

Leadership Learnings From Bloggers

2008 Edition



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Released February 2009

Aggregated and produced by Exponential Media, a Division of Exponential Network

Leadership Learnings from Bloggers is a collection of blog posts on leadership from over 20 national leaders / bloggers.

Disclaimer

In selecting the 20+ bloggers for this resource, we choose leaders with experience on the front lines. However, Exponential Network makes no warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, validity or originality of each blogger's content. Exponential Network is serving as an aggregator of leading bloggers and does not necessarily agree with the opinions and beliefs represented in individual posts. We've attempted to include their content verbatim from their web sites except for obvious typographical errors.

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About

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV) states that “plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” *Leadership Learnings from Bloggers* grew out of a desire to provide insights to church planters from more experienced leaders. As we compiled the resource it became clear that the collective insights were applicable to any leader and not just church planters. So the work was split into two projects. This first resource is leadership learnings applicable to any leader. A supplemental resource is also being compiled with unique content for church planters.

Although the resource was compiled for use directly by church leaders, the learnings are applicable to nearly any leader because many are rooted in principles and practical experience on the front lines of service. This resource covers leadership topics from staffing to vision casting.

We encourage you not to read this as a “how to” manual. Be cautious and slow to directly implement any of the learnings. Ponder the principles behind the learnings and adapt them to your unique context. Just as the Exponential Network makes no claim to agree with all the learnings, you may disagree with some. Be discerning.

We wrestled with whether to organize the resource by author or by subject. In the end, many of the posts cover multiple topics so we opted to organize the resource by author.

In selecting blog authors for inclusion, we surveyed a number of blog readers and simply asked for a list of their favorite bloggers. Additionally, the team at Passion for Planting follows a large number of bloggers for inclusion in NewChurches.com’s aggregator. The authors we asked to participate represent those who were most frequently cited on “my top 10 list.” With one or two exceptions, every leader who was asked to participate in this free resource enthusiastically did.

So how did we choose the number of posts for each blogger? Not scientifically. In a few cases, bloggers asked that we limit the number of posts. For most bloggers, we simply looked at each post through the lens of leadership learnings applicable to new church leaders. In most all cases, the learnings are universally applicable to leaders independent of context.

The Exponential Network (aggregator of this free resource) exists to attract, inspire and equip Kingdom-minded leaders to engage in a movement of high-impact, reproducing churches. We provide a national voice for this movement through the Exponential Conference, the Exponential Channel, the Exponential Church feature article in Outreach Magazine, the Exponential Book Series, and a growing number of alliance members (leading church planting groups choosing to affiliate with one another via Exponential Network).

For more information on the Exponential Network and it’s alliance members, go to www.exponentialnetwork.com or email info@exponentialnetwork.com, or call 800.319.5361

Special Thanks

Nearly every blogger we approached enthusiastically supported the idea of this resource and in allowing their content to be included for FREE. We'd like to thank each of the authors including:

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Imagine the time required to wade through thousands of blog posts to find the best “leadership gems.” Doug Foltz and Patrick Bradley from Passion for Planting (www.newchurches.com) and Pat Furgerson and Anna Mari Green from Exponential Network (www.exponentialnetwork.com) are to thank for the long hours preparing, compiling and editing this resource.



Todd Wilson
Director, Exponential Network

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Ben Arment

YOUR VISION ON A NAPKIN

Love the concept behind this **new book** by Dan Roam:

The Back of the Napkin: Solving Problems and Selling Ideas with Pictures. I **think in diagrams** and have napkins stuffed into my Moleskin from table-top brainstorming.

I think every church needs a **graphical mission** that can fit on a napkin. At RCC, I used the **guest lodge**, the **climbing teams** and the **sherpas** to illustrate our mission of *making disciples who can make disciples of Jesus Christ*.

You lose the diagram, you lose your ability to **communicate clearly** with people the vision of your church.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Focus, Simplicity

THE ENEMY OF INNOVATION IS SUCCESS

Even the most creative people are tempted to **stop being innovative** when their ideas become successful. They subconsciously **create a rule** that says, "This idea worked, so don't do it differently." They "**rubber-stamp**" instead of "**re-create**." I'll say this as clearly as I can: If you are executing the **same creative ideas** you did last year because they worked, you are already **on the decline**

Posted by: Ben Arment, Innovation

MARGINALLY RADICAL

Let me go out on a limb... I think most of us **walk the line** between **passion** and **peacefulness**. We play it **too safe** because we fear failure and criticism. I think **most of us** wake up every day with the goal of

not looking bad or bringing **unwelcomed attention** to ourselves. But I'll **make-up a rule** here that I think is true... If we're not **offending someone** or risking **personal embarrassment** with our life endeavors, we're probably making **very little impact**. That's just how **influence** works... It comes with the price of **personal unrest**.

