation receives as it gives itself away through ever-increasing commitment to the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church. We reap what we sow.

Working with staff and leaders effectively centers on establishing a core of spiritual development among staff and leaders, captured in essence in the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church, disciplines that must be embraced by staff and leaders before they can be fully embraced by a congregation.

**5.3 Strong Relationships** – Relationships require investment in people, not just in terms of what they do for the church but in terms of who they are and what’s important to them. These investments, though labor intensive at times, pay rich dividends over time. Think of Jesus and His investment in His disciples, and note His R.O.I., His Return on Investment.

What are the elements of relational investment in people? To answer this question, I want to begin by recalling several elements that we’ve already covered as follows:

1. The Liberator – In our discussion of Spiritual Authority, I introduced the SUPPORT/CHALLENGE MATRIX from GiANT Worldwide. We noted that the Liberator leadership style provides people with high support and high challenge, recognizing that Jesus provided His disciples with very high support while presenting them with very high challenge. The GiANT tag line is, “Become a leader worth following,” or, “Become a liberating leader.” Though we looked at this matrix in the context of leadership, we can also apply its dynamics to building strong relationships in working with staff and other leaders. When you provide people with high support while presenting them with high challenge, you will build strong relationships.

2. Interested before Interesting – Another GiANT construct, as previously noted, is “Interested before Interesting.” Leveraging positional authority to coerce people into being “interested” in what you have to say is the antithesis of building strong relationships. Showing a genuine interest in them; who they are, how they function, how they perceive their roles, what they see as top priorities, are among the keys to building strong relationships. One outcome of such strong relationships is their reciprocal interest in you. As a leader, you must be decisive and direction-setting, and you must mobilize those who work with you or for you to follow your lead but drawing that mobilization out of strong relationships will take you, them, and your church much further in the desired direction than simply spouting orders.

3. Managing Ministry Time – Skill #4 is Managing Ministry Time. We’ve already covered that in depth, and I won’t repeat that content here. However, I do want to point out two aspects of Managing Ministry Time that tie into working with staff and leaders. First, you cannot build strong relationships with people without investing time in them, so, infuse relationship-building time into your time management system. Don’t try to wing it or build strong relationships incidentally. Consider building strong relationships among your strategic priorities and intentionally invest the time. Second, when you do invest the time it takes to build strong relationships, that time will be rewarded in ministry outcomes that, in the long run, will be time invested that reaps strong dividends, i.e., time well spent.

**Single-Cell & Multi-Cell Churches**

An important distinction in local church ministry is the distinction between a single-cell church and a multi-cell church. Every church is one or the other, and this distinction will impact the building of strong relationships. A single-cell church is a church where a solo pastor will be the personal pastor to everyone in the church. Most American evangelical churches are single-cell churches, and most American evangelical pastors are solo pastors. A multi-cell church is a church where a senior pastor will NOT be the personal pastor to everyone in the church. The senior pastor will be the personal pastor to staff and leaders in the church, and these staffers and leaders will be pastors to sub-sets, or cells, within the congregation. It’s not quite that black and white but I think you’ll track with the primary distinction.

It’s my view that clarity regarding this distinction needs to be established very early in a church’s life cycle, whether that life cycle begins with the planting of a new church or with a holistic revitalization of an established church. Consider this: The size of a congregation does not determine whether a church is single-cell or multi-cell. Rather, the decision to be single-cell or multi-cell will determine the size of a congregation, or, at least, the potential size of a congregation.

I don’t want to dive too deeply into this distinction in this writing because the context on hand is strong relationships, but I do want to go deeply enough to explain the implications of this distinction in regard to strong relationships. Admittedly, many, perhaps most, pastors are not keenly aware of the single-cell vs. multi-cell distinction as they enter a call. When a call is issued, the church simply is a church of a certain size, and the size of the church dictates whether it’s functioning as a single-cell or multi-cell church. I believe this to be a mistake. Cell distinction should be a strategic choice and not simply the by-product of whatever size a church happens to be when a new pastor enters the scene.

What’s at stake here? At stake is the potential growth of a particular church, and the manner in which that church will likely multiply. The local growth of a single-cell church led by a solo pastor is limited to the personal ministry capacity of that pastor. On average, a solo pastor can handle somewhere between approximately 75 and 150 people, depending on that pastor’s individual capacity. Whenever the numerical growth of a congregation begins to approach the peak of that pastor’s capacity, growth will taper off. How, then, would such a church continue to multiply? Such a church would need to mobilize some of its peak congregation as the core of a new congregation, sending those folks off with, more than likely, another solo pastor/planter who would then start a new church not too far away geographically. In this model, there is unlimited growth potential in aggregate as single-cell churches produce single-cell churches again and again. This is a very effective and practical model, based on creating a network of single-cell churches led by solo pastors. The challenge, though, is that most single-cell churches don’t embrace this model. Rather, they are small simply because they have few people and are more likely to be declining than growing.

The local growth of a multi-cell church led by a senior pastor is unlimited. In this model, as numerical growth reaches certain growth thresholds, additional staff or lay leaders are mobilized, allowing for numerical growth to continue. Again, the senior pastor is personal pastor to staff and leaders, and they are pastors to the sub-set cells of the congregation. The upside to this model is that the local church can continue to grow without hitting a ceiling. The downside is that, as such churches get larger and larger, they tend to become more and more focused on themselves and lose the vision for sending people out to start new churches, if such a vision existed in the first place.

The bottom line is that there are pros and cons to each model. So, what has this got to do with strong relationships? Simple: the church that is envisioning being and remaining a single-cell church needs a solo pastor who invests in each and every person in an effort to build strong relationships with all, especially, but not limited to, staff and leaders. Every one in the congregation will feel the force of the quality of relationship with that solo pastor. On the flip side, the church that is envisioning being a multi-cell church needs a senior pastor who DOES NOT invest in each and every person, even when the congregation is small, but who invests in staff and leaders while creating a culture where the folks in the general congregation look to these staffers and leaders for pastoral care and hence, pastoral relationships.

Working with staff and leaders effectively blossoms through strong relationships between those who lead and those who are led, and the responsibility for building those strong relationships falls first and foremost on those leaders.

**5.4 Ministry Clarity** – Emphasis on ministry by programs often leads to programming “silos” in a church. Program staff and leaders are largely left to cover their respective ministry programs independent of a well-defined, unifying core mission. The Great Commission pastor unifies all ministries of the church around the core mission of going in the authority of Jesus Christ to make disciples through evangelizing and teaching obedience to the commands of Christ through discipleship.

For a church to be effective as a Great Commission Church, two dynamics must be present: 1. The all-church ministry must have unmistakable ministry clarity, such that all ministries within the church are clear on their mission priority, and, 2. The ministry clarity of all-church ministry must be centered on the Great Commission, such that all ministries within the church are clear on the fact that their mission priority is the Great Commission. When ministry clarity is firmly established, and that ministry clarity is centered on the Great Commission, staff and leaders are poised to expand the ministry of the church and the impact of the church in growing the kingdom. As such, Great Commission ministry clarity is a critical element in working effectively with staff and leaders.

I’m going to assume that you, as a pastor or leader of a church that is striving to be a Great Commission Church, are already committed to the Great Commission, so I’m not going to spend any time here promoting the merits of the Great Commission. This section focuses on establishing ministry clarity, and we’re going to assume that the ministry clarity we speak of here is Great Commission ministry clarity.

With that said, let’s look at ministry clarity itself. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger have given us an insightful book titled, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples*. In this book, they outline a discipleship process that features four elements: Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and Focus. In setting the stage for unpacking this process they state, “To have a simple church, you must design a simple discipleship process. This process must be clear. It must move people toward maturity. It must be fully integrated into your church, and you must get rid of the clutter around it,” (p. 26). Bingo!

Of course, our concern in this section is ministry clarity. Chapter 5 of *Simple Church* dives into clarity, assigning a tag line. The chapter title reads, “Clarity: Starting with a Ministry Blueprint.” We’re going to be building ministry around the Great Commission so the Great Commission will inform our vision, our strategy, and our organizational structure. We are building the spiritual house of God, one living stone at a time with Jesus as the cornerstone, as Peter informs in 1 Peter 2:4-8. We’re going to go in the authority of Christ and make disciples, we’re going to baptize and teach obedience, and He is going to be with us to the end of the age. Ministry clarity is going to provide a blueprint. I’d like to borrow from GiANT Worldwide once again, utilizing several of their leadership development constructs. These constructs will be helpful to you in your development as a leader and will be helpful to you in working with staff and leaders. Consider this Organizational Clarity diagram:

VISION/MISSION

Is it clear? Is it compelling?

VALUES

Do people know and live the values?

LEADERSHIP

Are roles and responsibilities clear at every level?

SIMPLE

STRATEGY SCALABLE STRUCTURE

How do we win? Do we have the right people,

systems, and capital?

SUSTAINABLE

TACTICS

© GiANT WORLDWIDE Do our people know what to do?

This Organizational Clarity diagram is a business model, but it easily transfers to a ministry application. I believe the diagram to be largely self-evident, so I’m not going to unpack all that’s included. Rather, I’m going to zero in on several features:

1. Strategy – *How do we win?* In other words, do we have a picture of what Great Commission success or effectiveness looks like? Do we have a sense of what outcomes we’re endeavoring to produce, what targets we’re aiming to hit? Ministry often operates without a clear understanding of what a win looks like, and it stands to reason that you can’t hit a target that you can’t see.

2. Structure – *Do we have the right people, systems, and capital?* Often, we approach mobilizing people for ministry through slot-filling, simply recruiting a dutiful soul who will fill a slot in our programming. Consequently, we end up with “wrong” people serving in ways that are unproductive and unfulfilling, ultimately leading to burn out. Systems are often carry-overs from 20th century programming that we have inherited without critical examination, and these conventional systems typically have nothing to do with the Great Commission. Capital in a church context might not have an obvious relevance to our discussion, but an examination of annual budgets and noting how financial and other resources are being distributed will indicate whether or not the Great Commission is in a position of priority.

3. Tactics – *Do our people know what to do?* What “our people” are we talking about here? First and foremost, we’re talking about our staff and leaders. Do they know what to do tactically? Have they been trained to conduct their respective ministries with Great Commission priority, and are they being evaluated according to that priority? Even as I write this, it occurs to me that the answer to these questions would be, “No,” but, upon further reflection, I think the answer in most churches would be, “What? What are you talking about?” This kind of thinking doesn’t even seem to be on the radar screen for most churches. Historical and conventional patterns typically shape tactical ministry, not Great Commission vision, values, strategies, and structures. Once staff and leaders are on board, the next “our people” is the congregation at large. If Great Commission organizational clarity is to prevail, that clarity must penetrate into all levels of participants, from senior staff and leaders throughout the entire congregation.