In almost **every endeavor** I go after, there is **always a moment** when I have **tremendous regret**. It's always **that moment** when I've gone too far to turn back, and there's absolutely **no assurance** of success. I start cursing my holy discontentment, my entrepreneurial nature, and I kick myself for being naive, calling it faith. And then God does something amazing, and I go do it all over again.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Risk Taking

GIVE UP YOUR GOOD CHRISTIAN LIFE AND FOLLOW CHRIST

I'm pretty sure the **greatest deterrent** to following God's leading or most of us is **not disobedience**, but rather the **deep sadness** that comes with moving hundreds of miles away from family and loved ones... the **paralyzing fear** of risking financial security... and the **pant-soiling faith-leap** of trying something new. But consider the alternative...

Posted by: Ben Arment, Risk Taking

THE BARRIER OF COMPARISON

Reading The 4-Hour Work Week to see what all the fuss is about... Author **Timothy Ferriss** tells an interesting story about challenging some **Princeton students** to a competition:

The first person to contact a **seemingly impossible person** to reach (Bill Clinton, JLo, JD Salinger, etc.) and ask them **three questions** would win a trip to anywhere in the world...

Out of a **whole class of students**, NONE of them accepted his challenge. Many thought the challenge was **impossible**, but the **most common excuse** was **comparison**. They thought the **other students** would certainly **get there first**. They didn't think there was any point in trying.

Such a **great lesson** on the **barrier of comparison**. How many times have we been **stopped in our tracks** because we thought someone else could write a better book than we can... or plant a better church... or do a better job than we can?

Posted by: Ben Arment, Selflessness

MORE ON THE BARRIER OF COMPARISON...

Another nugget from *The 4-Hour Work Week*... There's **more competition** to become **mediocre** than to become **remarkable**. Almost everyone is vying for the **same spots** to be **average**. Far fewer people actually go for the big dreams, which makes them **easier to attain**. For example, it's easier to raise \$1,000,000 than \$10,000 because more people are trying to raise \$10,000.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Selflessness

ATTRACTING HIGH-CAPACITY LEADERS WITH A VISION BREAKFAST

Four years ago, our **leadership team** at **Reston Community Church** was trying to figure out how to **engage** some of the **high-capacity leaders** in our congregation. Asking them to, say, wear a **reflective orange vest** to **direct parking** felt **emasculating**.

Of course, roles like handing out **bulletins** are important, but these guys included a **rocket scientist** for the NSA, a senior **vice president** for the largest private defense firm, the **owner** of some radio stations, a **doctor**, an **engineer** for NASA, and so on... There was no reason we couldn't offer them a **bigger piece of the pie**. And it didn't have to be an overtly **spiritual role**. **High capacity leaders** want to **be invited** to serve. It's not a **pride-thing**; they just don't know where to plug-in. So we invited 10 of them to a **breakfast** at the **Marriott Hotel**. We reserved a **private dining room**, wore our suits, prepared a **formal presentation** on Power Point and in print, and cast big vision to them. In essence... we **spoke their language**.

I can't tell you how much **that meeting** impacted our church. These leaders **felt included**. They bought-in. And it wasn't about giving them **special treatment** - they were the **marginalized members** of our community. It was about **laying down our pride** to let gifted leaders lead.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Miscellaneous

HOW TO BUILD A DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL (AND WHY YOU NEED ONE IN THE FIRST PLACE)

The best way to **succeed** at anything - whether you're a first-time **author**, a rock **band**, a **fund-raiser**, a singer/**songwriter**, an itinerant **evangelist**, or a **consultant** - is to create a **distribution channel**. (That's a fancy way of saying "a direct connection with a core audience.")

By the time **church planters** want to **raise money**, they're already **8-12 months behind** because they never built a **mailing list**. Aspiring **authors** can't get published because they never built a **readership**. It's all about the distribution channel...

Most of the organizations **you're familiar with** have taken **great care** to **build one** -- the Willow Creek Association, LifeChurch, Integrity Music, Catalyst, you name it. They're all **leading voices** because they have a **broadband connection** to a **core audience**.

Seth Godin? Purple distribution channel. Evotional? Chase the distribution channel. One Prayer? One distribution channel.

Even **Starbucks** realized they'd created an incredible **distribution channel** for **recording artists** through their thousands of stores -- a la Paul McCartney's latest CD. Garth Brooks did the same with Wal-Mart.

You can build a channel too, but it takes **diligence** and **hard work**. Here are a **few** ways to do it.

Keep adding friends on Facebook.

Publish your own magazine on Issuu.

Blog every day. Gather an audience of readers.

Build an ever-growing mailing list in Excel.

Send newsletters on a monthly basis.

Podcast or vodcast on a weekly basis.

Create your own Mogulus channel

By the time you're ready to unveil your **next great project** or **opus**, you'll have a **group of friends** ready to receive it.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Miscellaneous

TUCKER TOOK HIS TIE OFF

Several years ago, **Tucker Carlson** of the show *Crossfire* always wore a **bow tie**. It was his **trademark**, his **iconic symbol**. Until one day, he **no longer wore it**. The reason he took it off? The only thing I can pin-point is **John Stewart's appearance on their show in 2006**, where he said to Tucker in a **heated exchange** -- "This [show] is theater. How old are you?" "*Thirty-five*" "And you wear a bow-tie!?"

Criticism knocked Tucker off his game.

This is a **bad analogy**, I know. But I can't think of anything more **destructive** to vision than **criticism**. It makes you doubt yourself, your ideas, your dream of what the future can be. A couple of **take-aways**...

Surround yourself with vision champions

Understand that more success equals more criticism

If you've taken it off... put your bow tie back on

Posted by: Ben Arment, Feedback

MY TONY ROBBINS MOMENT

But I'm serious about this...

Every day, we **make decisions** at a board room table encircled by the **key influencers** in our life -- doubt, fear, money, intimidation, naysayers, etc. Our **greatest challenge** is not listening to their "no" before we give the opportunity a shot. -- Let the opportunity tell you no. Don't say "no" for it.

Yesterday, I **picked up the phone** and made an **audacious ask** that every instinct within me said was going to be a "no." I admit it was a pretty **unreasonable request**. Too big. But ya know what...? I got a "yes." Unbelievable. Don't say no for yourself. Let the opportunity be the one to do it.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Miscellaneous

THE BRUTAL LAW OF THE LID

This is such a **brutal law** by Maxwell. It means that if you can't find good leaders to serve with you, it's probably... gulp... **your own fault**. Great leaders don't follow good leaders. And **good**

leaders don't follow **bad leaders**. At least, not for very long. Doesn't mean you have to be better at **what they do** than **they are**. Most def not. In fact, if you're leading well, you'll be surrounded by talented specialists. But an indicator of your leadership ability is **who is standing around you**.

Posted by: Ben Arment, Staff

Mark Batterson

LION CHASER'S MANIFESTO

As we **kick off** a New Year, I thought I'd post the **lion chaser's manifesto**.

Read it. Print it. Post it. Live it.

Quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. Set God-sized goals. Pursue God-ordained passions. Go after a dream that is destined to fail without divine intervention. Keep asking questions. Keep making mistakes. Keep seeking God. Stop pointing out problems and become part of the solution. Stop repeating the past and start creating the future. Stop playing it safe and start taking risks. Expand your horizons. Accumulate experiences. Enjoy the journey. Find every excuse you can to celebrate everything you can. Live like today is the first day and last day of your life. Don't let what's wrong with you keep you from worshiping what's right with God. Burn sinful bridges. Blaze new trails. Criticize by creating. Worry less about what people think and more about what God thinks. Don't try to be who you're not. Be yourself. Laugh at yourself. Quit holding out. Quit holding back. Quit running away.

Chase the lion.

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Risk Taking

ALTARS TO GOD OR MONUMENTS TO SELF?

This morning I'm doing a session at the Evolve Conference titled *The Secure Leader*. I'm going to use Saul as a **case study in insecurity**. Two verses represent two **defining moments in his life**.

I Samuel 14:35: "**And Saul built an altar to God; the first one he had ever built.**" So far so good. Saul is building altars to God. But fast-forward one chapter. I Samuel 15:12 says, "**Saul went up to Carmel to build a monument to himself.**" Somewhere between those two verses, Saul stopped building altars to God and started building monuments to himself. There is a **fine line** between **Thy Kingdom Come** and **My Kingdom Come**. At some point, it was no longer about God. It was about Saul.

Here are seven habits of secure leaders:

1) Don't play the comparison game.

No one wins! Comparison either leads to **pride** or **jealousy**!