4. Simple, Scalable, Sustainable – Note the positioning of these three attributes down the center of the diagram. These attributes are outcomes that will be forthcoming when an enterprise has organizational clarity. The 4DX Model (*The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by McChesney, Covey, and Huling) describes such outcomes as “lag measures.” A lag measure, according to the 4DX Model, is an outcome that occurs as a result of executing an action designed to produce that outcome effectively. For example, in the church we might want to see our worship attendance increase, but concentrating on seeing worship numbers increase will not actually create that increase. A lead measure that might impact that number would be engaging with the community by presenting, say, educational seminars that are relevant to that community. In such a case, presenting seminars would be a lead measure while increased attendance would be a lag measure. It seems that most churches focus on lag measures, hoping for outcomes that have no catalyst, and then wonder why we aren’t seeing the desired outcomes.

Let’s get back to our diagram: Consider the lead measures of discerning a clear and compelling Great Commission vision or mission, building Great Commission values into your staff, leaders, and congregation, defining strategy through the lens of what a Great Commission win looks like, creating a Great Commission structure that puts the right people, systems, and resources in place, and training everyone in executing his or her Great Commission tactical roles with effectiveness. These are your lead measures. When you do so, Simple, Scalable, and Sustainable will be among your lag measures, will be among your outcomes. Ministry will be Simple, a la *Simple Church* by Rainer and Geiger. Ministry will be Scalable, i.e., easy to expand as numbers increase. Ministry will be Sustainable because the ministry blueprint is clear and the focus will remain a Great Commission focus, propelling the church again and again into the harvest, the catalyst for kingdom growth.

Ministry Clarity is one of the elements that contributes to creating healthy culture, and moving a church to a priority commitment to the Great Commission will likely entail changing that church’s culture. The Organizational Clarity diagram outlines a methodology for establishing ministry clarity which is foundational to creating healthy culture. GiANT also offers a snapshot of creating healthy culture in a broader sense with its Creating Healthy Culture diagram as follows:

VOCABULARY

Expressed In

VISUAL TOOLS

Creates

LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE

Impacts

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

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Stated in simple narrative, Vocabulary, or a common nomenclature, expressed in iconic Visual Tools creates a Leadership Language that impacts Leadership Culture. Over the twenty-five plus years that I have been engaged in revitalization ministry utilizing original curriculum, I have frequently heard pastors or church leaders comment on the fact that GO Center training gave them a language with which to talk about revitalization, or that I had provided a language that labeled thoughts that they had considered before but we unable to verbalize. This simple formula of Vocabulary + Visual Tools = Leadership Language that matures into Leadership Culture is, indeed, a baseline for creating a healthy culture.

Why is culture so important? Why do we need to think and talk about it? In short, consider this oft stated truth: *Culture Trumps Strategy*. There is a phrase circulating in the business world, mostly, it seems, attributed to business guru, Peter Drucker, that goes like this: *Culture Eats Strategy for Lunch!* What’s that all about? When a person, a group, a team, a task force, a committee, a department, or an entire organization seeks to revitalize, they, by definition, must effect change. Change is always challenging because, as a rule, people are more comfortable with the status quo, even when it’s not working well. Effecting change in general will create a need for new strategies. People will realize the importance of new strategies and might even affirm those strategies at the outset. However, change in strategies alone is not sufficient. Rather, there must be a change in culture. Why?

When launching new strategies, it’s inevitable that there will be obstacles along the way. Not everything will work smoothly, not everything that is expected will come to fruition, and not everyone up and down the ladder of the enterprise will get on board, and there might even be open resistance. When strategies run into this wall, culture will take over. If the prevailing culture is still grounded in the former status quo, that culture will devour the new strategies, and the revitalization attempt will be thwarted. If, however, the culture has shifted to the new vision, mission, values, and structure, the new strategies with their new tactics will find support and will be allowed to go through their growing pains as they move toward maturity. Vocabulary, Visual Tools, and Leadership Language will combine to establish a Leadership Culture that will surround new strategies and tactics as they get their legs. Without this cultural shift, new efforts will give way, and there will be a return to the former status quo.

Working with staff and leaders effectively demands ministry clarity, and ministry clarity is greatly supported by organizational clarity and the creation of a healthy culture that is founded on credible Great Commission vision, mission, values, strategy, and structure.

**5.5 Role Clarity** – Focusing outward on reaching a community with the Gospel creates a ministry environment that is often not as neat and tidy as that of an inward facing, program-driven church. It’s helpful to have roles among staff and leaders clearly defined with regular evaluations and accountability. Previously, we mentioned that a program focus to ministry often leads to the development of ministry silos where each ministry stays bounded within itself without a sense of its context in the larger picture of a church’s ministry. As such, the roles of leaders might be clear, but only in terms of operating inward ministries that serve a congregation independently of other ministries. Though that might qualify as a type of role clarity, it’s role clarity that is misplaced. Our concern is role clarity within the context of Great Commission ministry.

While it’s true that staff and leaders will have their unique areas of responsibility, each staffer or leader will also have a role or responsibility to the vision and mission at large, the common Great Commission mission that threads through every ministry of the church. This can be accomplished through the application of strategic ministry through the Great Commission Matrix. The backdrop to the Great Commission Matrix is a shift in ministry perspective. The conventional approach to ministry asks the question, “How do we minister TO the congregation?” The Great Commission Matrix approach to ministry asks the question, “How do we minister THROUGH the congregation to reach a community with the Gospel?” The shift from TO to THROUGH is a dramatic shift with huge implications for role clarity. Consider the following diagram:

The Great Commission Matrix

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | MIN  1 | MIN  2 | MIN  3 | MIN  4 | MIN  5 | MIN  6 |
| DISC  Disciples! | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 |
| EVAN  Make! | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 |
| OUTR  GO! | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 | Strategy 1  Strategy 2  Strategy 3 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Seeking the Lost & Seeking True Worshipers

Matthew 9:35-38 – The **Gathering** of the Saints: Noun & Verb

Mt 28:16-20

Luke 19:10

John 4:23

Rom. 12:1-2

I have fully unpacked the Great Commission Matrix in other documents such as *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*, so I’m not going to go into a full explanation of the matrix here. Rather, I’ll unpack as much as necessary to speak to role clarity.

Note that the matrix is formed by connecting a vertical axis with a horizontal axis. The horizontal axis contains a series of columns that represent the various ministry areas or program areas of the church. The vertical axis displays three rows that contain three missional ministry movements in the church. A movement is distinct from a ministry area or program in that it’s a thread that weaves through every ministry area of the church and is not simply one more entry on a list or menu of ministries or programs. From the bottom up, the three are Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship.

Outreach and Evangelism are not synonymous, though in some ministry circles they are treated as such. The GO Center makes a clear distinction between the two. Outreach is when people from inside the church connect with people outside the church to form sustainable relationships. The objective of Outreach is sustainable relationships. Evangelism is when people who are outside of the Christian faith are connected with a clear explanation of the Gospel. Many times, the opportunity to engage with Evangelism grows out of relationships built through Outreach, so they are very much related, but they are two distinctly different elements. Discipleship is the spiritual development of people who have come to faith through Evangelism. Obviously, Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship are closely related and, according to the Great Commission Matrix, are to be engaged in every ministry area of the church. Every ministry area develops the capacity to implement Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship and, consequently, every ministry area moves out from the church to minister in the harvest.

This unique perspective speaks strongly into role clarity of staff and leaders. Each staffer or leader, regardless of his or her unique assignment within a particular ministry area, will be active in Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship. That common action, that grows out of a common Great Commission vision and mission, impacts how staff and leader roles are defined. For example, a staffer or leader who serves in the area of, say, youth ministry, will, of course, concentrate his or her leadership on youth ministry, but that leadership will mobilize through the movements of Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship within the context of youth ministry. The big idea of the Great Commission Matrix is that ALL ministries will similarly mobilize.

Another of my resources that speaks to role clarity is the *Leadership Ladder: Developing Missional Leaders in the Church*. This resource, co-authored with Dr. Steven Ogne, is complemented by a workbook and is organized by two rails and six rungs of a ladder as follows:

Rail 1: Building Biblical Knowledge

Rail 2: Building Biblical Character

Rung 1: Living Missionally

Rung 2: Making Disciples

Rung 3: Mobilizing Ministry

Rung 4: Leading Ministry

Rung 5: Leading Leaders

Rung 6: Planting Churches

The church that clarifies staff and leader roles in accordance with Great Commission vision, mission, values, strategies, and structures, and that leverages such Great Commission tools such as the Great Commission Matrix and the Leadership Ladder, positions itself well for effectiveness in the harvest. This effectiveness is made sustainable through the use of regular evaluation and accountability. Church ministry often fails in this regard, not keeping a regular finger on the pulse of missional ministry and not holding staff and leaders accountable for faithfulness to role design and its prescribed objectives. Infusing regular evaluation and holding staff and leaders accountable for staying on course will support and solidify Great Commission effectiveness.

Working with staff and leaders effectively demands role clarity combined with regular evaluation and accountability to ensure that Great Commission focus is maintained.

**5.6 Healthy Communication** – Much of the conflict in a church comes from poor communication, miscommunication, or lack of communication, and a conflicted church cannot effectively reach a lost community. There are many facets to healthy communication but two stand out in my experience as paramount: Make No Assumptions and Go Directly to the Source. We’ll take a look at these two here.

**Make No Assumptions**:

Assumptions frequently lead to misunderstanding which is the antithesis of healthy communication. The previous two sections dealt with clarity; ministry clarity and role clarity. One way of thinking about clarity is that clarity leaves no room for assumptions. No two human beings ever see the same thing in exactly the same way, so when we operate on assumption, and fail to acquire clarity, we are bound to have miscommunication or poor communication. As I’m writing this, I’m realizing that the flip side of Make No Assumptions is Always Get Clarity. If you are the one providing the communication, that would suggest Always Provide Clarity. Healthy communication is clear and precise, so, if you’re on the end of providing communication, Always Provide Clarity, and if you’re on the end of receiving communication, Always Get Clarity. Make No Assumptions!

The terrain of assumption expands when there is a lack of communication. When communication is not forthcoming in a timely fashion, would be receptors of communication are left to figure it out for themselves, to fill in the blanks, i.e., to make assumptions. Guess what? No one can read your mind, and what might seem obvious to you might not be so obvious to the person that needs your communication. We’re back to the dynamic of Make No Assumptions.