2) Success isn't numbers

Saul got caught up in the numbers game. And David had better stats. Listen, if my children grow up to love God and everything else falls apart I'm successful. But if NCC grows to 50,000 people and I sell 10,000,000 books it means nothing if my family falls apart. Jesus was successful because he poured his life into twelve people!

3) Celebrate your failures.

Insecure people are **afraid of failing**. Secure people **laugh at themselves**. They celebrate failure because it accentuates what God can do **in spite of us!**

4) Don't panic

Saul panics when his men start scattering so he makes a sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel. Insecure people get nervous. They give up. Secure leaders **hang in there no matter what**.

5) Don't get defensive

How you handle criticism will make you or break you. You need **tough skin** and a **soft heart**. If you're insecure your **defense mechanisms** will get the best of you. So instead of leading out of imagination you'll lead out of insecurity.

6) Surround yourself with the right people

Who was Saul's greatest asset? David. But if you are insecure, your greatest asset will become your greatest threat. And it will short-circuit your ability to surround yourself with a great team. And it will limit your influence.

7) Keep building altars to God

God often uses us at our point of insecurity because then **He gets all the credit**. I pray for the **favor of God** as much as anything else because **I want God to do things for me that I cannot do for myself**. And every time we experience God's blessing we need to build an altar. That's why we named our coffeehouse Ebenezers: *hitherto the Lord has helped me*. The blessings of God either turn into **pride or praise**.

Are you building **altars to God** or **monuments to yourself?**

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Selflessness

MEETING TIPS

Yesterday was a **marathon meeting day!** I try to schedule the majority of my meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I call them my **meeting days**. Mondays and Fridays are my **focus days**. I went eight straight hours yesterday without coming up for a breath.

I love a meeting that has an agenda. That gives a meeting **positive energy**. A meeting with **no agenda?** Not so much!

Ever had one of those meetings where you don't have the guts to come right out and ask: **why are we meeting?** So you play detective and you can't figure it out for the life of you. An hour later you're still clueless. One of the simple lessons I've learned is to try to ascertain the **objective of the meeting** before the meeting. I came up with that little rule of thumb after a **one-hour meeting that culminated in a multi-level marketing opportunity!** Not that there is anything wrong with multi-level marketing! I just want to know upfront.

One of the things I wrestle with is this. I tend to be a little more **task-oriented** than **relationship-oriented** in the meeting context. If we're meeting to **hang out** let's play corn hole or go to a game. You know what I'm saying? But during the work day I tend to be in work mode. Not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Here are a few **meeting tips** for pastors with busy schedules:

- 1) **Pray for the person before meeting with them**--it can turn an ordinary meeting into a divine appointment.
- 2) **Let them know how much time you have upfront**--it can avoid misunderstanding and keep you from feeling like you are cutting them off.
- 3) **Get to the point but don't get there too early or too late.** If you get there too early it becomes impersonal. If you get there too late you'll have five minutes left to talk about the real issue.
- 4) **Ask lots of Questions**--don't try to be an Oracle. Be a sounding board.
- 5) **Remember that your time is the one of the greatest gifts you can give to people.** Be wise. Be generous.

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Meetings

RANDOM FIRINGS OF THE SYNAPSES

Every once in a while I like to share **what I'm reading**. I love to **cross-pollinate** by reading books in a **variety of disciplines**--everything from physics to philosophy to business. Here are some learnings from [*It's not about the Coffee*](#). I read this because we're looking to expand Ebenezers into a **coffeehouse chain**. But I think it has applications or implications for spiritual leadership as well.

"If you **grow people**, the people grow the business."

I think we focus too much energy on **church growth**. I think it's all about **personal growth**. It's not about growing a big church. It's about growing **big people**--people who serve sacrificially, give generously, dream ridiculously, and love gracefully.

"The fundamental task is to **achieve smallness** within a large organization."

The way to grow larger is to grow smaller via small groups. I honestly don't think God will grow us **beyond our ability to disciple people**. And if small groups are our primary context for discipleship, then **the number of small groups we have** will determine our **growth potential** as a church.

"Have you ever been to an art museum and **stood before a great work of art**? It captivates you and **transports you to a new place**. The mythologist Joseph Campbell used to call this epiphany an *aesthetic arrest*."

I love that concept. And I've always believed that **aesthetics are important**. Why else would a dozen chapters in Exodus be devoted to the aesthetics of the Tabernacle including the **color of the curtains** and the **exact recipe for the incense**? So we need to pay attention to aesthetics whether it's a coffeehouse or a church. But I couldn't help but think about the **aesthetic arrest** we'll experience when we **cross the space-time threshold; get our first glimpse of heaven; and kneel at the feet of Christ**. And by the way, I think a **spiritually charged atmosphere that is full of faith and grace** is the ultimate aesthetic! Read I Corinthians 14:25: "They will fall down

on their knees and worship God, declaring, "**God is really here among you.**" That has always been my goal for church.

"At Starbucks, all employees are called **partners.**"

I think **language** defines the way we think about things. For example, **pro-life** and **anti-abortion** are two very different ways of describing the same thing. Different connotations. Do we need a **new vocabulary** or a **new term** for what many of us call volunteers?

"We started **opening our stores ten minutes before the posted time** as a way to **say yes** to customers even before they placed their order."

I love this! When I played football it was called Lombardi time. If you weren't **five minutes early** you were late. I think it's part of creating **an extra-mile culture!** By the way, imagine everyone who attends your church arriving five minutes early one Sunday. What a thought!

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Miscellaneous

IMITATION IS SUICIDE

I just read the latest issue of [Outreach](#) magazine and the feature was an interview with Erwin McManus, pastor of **Mosaic** in LA. He said something that was so profound. Really made me think. "**I think a lot of pastors have a dream that matches the life of the pastor who is the living the dream they want.**" Man, that stopped me in my tracks.

I think there is a such a **temptation to copy** when it comes to ministry. I wrestle with it as much as anyone else. I think we need **models.** I've got my fair share, including Erwin McManus. But I remember reading something Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *Self-Reliance*: "There is a time in every man's education that he arrives at the conviction that **imitation is suicide.** He must take himself for better or for worse."

I think there are **two simple principles** that ought to guide us:

1) **Keep Learning.**

2) **Be Yourself.**

At some point, most of us **stop learning** and **start copying.** It's so much easier. We stop living out of right-brain imagination and start living out of left-brain memory. And that is when we stop **creating the future** and **start repeating the past.**

Just a simple reminder. **There never has been and never will be anyone like you.** And that isn't a testament to you. **It's a testament to the God who created you.**

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Originality

THREE TRANSLATIONS

Had a thought during one of the sessions today.

There are **three ways to translate the Bible**. You can translate it with 1) **your mind** 2) **your heart** and 3) **your life**.

I think a lot of us settle for the **mental translation**. But the end result is **information**. And what happens is this: **we learn more, do less**, and think we're growing spiritually. But not if that's the only translation.

The second translation is **emotional**. And the emotional translation may seem **more subjective** than intellectual translation. But that is when **our hearts break for the things that break the heart of God**. It's not just information. It's **transformation**. For the record, I think one person with **one deeply held conviction** will make more of a difference than someone with **a hundred good ideas**.

Finally, there is the **life translation**. That is when we become a "**living epistle**." That is when **the noun turns into a verb**. And that is how we **change the world**. At the end of the day, Jesus isn't going to say, "**Well thought** good and faithful servant." He's going to say, "**Well done** good and faithful servant."

Imagine a church filled with people who are **translating the Bible with their lives!**

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Discipleship, Modeling

PURPLE COWS

At the Sticks Conference I talked about **Trojan Horses, Purple Cows, and Broken Windows**. Thought I'd share a few thoughts about purple cows.

One of my favorite marketing books is [Purple Cow](#) by Seth Godin. The book revolves around this metaphor: **if you've seen one brown cow you've seen them all**. But a **purple cow**, now that would catch your attention. One statement in the book has profound implications: "**If you aren't remarkable you're invisible**."

Every church needs to **paint itself purple**. I'm not talking about gimmicks. I'm not talking about being different for difference sake. I'm talking about **making such a remarkable difference in our communities** that we are **unignorable**.

I have a couple core convictions:

- 1) **the good news ought to make the news**. Brown churches sit on the sideline and invite the community to **come** to them. Purple churches are always **going** and **compelling**. They are making such a big difference that they become a highly visible part of their community. And people drive by the brown churches--the churches that are invisible--to go to the purple church.
- 2) **The greatest message deserves the greatest marketing**. I know that marketing is a dirty word in some church circles, but does it get anybody else riled up that **Madison Avenue is far**

better at pedaling its worthless wares than the church is at preaching the good news? I have a problem with that. We need **sanctified competitive streaks**.

3) **The church ought to be the most creative place on the planet**. Too many churches look too much alike. **We need lots of different kinds of churches because there are lots of different kinds of people**. Every church has a unique **churchprint** and ought to be a unique expression of the gospel in their kingdom niche.