Think of it this way: if you fail to communicate, clearly and precisely, you’re forcing your would-be recipient to assume or guess. Typically, in such cases, there is only one correct assumption or guess, while there is a myriad of incorrect assumptions or guesses. Do the math! The chances of your recipient making a wrong assumption is far greater than his or her making a right assumption. A lack of communication leads to miscommunication which is poor communication, and this lack blocks or erodes your ability to work effectively with staff and leaders. They are left to wonder and wander in the dark, hoping to guess rightly as they make assumptions.

**Go to the Source**:

Another facet of communication that is rife with poor communication concerns hearsay or even gossip. An alternate description might be “third-party” communication. As communication passes from person to person, something gets lost in translation and that something has to do with perspective, clarity, language, and even truth. I once was told that every communication has at least six elements: 1. what you meant to say, 2. what you thought you said, 3. what you actually said, 4. what your listener actually heard, 5. what your listener thought he heard, and 6. what your listener wanted to hear. Let’s just say that communication between two people can be complicated. This complication increases exponentially when you add a third, fourth, or fifth party. So, bottom line, when conflict in communication arises, the wise person will go to the original source to get to the root of the real and true communication.

In recent years, a communications trend has surfaced that centers on the use of candor. This stems from the observation that candor is often in short supply in interpersonal communication when safety and trust are in question. In *Creativity, Inc.,* Ed Catmull writes, “There is no doubt that our decision-making is better if we are able to draw on the collective knowledge and unvarnished opinions of the group. But as valuable as the information is that comes from honesty and as loudly as we proclaim its importance, our own fears and instincts for self-preservation often cause us to hold back,” (*Creativity, Inc*: Catmull, p. 85). I served in a ministry for a season that wasn’t a safe place for truly sharing “unvarnished opinions,” and candor was off the table in favor of carefully guarding what I said, when I said it, and to whom I said it. Communication in this context was very unhealthy.

Kim Scott, in her book, *Radical Candor*, adds, “The key to getting everyone used to being direct when challenging each other (and you!) is emphasizing that it’s necessary to communicate clearly enough so that there’s no room for interpretation, but also *humbly*. I chose ‘candor’ instead of ‘honesty’ because there’s not much humility in believing that you know the truth. Implicit with candor is that you’re simply offering your view of what’s going on and that you expect people to offer theirs. If it turns out that you’re the one who got it wrong, you want to know. At least I *hope* you want to know,” (*Radical Candor*: Scott, p. 10).

In my thinking, candor fits well with the idea of Going to the Source because the bottom line that you are seeking is to get to the truth, the unvarnished or candid truth, and the best way to do that is to go to the source.

GiANT Worldwide, in its treatment of communication, speaks of *Provisional, Plan, and Promise*. They exhort communicators to make sure they have classified their communications in the appropriate category. A Provisional communication is one that is contingent; it includes an “if.” If certain conditions occur then I might do such and such – provisionally. A Plan communication carries a bit more weight as a statement that I am planning to do such and such, but, just because this is the plan doesn’t necessarily mean that it will come to fruition. A Promise communication is the strongest of all as a statement of promise or commitment that I will, in fact, do such and such. The problem, of course, is when folks are not clear on the category, e.g., if I make a statement that I consider provisional, and my recipient takes it as a statement of promise, there will likely be problems down the line. So, we’re back to clarity and making no assumptions. Be absolutely clear as to whether your statement is a Provisional statement, a Plan statement, or a Promise statement.

Finally, here’s a communication tip from Chip Heath and Dan Heath from their book on communication, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.* As mentioned previously, in this book, the Heath brothers speak of six key qualities of an idea that is made to stick. This is their way of describing effective communication. The six qualities are:

Simplicity

Unexpectedness

Concreteness

Credibility

Emotional

Stories

Perhaps you noticed that S-U-C-C-E-S almost spells SUCCESS. Despite omitting an “S,” it’s a great book on communication that I highly recommend. Putting all six together might go like this: Present your idea as a Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, and Emotional Story. This formula also works well as a methodology for Vision Casting because it’s a recipe for memorability, i.e., stickiness.

Working with staff and leaders effectively must include a solid platform of healthy communication that eliminates assumptions and that seeks out the source in the event of conflict or simple misunderstanding. Candor should be elevated to a position of high value with statements clearly categorized as Provisional, Plan, or Promise.

**A Working with Staff & Leaders Compilation:**

**5.1 Spiritual Authority**: Working with staff and leaders effectively requires establishing a foundation of positional authority, expert authority, relational authority, and spiritual authority. All four in combination create a best-case scenario.

**5.2 Spiritual Development**: Working with staff and leaders effectively centers on establishing a core of spiritual development among staff and leaders, captured in essence in the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church, disciplines that must be embraced by staff and leaders before they can be fully embraced by a congregation.

**5.3 Strong Relationships**: Working with staff and leaders effectively blossoms through strong relationships between those who lead and those who are led, and the responsibility for building those strong relationships falls first and foremost on those who lead.

**5.4 Ministry Clarity**: Working with staff and leaders effectively demands ministry clarity, and ministry clarity is greatly supported by organizational clarity and the creation of a healthy culture that is founded on credible Great Commission vision, mission, values, strategy, and structure.

**5.5 Role Clarity**: Working with staff and leaders effectively demands role clarity combined with regular evaluation and accountability to ensure that Great Commission focus is maintained.

**5.6 Healthy Communications**: Working with staff and leaders effectively must include a solid platform of healthy communication that eliminates assumptions and that seeks out the source in the event of conflict or simple misunderstanding. Candor should be elevated to a position of high value with statements clearly categorized as Provisional, Plan, or Promise statements.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 5: Working with Staff & Leaders

The objective of this workshop is to improve your effectiveness in working with staff and leaders by implementing the concepts covered under Skill 5.

**Spiritual Authority**: All four types of authority are valuable and have their place in a leader, but spiritual authority carries the greatest weight. Identify the ten most significant staff and leaders with whom you serve and determine what level of spiritual authority you carry with each from Very Weak to Weak to Neutral to Strong to Very Strong. Determine how you might grow in spiritual authority with each individually or with all in general, put those actions into practice, and track progress.

**Spiritual Development**: Determine how to strengthen the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church in yourself and in your key staff and leaders. Once you have identified the actions to be taken to do so, put those actions into practice and track progress.

**Strong Relationships**: As a primary leader, it’s your responsibility to develop strong relationships with those whom you lead. Identify two ways in which you might develop a stronger relationship with each of your key staff and leaders. Once they have been identified, put those actions into practice and track progress. Remember, the burden for strong relationships is on you.

**Ministry Clarity**: Starting with the foundation of Great Commission Vision, Mission, Values, Strategy, and Structure, begin to create a healthy culture among your key staff and leaders. Work to clarify a holistic perspective of Great Commission ministry and engage your key staff and leaders in clarifying their respective ministries to reflect the holistic ministry of the church at large. Finally, empower and enable them to move forward in their respective ministries by engaging the Great Commission Matrix as a primary strategic tool.

**Role Clarity**: Work with each of your key staff and leaders in developing role clarity for their respective leadership roles within the context of their respective ministries. This will create role clarity within ministry clarity and will foster Great Commission effectiveness.

**Healthy Communication**: Build the dynamics of Make No Assumptions and Go to the Source among your staff and leaders. Encourage candor through intentional effort, and leverage the clarity of using Provisional, Plan, and Promise statements.

*Congratulations! You are well on your way to working effectively in Great Commission Ministry with staff and leaders!*

**Skill 6: Leaving a Gospel Footprint**

This final skill, Leaving a Gospel Footprint, emerges from a transferrable concept that occurred to me a few years ago. Much has been said in recent years about a so-called carbon footprint. According to the Nature Conservancy ([www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)), “A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions. The average carbon footprint for a person in the United States is 16 tons.” A notion popped into my head, “What if we left a Gospel footprint wherever we go?” Using the quote from the Nature Conservancy as a template, we might end up with something such as this, “A Gospel footprint is the total amount of Gospel influence (including word, deed, attitude, behavior, etc.) that is generated by our actions.”

What do you suppose is the average Gospel footprint for an evangelical in the United States? I’m going to make an assumption and venture a guess, based on several decades of working with evangelical pastors, leaders, and congregations, that the average Gospel footprint for an evangelical in the U.S. is small, perhaps significantly small. I don’t have a metric or a means of measurement in this regard, but let’s just think about this in general terms. Consider these questions: What is the relationship between epidemic plateau and decline in the American evangelical church and the likelihood that the average Gospel footprint for an evangelical in the U.S. is small? What if, through prayerful vision, strategy, training, and implementation, this average Gospel footprint could be expanded by a factor of 2 or 5 or 10 or even 20? The Nature Conservancy is advocating for a decrease in the carbon footprint, but we’re going in the other direction, praying and working toward an exponential increase in the Gospel footprint. As Paul instructs and inspires in Ephesians 6, “Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace,” (Ephesians 6:14-15). Let’s get our Gospel shoes on and move into the harvest with a readiness given by the Gospel of peace, leaving Gospel footprints everywhere we go.

**6.1 Life WITH God**: To leave a Gospel footprint, pastors and leaders must make personal spiritual formation a priority. The truth is that you can’t take someone to a place you haven’t been or to a place you have been before but drifted away from since. If your calling and intention is to flood the harvest with the Gospel, you must be immersed in the Gospel yourself, right now, not way back when. One challenge for the evangelical Great Commission pastor or leader is to get so invested in the mission of reaching the community that the mission itself becomes an idol. The effective Great Commission pastor or leader will remain plugged into the vine (John 15), living life ***with*** God and not just a life ***for*** God.

At the GO Center, we feature an approach to revitalization that is built on two platforms: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. We highly recommend one book resource that connects with each of these platforms. Granted, many books might qualify to serve these roles, but it’s unproductive to overload leaders with too many resources, so we narrowed the field to one each. For Strategic Initiative we recommend *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger (mentioned earlier) and, for Spiritual Renewal, our selection is *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God* by Skye Jethani. Here’s a peek at *With*:

Wrong ways to relate to God:

Life *Under* God – win favor and control God by combining rituals and morality.

Life *Over* God – God, the watchmaker, wound the watch; we understand and control.

Life *From* God – we believe in a God who exists to satisfy our consumer desires.

Life *For* God – we live to accomplish his mission, however we define it, doing before being.

Right way to relate to God:

Life *With* God: The LIFE WITH GOD posture is at the core of the cosmos: God the Father with God the Son with God the Holy Spirit…God himself came to be with us – to walk with us once again as he had done in Eden in the beginning. Jesus entered into our dark existence to share our broken world and to illuminate a different way forward. His coming was a sudden and glorious catastrophe of good (*With*: Jethani. p. 101).