So how do we paint ourselves purple? For starters, **dare to be different**. You might offend some Pharisees, but that isn't who you're trying to reach. Secondly, **disrupt the routine**. I think it starts with your personal routine. **Change of pace + change of place = change of perspective**. You need to get out of your routine so you can have some **purple thoughts**.

As a leader, you need to **cause confusion**. Jesus didn't do orientations. He did **disorientations**. You need to find **new ways of saying old things** (see the Parables). You need to find **new wineskins**. You need to **sing a new song**. Neurological studies have found that familiarity stimulates the left-brain. Novelty stimulates the right-brain. We need some **Spirit-inspired, right-brained ideas** that **capture the imagination of the church and the world**.

Posted by: Mark Batterson, Originality

Chris Elrod

THINGS THAT WORKED FOR US IN 2007

In contrast to my other 2007 review post here is a list of things that worked for us this year at Compass Point. It's a pretty small and simple list...but was hard to come by (more on that in a later post). We tried most everything else out there to grow a church...only to throw in the towel...and come back to the basics. In 2007 what worked for us was...

We studied the Bible.

We followed the Bible.

We preached the Bible.

Finally, we prayed about everything before we did it...no matter how big or small.

This list reminds me of that scene in the movie "Bull Durham" where the coach is talking to the team in the locker room and says, "Baseball is a simple game. You throw the ball...you hit the ball...you catch the ball."

Seriously...the marketing, technology, programming, music style, etc. is all just window-dressing. The real meat is with the vision...and you can't get it...or pass it on...without doing all of the stuff listed above.

Posted by: Chris Elrod, Focus

THE LOOK OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF DEFEAT

Last night's Super Bowl didn't end like they normally do. The clock was down to one second and both teams thought the game was over. The coach's handshakes had been given, the teams were talking to each, the Gatorade had been dumped, the press was on the field, etc. Then it happened...the referees started getting everyone back to their benches because there was still one more play to run. The Giants offense and Patriots defense took their place on the field. Giants head coach Tom Coughlin was on his sidelines. Patriots head coach Bill Belichick was...in the locker room. His team was on the field...and in the face of defeat he was hiding in the locker room like a childish little coward (sorry Bob, but it was true). No one is sure if it was anger, upset, disappointment or just the fact that he may have been a sore loser...but when his team needed him most...their leader(?)...Bill Belichick...was no where to be found (some speculate that he was in hiding secretly videotaping Coughlin's final offensive call in preparation for next season's match up).

As a pastor we have to lead everyday. It is easy to lead when everything is going well. When the attendance is growing, giving is increasing, your church's star is on the rise in the community, baptisms are happening every week and God is blessing every day...leadership is a easy. However, when the whole world comes crashing down around you...that is when the true mark of leadership is found.

It's easy to cast vision, recruit volunteers and develop leaders when you are winning...but it takes a true leader to stare into the face of defeat and still mount the charge anyway. People are sick of church leaders losers that bail at the first sign of trouble. They are looking for someone to follow when the chips are down...when the battle is tough...when defeat is a sure thing...yet the leader is still at the helm pushing forward. It is in those moments that people are inspired, motivated and transformed. It is also when God gets the greatest glory!!!

History has shown us that the greatest leaders motivated people to their greatest successes when it looked like all was lost. Whether it was General Douglas MacArthur's "I shall return" when he was leaving the Philippines right before the Japanese invaded. Or naval commander John Paul Jones' shouting "I have not yet begun to fight" when asked if he was ready to give up his ship. Or General Anthony McAuliffe's reply of "nuts" to the Nazi's invitation to surrender at Bastogne (my personal favorite). All of these men looked into the face of defeat...accepted their roles as leaders...and led their troops to victory. That is the mark of a great leader!!!

It's Monday morning and the blogs are alive with posts from pastors talking about how great their services were yesterday. However...for some...it was a difficult day...a real battle. Defeat looks eminent...hardship is at hand...struggle is the only constant. It is in those moments that leaders are born. Don't pull a "Belichick"...don't run for the locker room. Stay in the game...lead...inspire...motivate...gain ground...do the unexpected...for victory could be just...one second away!!!

Posted by: Chris Elrod, Persistence

IT'S THE PRICE OF LEADERSHIP

I love my calling and I love being the senior pastor of Compass Point Church. There is literally nothing else I can even think about doing...nothing gets me as jazzed as this. I love watching people far from God come to know Jesus...I love baptizing them...I love to see their life changed...I love to see them start growing in their knowledge of God's Word...I love to see them come full circle.