I’m not so sure about the use of word “catastrophe.” I might have gone with something such as “cataclysmic,” but I get it. The coming of Jesus changed everything and the key is to abide in Him because He is the vine and we are the branches (John 15, again). For the branch to live it must be connected to its source of nutrition, and that is the vine, Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and God the Son. Life WITH God, life WITH Jesus through the power and agency of God the Holy Spirit, is where the action is, and life WITH God is essential to church revitalization.

FYI: If you have or know of another book that serves this purpose and prefer to go with it, by all means do so, but, if we’re talking armor, *With* is my weapon of choice.

Here’s another question to consider: If your life is NOT with God in this abiding sense, who or what is your life with? You’re abiding in something or someone whether you realize it or not, and it might be good to identify what that something or who that someone is. What is influencing your life and ministry, and where is that influence coming from? What or who is feeding your mind, your heart, your soul, and what fruit is that influence producing? Remember: we’re focusing on leaving a Gospel footprint. Is the footprint you’re leaving a Gospel footprint or is it something else?

Let’s look at a couple of examples. Example 1: What’s influencing me? One strong influence in our culture today is, well, our culture. It seems that the slippery slope of ethics, morality, sexuality, and values in general that our culture tiptoed onto back in the 60s and 70s is now a full-scale avalanche. Its presence is virtually inescapable and, like moving water, is bound to erode even the strongest rocks. What was unthinkable not that long ago has passed through being permissible to being prevalent and is now vying to be the norm. Let’s call that a secular culture footprint. To what degree are those footprints influencing and impacting you? Is there still a defined black and white in your worldview or is more and more disappearing into the gray?

Example 2: How are you influencing others? Consider your life outside of typical church involvement, life in the community, life in the harvest. Is the Gospel being seen in you as you move through your day, week, month, year? Are you leaving Gospel footprints? To be clear, I’m not talking about pounding people with your Bible and leaving Gospel bruises in the community. I’m talking about your mindset in your interaction with people, your prayer preparation for whom you might engage on a given day, your providential availability to be used by God in various ways to bring light into darkness.

OK – let me run a risk here and dive a little deeper into this idea of providential availability. What exactly is providence? I’m going to lean on Dr. Wayne Grudem for a reasonably tight working definition. In his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, he writes:

We may define God’s providence as follows: God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes…Under the general category of providence we have three subtopics, according to the three elements in the definition above: (1) Preservation, (2) Concurrence, and (3) Government (*Systematic Theology*: Grudem, p. 315).

With this backdrop I want to move in closer to (2) Concurrence. Regarding Concurrence, Grudem adds, “God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do,” (*Systematic Theology*: Grudem, p. 317). My observation is folks often mistake coincidence for providence. Someone will say, “I ran into so-and-so at Starbucks the other day. It was providential.” Hmmm…was it providential? I think probably not. More likely it was coincidental that these two people, who happened to know each other, both decided to go to the same Starbucks at the same time. To me, this is random, purposeless; just one of those things. By this standard, virtually every movement of every person throughout every day would be providential; spiritual micro-management. While in a general sense, nothing falls outside of God’s sovereignty or His providence, for that matter, I don’t think this is what the providence of Concurrence is about.

My sense is that true providence engages God’s specific purpose. So, for example, let’s say that God is moving in the heart and mind of someone who is still lost in the harvest, beginning to draw him or her to Himself, to the faith. That person decides to go to a particular Starbucks on a particular day at a particular time. Meanwhile, in another lane, a solid person of faith has been routinely praying for opportunities to engage with people on a spiritual level, has prepared to do so with training of various kinds, and has developed something of a track record of having such conversations. That person decides to go to the same Starbucks on the same day at the same time and finds himself, finds herself, standing next to the person being drawn by God toward the faith. With spiritual antennae up, a spiritual vibe is picked up, and a brief conversation begins. Maybe that leads to sitting down at one of the small tables to talk further, maybe that leads to a decision to get together another time, or maybe that leads to exchanging contact info, or who knows what else. That, in my mind, is providence at work. It’s intentional, it’s strategic; it’s purposeful.

Now, let’s get back to providential availability. I want to make an analogy, here, that considers sanctification. God, of course, through His Holy Spirit, does the heavy lifting when it comes to our sanctification. However, we have a volitional role to play, and we contribute to our own sanctification either positively or negatively, depending on our commitment to our growth and maturity. We work with God, or we work against God as He sanctifies us. Similarly, we have a volitional role to play in providence. We can contribute to being used by God providentially either positively or negatively, depending on our commitment. In the case of our Starbucks examples, the positive and the negative are on display. Positively, our solid person of faith, in life WITH God fashion, intentionally committed to engaging in the harvest and went to Starbucks in anticipation of, perhaps, God’s providentially providing such an opportunity. Our other Starbucks-goer, however, simply went to Starbucks for a beverage and ran into an acquaintance.

All this is to say that we have the capacity to make ourselves providentially available, providentially useful, through prayer, through intentional preparation, through practice, and through moving through life with the spiritual antennae up. Common sense tells us that God will use such a person to bring about his purposes providentially. This concept can scale up to engaging a congregation generally in its ministry in the harvest, and the congregation that is providentially available will be providentially used as it leaves Gospel footprints all across a community. This is a church that God will use to grow His kingdom.

Jethani’s book, *With*, cautions against doing over being. However, to pit these against each other creates a false dilemma. It’s not ***doing*** or ***being***; it’s ***doing*** and ***being***. More appropriately, it’s being ***then*** doing such that our doing emerges from our being with God, the productivity of the branch’s abiding in the vine.

Leaving a Gospel Footprint is founded on life WITH God as true followers abide in Christ as the basis of their being and intentionally make themselves providentially useful as the basis of their doing.

**6.2 Personal Outreach & Evangelism**: The effective Great Commission pastor or leader must practice what is preached, significantly engaging in personal outreach and evangelism through personal involvement in the community. This commitment is a leader’s modeling of what it means, in part, to leave a Gospel footprint. Again, as a leader, you cannot send people where you are not willing to go. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,” (John 20:21). Jesus modeled being sent before He sent others. As leaders, we are saying to our people, “As the Father, Son, and Spirit have sent me, I am sending you.”

By way of brief definitions, outreach is building sustainable relationships in the harvest, and evangelism is clearly articulating the Gospel in the harvest. So, it’s incumbent upon pastors and leaders to be building sustainable relationships in the harvest and tuning into the leading of the Spirit for the opportunity to evangelize. The simple question, then, is, “Are you doing that, are you building sustainable relationships, and are you always on the lookout within those relationships for opportunities to share the Gospel?” If not, it’s time to begin developing strategies for personal relationship building and personal evangelism.

What are the barriers to personal outreach and evangelism? This list could be very long and I’m not going to attempt to point out every possible barrier. Rather, I’m going to identify five that surface often in my interaction with pastors, and I’m going to speak in their voice:

1. *Evangelism is not my spiritual gift. Ephesians 4 identifies five callings: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers. My calling is more a blend of shepherd and teacher so I leave evangelism to the gifted*, (Ephesians 4:11). True, we don’t all have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but we all are called to evangelize. Often, Timothy is cited as an example of the pastor/shepherd and is used as a model for pastors that sense that calling in their lives, but remember Paul’s words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

So, it seems that, in Paul’s eyes, Timothy would leave his ministry unfulfilled if he failed to do the work of an evangelist. If Timothy is, indeed, the quintessential model of a biblical pastor/shepherd, then evangelism must surely be an element within that model. Perhaps you don’t have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but you do have the responsibility to evangelize. If lack of gifting is a barrier for you, remove it.

2. *With all that I have to do, I do not have time to invest in building sustainable relationships, even if that might lead to opportunities to share the Gospel*. I get it. Serving as the lead pastor in any size church is extremely demanding on time. I want to suggest to you, however, that the root of this barrier is not really time, it’s priority. You’re not giving personal outreach and evangelism a position of priority in your life and ministry. Once you do establish that as a priority, you will find the time. As long as it remains of secondary importance to you personally, you won’t. With personal outreach and evangelism established as a priority, the barrier shifts to one of time management. We went into significant depth regarding Managing Ministry Time under Skill #4, so I won’t repeat that here. If lack of time is a barrier for you, commit to establishing personal outreach and evangelism as a priority and use Skill #4, or an alternate resource of your choosing, to distribute your time accordingly.

3. *My congregation has high expectations regarding my ministry to them, and I don’t think they would be willing or understanding if I compromised on that in favor of ministry to the community.* We’re back to priority, again, with a twist, and the twist has to do with congregational buy-in. First, we’re not talking about compromise and we’re not talking about either/or, as in we can either minister to the congregation or we can minister to the community. The objective is to do both but to do them with a biblical basis. A congregation is called to love God and love neighbor and to go and make disciples as Jesus works through them to seek and to save the lost. There is no place for self-indulgence as a believing congregation.

However, self-focus is the posture that many, if not most, congregations have acquired over long stretches of time, and that won’t go away overnight. It’s up to senior leadership to, well, lead; lead the congregation through a transformation from self-focus to kingdom-focus, and the kingdom, surely in part, is focused on multiplication until the full number of saints is gathered, until the multitude that is too numerous to count is brought into the family. If congregational expectations are proving to be a barrier to personal outreach and evangelism, those expectations must be changed through dynamic leadership. Leaders must lead and not simply follow their congregations, taking congregations where they biblically ought to go and not necessarily where they want to go, if their wants are contrary to God’s mandates.

4. *Personal outreach and evangelism are not why I signed up for ministry. Rather, I signed up to preach, teach, pastor, and shepherd.* I remember the moment I crossed a line in my consciousness and realized I was being called to pastoral ministry. For roughly three years, I had served with a church planter in starting a new church. My role was in music and the arts. This church had a strong launch and grew very quickly with several hundred attending at this three-year mark. I was meeting with this planter one day and he informed me that he was going to have to miss a few consecutive Sundays, something that hadn’t happened before. He was concerned about who would preach in his place, having been very careful with the pulpit since we had a very distinct ministry approach and culture. Suddenly, I heard a strange voice say, “I’d like to preach.” It was my voice and I have no idea where it came from, but it was out there. He looked at me rather oddly and then said something such as, “I could see that working.”

I suppose the rest is history, my history anyway, but that was the beginning. Two years later I would be in seminary, and three years after that I would be the lead pastor in a revitalizing church. All to say that I get it; I think most of us go into local church ministry as pastors because we have a strong calling to preach and teach and take care of a congregation. However, it’s antithetical to Great Commission commitment to pursue that calling to the exclusion of personal outreach and evangelism.

Consider Paul’s instruction is Romans 10:13-15:

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

I’ve heard numerous sermons and teachings based on this passage of Scripture, and many have missed the point entirely. They have presented this word from Paul (from God Almighty through Paul) as if the focus is on the preaching. It is not; the focus is on the sending. Paul builds a chain, here, that starts from the end and works its way back. The objective is belief, and Paul begins there with belief that emerges from hearing that emerges from preaching that emerges from sending. Without the sending, there is no preaching, no hearing, and no believing. He emphasizes this point by quoting from Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.” This is a poetic depiction of messengers who run from the scene of battle to deliver news of victory. This imagery appears again in Nahum 1:15 as a reiteration of Isaiah 52:7 and yet again in Ephesians 6:15 in Paul’s explanation of the Whole Armor of God with, “as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”

Concerning Romans 10, Bible commentator Leon Morris writes, “The climax to which Paul builds up is *And how can they preach unless they are sent*…Paul is saying that the preaching of the Christian message is impossible without the divine commission…It’s interesting to have the feet selected as the beautiful parts of the body. But, of course, the messengers normally traveled on foot and the feet were the significant members. They might be dirty and smelly after a long, hot journey, but to those who eagerly awaited good news they were beautiful. Those who *bring good news* are always welcome,” (*The Epistle to the Romans*: Morris, pp. 390-391).

The words of Isaiah 52, quoted in Romans 10, are messianic in nature, delivering a message of salvation from bondage, victory for the captive who is set free. All of the links in the chain are important: the sending, the preaching, the hearing, and the believing, but the starting point is the sending. Again, as Jesus, said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,” (John 20:21). In a general sense, a call to pastoral ministry is a call to more conventional pulpit preaching, but the more specific sense is the call to labor in the harvest, working to bring those who are estranged from the family of God into the fold. Perhaps your perception of ministry is that you didn’t sign up for personal outreach and evangelism, but, if so, I want to encourage you to reconsider what it means to be among those who lead in the church that Jesus Christ is building.

5. *Personal outreach and evangelism are way outside of my comfort zone*. I have a friend and ministry colleague who is the most effective evangelist that I know, and I don’t, for a minute, think that all of us can or should function in quite the way he does. However, he makes a very interesting point in regard to evangelism and one’s comfort zone. If personal outreach and evangelism are outside of your comfort zone, he doesn’t suggest that you simply bite the bullet and push through your discomfort. Rather, he says that you need to cultivate a new comfort zone. In other words, according to his perspective, if reaching out to lost people and evangelizing is outside of your comfort zone, you have the wrong comfort zone. Interesting!

Following this logic begs the question, “How do I cultivate a new comfort zone, one that is comfortable with personal outreach and evangelism.” Before I go any further, let me offer a couple of thoughts: Jesus did not say, “Follow me and I will make you comfortable.” He did not say, “Take up your cross and I will provide for your comfort.” All to say that faithfully serving the Lord is sometimes going to lead into awkward and uncomfortable situations. The objective is not comfort. Rather, the objective is to be effective and productive even when we’re stepping into areas of ministry that are not in our wheelhouse, recognizing that through practice, practice, practice we’ll likely become more effective, more productive and, yes, more comfortable.

In short, the road to more comfort or ease at facing the uncomfortable begins with prayer. That, of course, is no surprise. Pray, pray, and pray for God’s strength, insight, peace, opportunity, etc., etc., etc., and see what the Spirit does in and through you. Jesus said, “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest,” (Matthew 9:38). Indeed, you are one of those laborers the Lord of the harvest will send into the harvest through prayer to gather His family.

To prayer, add practice, practice, practice. Surely, you’ve heard the saying, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” Answer: Practice, Practice, Practice. There is no substitute for experience so get out there and get started. It might be difficult at first, but, eventually, this can become your new norm through habitual, prayerful practice. Over time, reaching out and evangelizing will become more “comfortable.” Brian Tracy, motivational speaker and consultant, has a book titled, *Eat That Frog,* that challenges folks in the workplace to do the hard thing first, get it over with, and move forward. Of course, part of the concept is that eventually the hard thing won’t be the hard thing anymore. The title of the book borrows from a statement attributed to Mark Twain, “Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.” Ok, I’m not going to suggest that this be included in the Book of Proverbs, but I think you get the idea. If there is something that is absolutely right that needs to be done, but is challenging, difficult, or uncomfortable, prayerfully go for it, again and again, and it will get easier.

So far, we have prayer and practice; I’m going to add one more “P,” partnership. If, as a pastor, you are struggling with personal outreach and evangelism, note that many pastors are just like you. Find a pastor colleague or two or three and form a partnership in your and their pursuit of personal outreach and evangelism engagement and effectiveness. Pray together, share experiences as you practice, and, perhaps, join together on occasion to minister together. Change your comfort zone and maximize your personal outreach and evangelism effectiveness through prayer, practice and partnership.

Shifting gears away from barriers, what are the opportunities for personal outreach and evangelism? There is no limit to the possibilities so I’m going to narrow the field by approaching this question through two categories: 1. Direct Engagement and 2. Indirect Engagement. Direct engagement is contact that you make personally and indirect engagement is through contact you make from one degree of separation.

Direct engagement in beginning to establish sustainable relationships, a.k.a. outreach, is to leverage connections that are already accessible. That might include family, friends, and neighbors. Arguably you already have some sustainable relationships from among those groupings, so the question would be whether or not you are strategically utilizing those relationships for Gospel purposes. If not, begin to pray for God’s leading and the Holy Spirit’s sensitivity in moving those relationships in a Gospel direction.

Another source is the workplace setting of folks in your congregation. Mining that territory has a double application: 1. connecting with congregants at their workplaces is, obviously, connecting with them, which is a good thing, and 2. connecting with congregants at their workplaces might open the door for connecting with some of the folks that are their co-workers. This can be a win-win that begins to groom outreach that might grow into evangelism. Also, there is a plethora of affinity groups within most communities that might provide footholds for engagement. Finding such groups that organize around interests of yours can be fertile ground.

Finally, good old-fashioned networking can provide a source of making connections. This is very similar to leveraging affinity groups but might be thought of as groups for networking that don’t necessarily organize around something for which you have an affinity.

Indirect engagement in beginning to establish sustainable relationships occurs when you influence others to embrace direct engagement, so you are separated by one degree. As a pastor, begin with your staff and leaders, first, and then move to your congregation. This can be done through your teaching and preaching ministry, your personal leadership in their lives, and the model of direct engagement to personal outreach and evangelism that you present. Again, practicing what you preach in this regard will greatly enhance the effectiveness of your influence in their lives.

I’ll close this section on personal outreach and evangelism with a highly transferrable concept called Closing the Gap. The concept concerns the gap between where you are in any given endeavor and where you want to be plus the commitment to close that gap through strategic intentionality. For example, let’s say that your assessment regarding your ministry time is that you do not have the time bandwidth to accommodate proactively engaging in outreach, which we have defined as building sustainable relationships. That’s where you are. However, you have become convicted of the importance of making outreach a priority, which is where you want to be. Wishing and hoping will not close that gap, but the gap can be closed through strategic intentionality.

What are some of the elements of closing such a gap? Begin with a heartfelt commitment to do so accompanied by prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide you in establishing this new priority. Quantify the objective by targeting a percentage of your ministry time for this initiative, perhaps 5% or 10%. Analyze how your time is currently being allocated and determine what adjustments will need to be made to open that 5% or 10% for this purpose and begin to take the action steps necessary to make it so. I think you get the idea.

Closing a gap is typically not complicated but it does require discipline. There are two elements that often cause a breakdown: 1. Failure to identify individual action steps that will need to be taken to close the gap, and 2. Failure to take those steps in a timely fashion once they’ve been identified. Again, wishing and hoping will NOT close a gap. Timely action steps must be taken, however incrementally, and when this occurs virtually any gap can be closed.

Leaving a Gospel Footprint requires a strong commitment to personal outreach and evangelism, overcoming barriers, leveraging opportunities, and closing whatever outreach or evangelism gaps that are present.

**6.3 Corporate Outreach & Evangelism**: Personal outreach and evangelism by a Great Commission pastor, leader, or congregant is most effective when the church is corporately engaged in outreach and evangelism. The ministry of the church supports the outreach and evangelism efforts of the individuals and the individuals support the outreach and evangelism efforts of the church as a corporate body. This creates an upward spiral of conversion growth in the kingdom and in the visible church.

To set the stage for this discussion, let me point out what happens when the personal commitment to outreach and evangelism and the corporate commitment to outreach and evangelism are NOT in alignment. In somewhat simplistic terms, let’s look at this from two sides. First, let’s say there is a strong commitment on the part of the pastor and leaders to corporate outreach and evangelism. Many church or departmental ministries work diligently to connect with the community, establishing a positive presence in the community that contributes to drawing folks into the church. However, once those newcomers arrive, the individuals that make up the congregation seem cold or aloof toward newcomers, not welcoming them warmly and not giving newcomers the sense that they belong. More than likely, these newcomers will come and go very quickly.

Second, the flip side, let’s say we have some individual in the church that actively engages in outreach and evangelism in the community, building relationships and nurturing them. At some point, his or her presence in the lives of these community folks presents an opportunity for them to engage in attending a worship service or some other gathering. However, the church at large doesn’t reflect the relational attributes of this individual church person and, though he or she has successfully labored to build that relationship, this doesn’t scale up to a relationship with the church. In such a case, the church has failed both this active engager and the newcomer.

Here’s a brief example: I was pastor of a church that went to great lengths to establish this kind of alignment between the general ministry of the church and the personal ministry of its people. There was one woman in particular who was an avid networker and who built many relationships with folks in the community. Many came to our church through her invitation and, since we were geared up to receive newcomers well, many found Christ, plugged into our particular body, and served and were served among us. However, when I left that church to go full time into revitalization training and consulting, the pastor that followed me came in with a very different approach to ministry that was out of step with the outreach ministry culture we had established. After maybe six months or so of this new administration, I received a communication from this avid networker. She told me that she no longer felt that she could invite people to this church because she lacked trust and confidence in what they would experience. Her personal efforts in outreach were not being supported by corporate alignment. It was heartbreaking for me and spotlights why this alignment is so important.

All to say that, strategically, the one-two punch of effective outreach and evangelism is for the ministry of the individual and the ministry of the church at large to be in alignment, each supporting the other. We’ve already covered some of the dynamics of personal outreach and evangelism, so in this section, I’ll focus on the corporate element. To do this, I want to introduce an approach I’ve titled, *DNA:* *Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator*.