On the other hand...there is a price to being in leadership. The minute you say "yes" to being a leader...a target appears on your back...and people begin to take shots. It is not fun...it takes thick skin to survive...but it comes with the territory. Folks get mad...folks get greedy...folks get power-hungry...folks get turned inward...and they take shots at you. You are the one casting the vision...you have the final decision...you are where the buck stops...therefore...you are the easiest one for people to blame about whatever beef they have.

Over the years I have discovered some things about wearing the target that comes with leadership. When I'm getting shot at I try to remember these simple things:

1. It's the price of leadership. Leadership is not easy and not always fun. My grandmother use to say that if you can't stand the heat...get out of the kitchen. Thick skin is a must in leadership...if I can't take shots...I can't lead.

2. Don't let it get personal. It may be personal for the one taking the shots...but I try to never let it get personal for me. At the end of the day I still have to try and lead that person. If I have lost my temper, held a grudge or held on to anger then I cannot lead effectively.

3. Is there validity to the shots. It may have not been handled well...it may have been a sharp knife in the back...but I always ask myself if there is validity to an accusation or claim being made against me. Sometimes God has spoken to me through taking a shot...reveals things about my leadership style, personality or how I deal with things that need to be changed. Every moment in leadership is a learning opportunity unto itself.

4. It is only one person's opinion. In most cases it has been one or maybe two people that are taking shots at me...not everyone I'm trying to lead. I try not to get paranoid and think everyone is out to get me. I try not to hole up in my office or house and have no interaction with all of the other people that are not taking shots at me.

5. Determine if it's cancer. Cancer can grow quickly and can cause much damage...even death. The same can be said for people that continually take shots at leadership. Their attitude and issues can cause serious problems or the demise of an organization. Cancer must be identified and dealt with quickly...if it can't be cured...it must be cut out. I always try to determine if the shots are a one-time thing or if this is going to be an ongoing problem. My answer to that usually determines how I deal with the situation.

6. Turn to God. Most importantly...I turn to God and His Word when people start taking shots. Their attacks do not catch Him by surprise...and at times...play into His plans. I find not only comfort from praying and reading the Bible while I'm taking shots...but many times find that He reveals the steps that need to be taken to change the situation.

Posted by: Chris Elrod, Feedback

STATEMENTS THAT HAVE ME THINKING

As a person with Attention Deficit Disorder I take in a constant stream of input, however it takes me a while to process through it all (I'm almost always processing). What normally happens is that certain statements, questions or thoughts really grab my attention and keep filtering back through my mind for several weeks. To some extent it's like the cream rising to the top and replaying in my mind over and over again. Over the last month several things other people have said have really caught my attention...and have had me wrestling with leadership questions. Most of it revolves around the kind of leaders we need to be putting into place at Compass Point (both paid and volunteer leaders)...and the kind of leader I need to be in order to fulfill the vision that God has given us as a church. Here are those statements, quotes and questions...most are from Perry Noble's coaching network that I'm currently participating in.

“Thinking that things are going to slow down and we'll be able to get our schedule under control is a lie from Hell” – Perry Noble

“Fairness ended in the Garden Of Eden. It's not our job as pastors to be fair, but to follow God's leading first and foremost” – Perry Noble

“**Are you bringing on leaders...or projects?**” – Jeff Kapusta

“The church needs your leadership more than your preachingship!” – Craig Groeschel

“If the folks in leadership around you can get the decisions 80% close to what you wanted...leave them alone and let them do the job.” – Perry Noble

“Leadership costs money!!!” – Perry Noble

“If someone doesn’t bring energy to the vision when they walk into the room, they are not going to be in...or stay in...leadership at my church” – Hal Mayer

“Never let your personal opinion affect your leadership.” – Perry Noble

“Are you more concerned about being discovered or being developed?” – Perry Noble

“Some days we don’t need to fast from food, but from technology.” – Perry Noble

“The difference between where we are and where we want to be is the painful decisions we are unwilling to make.” – Ed Young, Jr. (I think that’s who originally said it)

“If I have to spiritually feed my staff, then I don’t need them as staff.” – Perry Noble

Posted by: Chris Elrod, Learning

PLAYING ABOVE YOUR GAME

When I was in elementary school I decided to take a summer tennis course sponsored through the local YMCA. I had never picked up a tennis racquet before...much less hit a tennis ball. In all honesty I took the course because I thought Chris Evert was hot and I had pre-teen dreams of impressing her with my skill. Anyway, I sucked at tennis...until I played against a guy in my neighborhood that was aiming to be pro. He would whip my rear every game...I mean totally humiliating defeats. The crazy thing...as I was playing against him...I was learning at a level beyond my abilities...I was playing above my game. I never did beat him...not even once...but I was able to demolish every other player taking the YMCA course. By the way, Chris Evert never took an interest in me so I dropped the game.