DNA: Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator

**Newcomer Passion**: Develop a culture of passionate concern in your church for those who are lost in the harvest.

**Newcomer Identification**: Determine your church’s geographic and demographic targets so that missional ministry can be defined, directed, and focused.

**Newcomer Connection**: Build sustainable relationships in the harvest within your church’s geographic and demographic targets.

**Newcomer Acquisition**: Move sustainable relationships in the harvest toward direct engagement with the ministry of your church such as attending a service or some other event opportunity.

**Newcomer Satisfaction**: Guarantee that newcomers to a service or event leave fully satisfied with the experience, opening the door for ongoing engagement.

**Newcomer Retention**: Assimilate newcomers quickly so that their commitment can be nurtured and expanded, commitment to the church and commitment to Christ.

Granted, we’re just skimming the surface of this DNA concept here. I’m sharing this to demonstrate the lengths to which a Great Commission corporate culture commitment will go to make a credible missional difference in a community. However, even in this outline form, the Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator provides the railroad tracks for developing an effective newcomer impact strategy. Use these headings with their one sentence directives to begin processing through what it will take for your church to engage outreach and evangelism corporately as a matter of both culture and strategy. Note that the elements of the Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator are currently under development as a training curriculum. Stay tuned!

Corporate ministry is a function of corporate leadership, so, as a pastor, it’s your responsibility to set the tone by modeling pastoral commitment to corporate outreach and evangelism in how you conduct your pastorate, and by especially grooming this component in other staff and leaders. Selection of staff and leaders should reflect this commitment by including it among the criteria for staff and leadership positions. This perspective can be learned, but mobilizing personnel with this element already built in saves time and energy.

Leaving a Gospel Footprint corporately is greatly enhanced by a commitment to the Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator (or something like it) and by a strong commitment to corporate outreach and evangelism among pastor(s), staff, and leaders.

**6.4 The Gospel Ask**: So far in Skill 6: Leaving a Gospel Footprint, our concentration has been mostly on outreach. At this point, we’re shifting more to evangelism and later, in 6.5 and 6.6, we’ll move into discipleship. A Great Commission pastor finds many ways to “ask” someone if he or she is ready to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit is moving in the hearts and minds of people in the community as the Gospel is being brought to them through individual and corporate outreach and evangelism. Some will respond but will need a clear opportunity to take that step. They will need a response mechanism that you provide, a line to cross, a trigger to pull.

Just last week I officiated at the funeral of a man I guided to Jesus about a year ago, following his coming to Christ with one-on-one discipleship until the day he died from a terminal illness. Of course, the Holy Spirit did the heavy lifting, but I “brokered” the transaction leading to the transformation that took place. It’s always a thrill to be used in that way. I shared his journey to the Lord in my funeral remarks, inviting others in attendance or watching online to contact me if they had questions regarding “matters of the soul” or perhaps wanted to pursue the journey our departed friend had been on. Of course, this was not a case of my having developed sustainable relationships with them over time, but I shared with them about the relationship I had with our friend, and that I was available for them. This was a compressed adaptation of personal outreach and evangelism in a very specific and bounded context. My point is that, during my remarks, I had carefully explained the basics of the Gospel, and I made a discreet Gospel Ask of all those within earshot. So far, two have expressed interest in baptism and several have remarked about the steps to salvation being explained so clearly. What was I attempting to do? I was attempting to leave a Gospel Footprint that included a Gospel Ask. We’ll see how God uses this in the months ahead.

What are the components of a Gospel Ask? Let’s assume that we’re on-script and that a sustainable relationship has been developed over time. That might be Component #1. Component #2 (don’t get lost debating cart and horse theories here) would be prayer, prayer for the opportunity to forge a relationship, prayer for the Holy Spirit to move in hearts and minds, prayer to be providentially in the right place at the right time, prayer for discernment, prayer for open doors to move toward a Gospel Ask; the list goes on.

Component #3 might be the movement of God in a certain person’s life to prompt their being drawn toward the Good News. Again, the list might be long, but I categorize these promptings into three basic categories: Crisis, Children, and Curiosity. Crisis is caused when the events of life are dramatic and, usually, negative. For example, my aforementioned friend was diagnosed with an inoperable, malignant heart tumor. That will definitely get your attention and create crisis in your life. This head on collision with overwhelmingly bad news prompted him to contact me to help him take “spiritual inventory,” as he called it. Crisis can be Gospel-catalytic.

Children have a way of nudging parents toward matters of faith. Of course, problems with a child can create crisis, and we can circle back to the first category, but the context I’m referring to here is more about having children in the first place. As I look back on my pastoral ministry, I can name numerous couples who were living life with great satisfaction without God when they had no children. However, at the birth of their first child, an internal switch was activated and thoughts of greater things, more important things, began to surface. Next thing you know, they’re searching for God or a church or some means of understanding eternal reality and not just self-gratification. Why? Their child means more to them than they mean to themselves, so they’re looking at life more deeply. Children can be Gospel-catalytic.

Rounding out Component #3 is Curiosity. The brand of curiosity I have in view is spiritual curiosity prompted by a movement of the Holy Spirit. In some folks, neither Crisis nor Children prove to be the catalyst. Rather, a curiosity regarding spiritual matters, eternal matters, faith, God belief, whatever, just bubbles up, seemingly from nowhere. Of course, it’s not from nowhere or even from somewhere, it’s from someone, the Holy Spirit. We know that no one comes to faith in Jesus Christ unless he or she is drawn. In John 6, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day,” (John 6:44). This drawing is the work of the Holy Spirit, and, typically, as this drawing is taking place, a curiosity regarding the things of God surfaces. Curiosity can be Gospel-catalytic.

In connecting a few dots, we have developed a sustainable relationship with someone through outreach over time. Therefore, we are embedded in that person’s life and are always nearby. We’re praying routinely for that person to come to Christ. When the Spirit begins to draw that person toward Christ, through Crisis, Children, Curiosity, or some other means, we are an arm’s-length away, so when he or she reaches out, we’re there with the Good News.

That brings me to Component #4, a crystal-clear explanation of the Gospel. If we’re going to ask a person to commit his or her life to Christ, we’ve got to explain what that means in explicitly clear terms. Circling back to Romans 10, Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that Jesus raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved,” (Romans 10:9-10). Confess what? Believe what? Let me frame how I organize a concise but thorough presentation of the content of the Gospel. My objective is to help the people I’m serving to be able to answer “I do” to the following questions:

Do you believe that you are a sinner? (I do.)

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? (I do.)

Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay the penalty for your sins? (I do.)

Do you repent of your sins? (I do.)

Do you believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? (I do.)

Do you believe that your sins – past, present, and future – have been forgiven? (I do.)

Do you believe that you have eternal life by the grace of God? (I do.)

To respond “I do” with understanding and conviction to these questions is an indication that the Gospel has been fully grasped and affirmed. I now use these questions in administering the sacrament of baptism. A bottom-line comment: If the Gospel has not been clearly articulated, evangelism has not happened.

Finally, Component #5 is simply Repeat. If you reach a point in a relationship where you sense the moment is right for the Gospel Ask, but when the Ask is extended it’s not received, don’t panic. Keep communication open and begin to seek a next opportunity, and a next, and a next, if necessary. Don’t issue ultimatums and don’t try to coerce a positive response. Give the Holy Spirit time to move, and when God’s timing is right, belief will manifest.

Gospel Bonus: Psalm 103:1-5 provides a succinct outline to the message of the Gospel. In this Psalm, David the songwriter lays out the benefits of being a child of God in this song’s lyrics, and these benefits go a long way in explaining the Gospel. It reads:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

who forgives all your iniquity,

who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Clearly, the cost/benefit ratio of becoming a child of God tips in our favor. This psalm is a wonderful way to remember and share the content of the Gospel.

We’ve covered a lot of ground in this section so let me capture the five components of a Gospel Ask succinctly:

Component #1: A Sustainable Relationship

Component #2: Strategic Prayer

Component #3: Holy Spirit Prompting (Drawing)

Component #4: A Clear Gospel Explanation

Component #5: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Leaving a Gospel Footprint is at its highest peak when offering a credible Gospel Ask that stands on the shoulders of an authentic, sustainable relationship.

**6.5 Personal Discipling**: In a similar way to personal outreach and evangelism, the Great Commission pastor or leader develops a ministry of personally discipling others, keeping a finger on the pulse of the growth and maturity of those who have committed to Christ. Note that the Great Commission is not exclusively about evangelism. The mandate is not, “go and make converts” or “go and make believers.” Rather, the mandate is, “go and make disciples,” incorporating both the conversion of a lost person, the starting point, and discipleship, the journey of that new believer into sanctification and service.

The Greek word for disciple is maqhths, transliterated *mathetes* (pronounced *muh-thay-tace)*, which carries the basic meaning of pupil, student, or learner. So, a disciple is one who learns. Our context concerns disciples of Christ, students of Christ. In the culture of Judaism, rabbis took on disciples or students. The practice, though, was that students would seek out a rabbi, meaning teacher, and essentially apply or seek permission to become that rabbi’s disciple. The student did the seeking and made a case for his discipleship qualifications. Jesus, often referred to as “Rabbi,” flipped the script. Would-be disciples did not come to Him and apply. Rather, He went to them and “called” them to be His disciples, making an offer that they essentially couldn’t refuse because of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is one way of describing the methodology deployed by Christ in “seeking and saving the lost,” (see Luke 19:1-10).

*The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, informs, “In the New Testament, the word *mathetes* occurs only in the Gospels and Acts. It is attested some 250 times, almost always for those who follow Jesus (*TDNT*, Abridged: Bromiley, ed., p. 559). Further, *mathetes* implies a relationship to a particular teacher (*TDNT*, p. 556), so being a student was not a general categorization for someone who was a student in the sense of the word’s usage today. Rather, to be a student, or a disciple, was to affix that learner to one particular teacher. The disciple, then, was a follower of that teacher.

In the Christian context, there is but one Master Teacher, one Master Rabbi, one Messiah, one Savior and one Lord, and that, of course, is Jesus Christ. All true believers, then, are to be disciples of Christ, regardless of what human teacher or preacher might contribute to our learning. They are acting on behalf of Christ as disciples of Christ themselves, but our true devotion, our ultimate allegiance, is to Christ first and Christ only. With this understanding, we can appreciate Paul’s frustration revealed in 1 Corinthians 1:

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

While in seminary, I studied under a number of remarkable teachers: Dr. R.C. Sproul, Dr. Roger Nicole, Dr. Richard Pratt, Dr. Allen Mawhinney, Dr. Reggie Kidd, Dr. Steven Brown, Dr. Ronald Nash; Dr. Steven Childers. I was never, however, a student of any of these gifted teachers. I was, and am, a student, a disciple of Jesus Christ, as are they. Some have gone to be with the Lord while others still serve. Either way, their investment in discipling me, as fellow disciples of Christ, continues to pay dividends in my life and ministry to the glory of God. This is an example of discipleship at work.

With these broad strokes as a backdrop, let’s move in for a closer look at you, a pastor or leader, as a personal discipler. The objective is to center the disciple on an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. As such, one analogy would be to think of yourself as a tour guide. You know Christ and His kingdom so, as a guide, you will lead the disciple into what you already know and have experienced in terms of knowledge of Christ and relationship with Christ. Note that discipleship is not about trying to foster allegiance in the disciple to your or any other visible church. That might come and it’s a credible outcome, but it’s not the objective.

There are three elements that I want to emphasize regarding personal discipling: 1. The Ministry of the Word and Prayer, 2. The Conversion/Discipleship Gap, and 3. Obedience-Based Discipleship. In Acts 6 the original disciples, who were foundational to the establishment of the Christian church, called attention to the priority of the practice of prayer and attention to the Word of God. We read, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word,” (Acts 6:4). These two are the pillars of discipleship and any approach to discipling must firmly establish and then build on the disciplines of prayer and absorbing the Word into knowledge and practice. Paul said this about prayer, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ for you,” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Concerning God’s Word, we find this regarding Ezra’s selection by God to serve in a very important and unique way, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel,” (Ezra 7:10). Discipleship must feature prayer and the ministry of the Word.

There is a two-dimensional gap between conversion and accelerating into robust discipleship. One is knowledge apprehension and the other is time lapse. As a rule, a new convert does not have a broad understanding of Scripture and has yet to develop strong spiritual disciplines. Often, the follow up with new converts is not timely, allowing significant time to pass before moving toward discipleship. Pastors must keep tabs on new converts and make sure that they are moved quickly from conversion into personal discipleship. It might not be that you, as a pastor, will personally disciple everyone, but you must see that every is discipled. This concept might expand to an entire congregation, not just those who are recent converts. When the time lapse gap is closed between conversion and discipleship, and when discipleship intentionally builds biblical knowledge and practice into those being discipled, spiritual growth happens.

The Great Commission speaks directly to teaching, but an important distinction regarding teaching is often missed. Consider this: at training events, as we discuss the Great Commission, I will typically ask the question, “What does the Great Commission tells us to teach?” Many times, the initial response goes like this, “Teach all that Jesus commanded,” or “Teach the commandments of Christ.” At first glance, these sound like correct answers, but they’re not. Jesus says, “Teach them to observe [or obey] all that I have commanded you.” Of course, in order to obey the commands of Christ, the disciple needs to know what they are so the commands of Christ do need to be taught, but the emphasis on not on knowing the commandments, it’s on obedience.

Knowledge and obedience are two very different things. Many times, as a parent, I said to one of my children, “You know better!” What’s implicit in that statement? It’s implicit that this child had knowledge of what was the right thing to do, but, obviously, chose to do what was wrong. In other words, there was knowledge but no obedience. The objective of discipleship is not knowledge, it’s obedience to biblical knowledge, so we must promote an obedience-based discipleship. Many churches feature a staff position titled something such as Director of Discipleship. However, I’ve yet to come across a church that staffs a Director of Obedience. Hmmm. It seems our typical approach to Christian education is a knowledge-based approach rather than a promotion of Christian living in an obedience-based approach. Obedience-based discipleship will secure and develop the life transformation that begins at conversion.

A final comment: Discipling resources abound so I’m not going to address that here. These are easy enough to find online and through the recommendation of those who are effective disciplers. Seek out this information and select what seems best to you in the context of your discipling ministry.

Leaving a Gospel Footprint becomes more and more of a reality when personal discipling is grounded in the Ministry of the Word and Prayer, when the Conversion/Discipleship Gap is closed, and when Discipleship is Obedience-Based.

**6.6 Corporate Discipling**: The companion to personal discipling by a pastor or leader is the corporate discipling within a congregation, being equally concerned about the depth of congregational growth as the width of congregational growth. C. Peter Wagner comes to mind, longtime missiologist and professor, and one of the early leaders of the Church Growth Movement. I’m not going into the pros and cons of the Church Growth Movement here. Rather, I’m drawing on Wagner’s identification of three levels of local church ministry: 1. Cell, 2. Community, and 3. Congregation. This concept isn’t exactly trending these days but I find it to be a helpful way of organizing strategy in the local church.

In brief, the **cellular** level represents small groupings of people such as, well, small groups, ministry teams, Bible study groups, perhaps a complete staff or gradation of staff, perhaps a group of elders or deacons, missions teams, etc. These are excellent formats for up close, corporate discipling. The **community** level is the mid-grouping, larger than a small grouping but typically not as large as a full congregation. In conventional churches, this might be the group that gathers for a Wednesday night dinner and Bible study, a men’s group, a women’s group, or other departmental subset. Groups of this size might be too large for the intimacy that can develop at the cellular level, but tend to consist of folks that are regularly engaged in the life of the local church, “insiders” if you will. Pastors and leaders are wise to consider how the communities of the church might be leveraged for corporate discipling. The **congregational** level is the all-church level and could even consider inclusion of fringe folks, newcomers, and guests. This would be the group that attends worship services, special services (such as Christmas and Easter), and special events, for example.

Though the context of corporate discipling is groups of people at the cellular, community, and congregational levels, rather than personal discipling of individuals, the same three elements should guide the content: The Ministry of the Word and Prayer, the Conversion/Discipleship Gap, and Obedience-Based Discipleship. As these three elements are engaged in the corporate context, each brings a challenge that is somewhat different than engaging these elements in the individual context. The Ministry of the Word and Prayer will require a broader approach to application since the context involves numerous individuals within the group(s). The Conversion/Discipleship Gap will require broader assimilation strategies and practices to move individuals who have experienced conversion or, perhaps, renewal, into corporate discipling opportunities. Follow through on Obedience-Based Discipleship will require a broader approach to accountability to ensure that orthopraxis is following on the heels of orthodoxy.

Leaving a Gospel Footprint becomes more and more of a reality when corporate discipling is also grounded in the Ministry of the Word and Prayer, when the corporate Conversion/Discipleship Gap is closed, and when corporate Discipleship is Obedience-Based., all three operating at three levels: 1. Cellular, 2. Community, and 3. Congregational.

**A Leaving a Gospel Footprint Compilation:**

**6.1 Life WITH God**: Leaving a Gospel Footprint is founded on life WITH God as true followers abide in Christ as the basis of their **being**, and intentionally make themselves providentially useful as the basis of their **doing**.

**6.2 Personal Outreach & Evangelism**: Leaving a Gospel Footprint requires a strong commitment to personal outreach and evangelism, overcoming barriers, leveraging opportunities, and closing whatever outreach or evangelism gaps that are present.

**6.3 Corporate Outreach & Evangelism:** Leaving a Gospel Footprint corporately is greatly enhanced by a commitment to the Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator (or something like it) and by a strong commitment to corporate outreach and evangelism among pastor(s), staff, and leaders.

**6.4 The Gospel Ask**: Leaving a Gospel Footprint is at its highest peak when offering a credible Gospel Ask that stands on the shoulders of an authentic, sustainable relationship.

**6.5 Personal Discipling**: Leaving a Gospel Footprint becomes more and more of a reality when personal discipling is grounded in the Ministry of the Word and Prayer, when the Conversion/Discipleship Gap is closed, and when Discipleship is Obedience-Based.

**6.6 Corporate Discipling**: Leaving a Gospel Footprint becomes more and more of a reality when corporate discipling is also grounded in the Ministry of the Word and Prayer, when the corporate Conversion/Discipleship Gap is closed, and when corporate Discipleship is Obedience-Based., all three operating at three levels: 1. Cellular, 2. Community, and 3. Congregational.

WORKSHOP: Turning Knowledge into Skill

Skill 6: Leaving a Gospel Footprint

The objective of this workshop is to establish your effectiveness in leaving a Gospel footprint by implementing the concepts covered under Skill 6.

**Life WITH God**: At the GO Center, we feature an approach to revitalization that is built on two platforms: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. To leave a Gospel footprint, pastors and leaders must make personal spiritual formation a priority. On the surface, this might seem to be uniquely about Spiritual Renewal, but, in truth, personal spiritual formation factors strongly into Strategic Initiative as well. The effective Great Commission pastor or leader will remain plugged into the vine (John 15), living life ***with*** God and not just life ***for*** God.

As stated, we strongly recommend the book, *WITH*, by Skye Jethani as a resource in this endeavor. Please take a look at this book, and either use it as a resource for your personal spiritual formation or use a resource of your own choosing that will similarly serve this purpose.

**Personal Outreach & Evangelism**: The effective Great Commission pastor or leader must practice what is preached, significantly engaging in personal outreach and evangelism through personal involvement in the community. Review the definitions provided for Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship, and then move into the following action steps:

1. Identify any barriers that are keeping you from engaging more effectively in personal outreach and evangelism. Create strategies to remove or overcome those barriers and take action. Review your progress at least every 30 days and make adjustments as needed.

Consider both Direct and Indirect engagement.

2. Identify 3 opportunities for personal outreach and evangelism that are new to you or that lie dormant in terms of action on your part. Create strategies to leverage those opportunities and take action. This might require shifts in Managing Ministry Time. Review your progress at least every 30 days and make adjustments as needed.

Consider both Direct and Indirect engagement.

3. As you work through Action Steps 1 & 2, take note of any Gaps between where you are and where you’d like to be. Create strategies to close those gaps and take action.

**Corporate Outreach & Evangelism**: Review the material concerning the DNA: Dynamic Newcomer Accelerator. Brainstorm possibilities for strategic plans and implementation in the six elements of the DNA:

**Newcomer Passion**: Develop a culture of passionate concern in your church for those who are lost in the harvest.

**Newcomer Identification**: Determine your church’s geographic and demographic targets so that missional ministry can be defined, directed, and focused.

**Newcomer Connection**: Build sustainable relationships in the harvest within your church’s geographic and demographic targets.

**Newcomer Acquisition**: Move sustainable relationships in the harvest toward direct engagement with the ministry of your church such as attending a service or some other event opportunity.

**Newcomer Satisfaction**: Guarantee that newcomers to a service or event leave fully satisfied with the experience, opening the door for ongoing engagement.

**Newcomer Retention**: Assimilate newcomers quickly so that their commitment can be nurtured and expanded, commitment to the church and commitment to Christ.

Note: For this workshop, you’re being asked to do this on your own, but the ideas you identify and develop here can be used in concert with other leaders in the future.

**The Gospel Ask**: Review the Five Components of the Gospel Ask:

Component #1: A Sustainable Relationship

Component #2: Strategic Prayer

Component #3: Holy Spirit Prompting (Drawing)

Component #4: A Clear Gospel Explanation

Component #5: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Identify 3-5 people that are connected with you such that moving with them through these components is a reasonable possibility by the grace of God. If you have no such connections, begin to develop them. Create strategies to engage these individuals in Component #1 and begin to follow through with action steps. This might seem awkward or even manipulative at first, but give it a chance. Jesus asked that we pray for God to send workers into the harvest. Might you be one of those workers? Hint: Yes, you are!

If you haven’t already, develop a Gospel presentation outline and literally rehearse, saying it aloud until you can articulate the Gospel clearly and with confidence. Use my outline of DO YOUs, the outline of Psalm 103:1-5, or some other outline of your choosing. Make it clear. Make it succinct.

**Personal Discipling**: Identify 2-3 individuals that you are personally discipling now. If you don’t have 2-3, pray and strategize in regard to entering into a discipling relationship with 2-3 people. Consider how you might engage with them individually through the following three elements and take action:

1. The Ministry of the Word and Prayer

2. The Conversion/Discipleship Gap

3. Obedience-Based Discipleship

Corporate Discipling: Determine which level the ministry groupings within the church can be divided:

Cellular, Community, and Congregational. Consider how each might be engaged corporately through the following three elements and take action:

1. The Ministry of the Word and Prayer

2. The Conversion/Discipleship Gap

3. Obedience-Based Discipleship

*Congratulations! You are now ready to leave an indelible Gospel footprint!*

**Afterword: From Theory to Practice**

Much has been said during this journey through X/52 regarding gaps. One of the most significant gaps that manifests following any training endeavor of this sort is the gap between the theory of what has been covered and the practice of implementing those ideas, concepts, tools, and principles. Recall the distinction between teaching and training that was explained in the Introduction:

*Teaching is information-driven and the objective of teaching is the acquisition of knowledge. Training is implementation-driven or execution-driven and the objective of training is the acquisition of skills. Effectiveness lies in what is done, not in what is known or even planned.*

Again, effectiveness lies in what is done, not in what is known or even planned. If you have faithfully engaged with the training material that is the content of X/52, your Great Commission ministry knowledge has increased. The question is, “What will you do with that knowledge?” The actions that you take in answer to this question will determine whether or not this knowledge truly becomes skill.

During the certification training that I received through the Train-the-Trainer program at the University of Richmond, our instructor followed his remarks regarding the distinction between teaching and training with an example. It went something like this, “If a bank hires me as a trainer to train new bank tellers, my effectiveness as a trainer will not be judged by their ability to pass a test on being a bank teller at the end of training. My effectiveness as a trainer will be judged by their having a 99% accuracy rate when behind the counter.”

I trust that you can see that, with these remarks, I have issued a challenge. What will you do with your increased Great Commission ministry knowledge? However, I want to be a Liberator, a liberating leader, and, in order to do that, I must provide more than a challenge; I must provide you with complementary support. According to GiANT’s Support/Challenge Matrix, the Liberator provides both high support and high challenge.

Please know that you are wildly supported as you move forward with X/52. First and foremost, you have the support of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Jesus is building His church (Matthew 16:13-18). He is sending us out in His authority and promises to be with us always (Matthew 28:18-20). The harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:35-38). A multitude is being gathered that is too numerous to count (Revelation 7:9-10). As you grow in your commitment to Great Commission ministry, I truly believe that the words of Paul to the Philippians will apply to you, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 4:19). You have God’s ample and inexhaustible supply and support.

You also have the support of the GO Center. Recall our Mission Statement: Inspire Hope, Instill Vision, Inform Strategy, Invigorate Action. We are here to help you move from knowledge to skill; from theory to practice. Call, text, email, just get in touch any and every way and we will be here for you.

**The X/52 Triangle**:

As a pastor, as a leader, you have the capacity to be an X-Factor, a catalyst for bringing effective Great Commission ministry into the harvest. X/52 has provided a platform for the development of Great Commission skills. Mobilize those skills along with strong leadership coupled with congregational sacrifice, and the blessing of the hand of God will surely bear kingdom fruit. The lost will be found, the missing will be brought home, and true disciples will become true worshippers as they grow in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ, all to the glory of God. Hallelujah! Amen!

**Scriptures Referenced (ESV)**

Note that some Scriptures are referenced more than once. This is an indication of the importance of their contribution to X/52 in both biblical ministry philosophy and strategic practice. For the most part they are listed in their order of appearance in the manuscript.

**Foreword: Prophet, Priest, King & Pastors Skill 1 – cont’d Afterword: From Theory to Practice**

Isaiah 35:10 Matthew 16:18 Matthew 16:13-18

Luke 19:10 1 Peter 2:9 Matthew 28:18-20

Luke 4:43 Romans 10:13-15 Matthew 9:35-38

Psalm 110:1-4 Genesis 1:28 Revelation 7:9-10

Hebrews 7:11-17 Revelation 7:9-12 Philippians 4:19

Psalm 103:19

1 Timothy 6:13-16 **Skill 2: Casting Vision & Creating Ownership**

Hebrews 3:1-19 Proverbs 29:18a (KJV)

Hebrews 4:11-12 Matthew 17:20

Matthew 28:18-20 Matthew 9:29-30

Matthew 8:26

**Introduction: The X/52 Formula**

Luke 19:10 **Skill 3: Setting Objectives & Establishing Accountability**

John 20:21 2 Corinthians 5:17

Matthew 28:18-20 Ephesians 4:11-14

Matthew 9:35-38 Romans 12:1-2

John 4:34-38 Revelation 7:9

Matthew 16:18 Genesis 15:5

James 2:17 Psalm 147:4

Judges 5:2 Matthew 9

Ezra 7:6, 9 Genesis 1:4

Nehemiah 2:8, 11-15, 17-18 2 Kings (Selected)

Nehemiah 1:3 1 Corinthians 10:31

Nehemiah 1:4

Nehemiah 1:11 **Skill 4: Managing Ministry Time**

Proverbs 29:18a (KJV) Ephesians 5:15-17

Luke 19:10 Colossians 4:5

John 20:19-22

Matthew 28:18-20 **Skill 5: Working with Staff & Leaders**

Matthew 9:35-38 Matthew 7:12

John 4:34-38 Acts 2:1-2

Acts 1:8 Matthew 28:20

John 4:23 Galatians 6:7

Romans 12:1-2 Matthew 10:34-39

Genesis 1 (Selected)

**Skill 1: Discerning & Developing Vision** Revelation 7 (Selected)

Matthew 6:9-10 Luke 19:10

I Chronicles 16:23-25 1 Peter 2:4-8

Psalm 19:1

Psalm 108:5 **Skill 6: Leaving a Gospel Footprint**

Isaiah 48:9-11 Ephesians 6:14-15

Matthew 25:24-27 John 15:1ff.

John 1:14 John 20:21

1 Corinthians 10:31 Ephesians 4:11

Philippians 4:19-20 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Hebrews 13:20-21 Romans 10:13-15

Revelation 21:23 Isaiah 52:7

[See List on p. 16] Nahum 1:15

Luke 19:10 Ephesians 6:15

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Ezekiel 34:6 Matthew 9:38

Ezekiel 34:11-13a John 6:44

John 4:23 Romans 10:9-10

Romans 12:1-2 Psalm 103:1-5

Luke 4:42-44 Luke 19:1-10

John 20:19-22 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Matthew 16:18 Acts 6:1ff.

Matthew 9:37 Acts 6:4

Matthew 28:18-20 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Acts 2:42-47 Ezra 7:10

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Ezra 7:10

Matthew 9:37

*Come, work repentance in my soul;*

*Represent sin to me in its odious colours that I may hate it;*

*Melt my heart by the majesty and mercy of God;*

*Show me my ruined self and the help there is in him;*

*Teach me to behold my Creator.*

*his ability to save, his arms outstretched, his heart big for me.*

*May I confide in his power and love,*

*commit my soul to him without reserve, bear his image, observe his laws,*

*pursue his service and be through time and eternity*

*a monument to the efficacy of his grace, a trophy of his victory.*

*Make me willing to be saved in his way;*

*Perceiving nothing in myself, but all in Jesus:*

*Help me not only to receive him but to walk in him,*

*depend upon him, commune with him,*

*be conformed to him, follow him,*

*imperfect but still pressing forward,*

*not complaining of labour, but valuing rest,*

*not murmuring under trials, but thankful for my state.*

*Give me that faith which is the means of salvation,*

*and the principle and medium of all goodness;*

*May I be saved by grace through faith,*

*live by faith, feel the joy of faith, do the work of faith.*

*Perceiving nothing in myself, may I find in Christ*

*wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption.*

Excerpt from *The Valley of Vision:*

*A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*

*“The Convicting Spirit”*

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**Additional Books of Interest**

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**About the GO Center**

If you are a pastor or leader in an evangelical church that is serious about increasing your effectiveness in reaching the lost and growing the found, the GO Center is here for you. Our focus is on church vitalization and/or revitalization through an ever-expanding commitment to the Great Commission as the heart of both vision and strategy in a local church. Your church is at the epicenter of a domestic mission field and that field is ripe for harvest. Rampant plateau and decline in the church, and the lack of conversion growth in most churches, are not the result of a lean harvest. Jesus tells us that the harvest is plentiful. The challenge is that there are too few laborers willing to commit to working in that plentiful harvest, coupled with, perhaps, a lack of skill and know-how as to how to work in the harvest effectively once laboring in those harvest fields that surround our churches.

We get it. We’ve been at this for a long time and, by the grace of God, we’ve figured a few things out. We can help you with training, consulting, coaching, and assessment. We can help you identify the course to follow, and we can help you stay on that course to completion. You want to make a difference and we can help you make that difference.

The GO Center offers a wide range of ministry from one-on-one coaching and consulting to congregational revitalization. Wherever you are in your journey to bring Great Commission vitality or re-vitality to your church, we can be your resource, ranging from small engagement with us to very large engagement. We can work with a pastor, leader, or church one-on-one or we can group pastors, leaders, or congregations into cohorts for group engagement. Whatever you need and however you need to frame it, we’ll find a way to serve you as we move together toward establishing or sustaining Great Commission vitality in your church or ministry.

Now is the time. Contact us today!

The GO Center

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*HAPPY HARVESTING!*

*Matthew 28:18-20*