The point is that I didn’t hang around people that were at my level. I wanted to get better...I wanted to succeed...I wanted to be the best I could...so I played with people above my game. Whatever I have done in life...comedy, church leadership, being a husband...I always looked for people playing above my game to hang out with and learn from. As a church leader my dream is to see Compass Point Church reach thousands of people far from God in Lakeland with the Good News of Jesus Christ...therefore I seek out relationships with pastors that are already reaching thousands in their community. As a comedian I never hung out with guys on my own success level...I hung out with comedians that were doing television shows and headlining tours. As a Christian I try to hang out with...listen to...and read books by...theologians and pastors that are way beyond my understanding of the Bible. Trying to comprehend their level of Scriptural knowledge increases my level of knowledge of God’s Word. I may never reach their level of play...but my game gets better with each passing day.

Don’t settle for the norm...the status quo...in your walk with Jesus Christ...in your calling for God’s Kingdom. Be better...go further...get deeper...become proactive...and rise above the standard level. To do so...seek out...spend time with...listen to...and soak up...the wisdom and **practices** of people playing above your game.

Posted by: Chris Elrod, Learning

Dave Ferguson

WHY EXISTING CHURCHES NEED NEW CHURCHES

I have been thinking again about innovation. Ed Bahler was challenging me with the idea from the [Innovators Dilemma](#) (which I have just ordered). The basic concept is that **even the most innovative and best-managed companies (or churches), in spite of their attention to customers and continual investment in new technology, are susceptible to failure because these companies (or churches) tend to continue to do business the way they always have done business.**

It seems to me that the only way to break out of that innovators dilemma is to continually surround yourself with innovators and people who are inventing the new tomorrow. And the best way to do that in the church world is to become a reproducing church. Start new sites with young emerging leaders and listen to their new ideas. Start new churches and get close enough to them that you can learn from them and break out of your old paradigms. Begin a church planting network and find yourself immersed in a conversation of new and innovative thinking about reaching people far from God. I think we need to be reproducing churches not only so that we can start new sites, churches and networks to help people find their way back to God; we also need to be reproducing churches so that our existing churches remain relevant to an ever-changing world! Agree? Disagree?

Posted by Dave Ferguson, 3/11/08 Innovation

BELONGING BEFORE BELIEVING

We baptized 362 people last year at [Community](#). Guess how many of them I baptized? I baptized less than a dozen of the 362 them. Do you know who baptized the most people at our church last year? Small group leaders and small group participants. **The vast majority of the people who made a commitment to follow Christ asked their small group leader or someone in their small group to baptize them.** Why? It was within the context and experience of community that these people came to belief. This is indicative of a spiritual shift that has been taking place over the last decade - **spiritually searching people need to belong before they believe.**

Posted by Dave Ferguson, 3/30/08 Culture

BIKERS, DARTS AND THE MISSION OF JESUS

We had a great weekend at Community. And I'm not even talking about the 25 services at our 9 locations. I got a couple weeks worth of post from this weekend. But it all started on Saturday morning at Leadership Community when we were able to share some great news with the leaders that our God was entrusting us with record numbers of people - more than ever before! And as

cool as that was, that was not the highlight. **The highlight was getting to interview Donna and Jeremy who are leading 3C Communities.**

These 3C Communities are not facility-dependent and are not staff-dependent. They are a lot like a small group, except that this 3C Community becomes your church. **Rather than starting a new community (new small group, new campus or new church) to help people find their way back to God; they are trying to redeem the communities of which they are a part.** Their hope is that these communities will one day be at a place where all three C's (celebrate, connect and contribute) are experienced and that their friends will become Christ followers.

Donna loves to ride bikes (read Harleys) and loves bikers. Most of her biker friends are not interested when she invites them to come to one of our CCC sites. But when she asked them if they would like to schedule regular rides on Sundays they all said yes! So every Sunday she will be riding with her biker friends asking God to give her a chance to redeem that community and help her friends find their way back to God. Donna believes that her greatest opportunity is that as a need arises she offers to pray with and for her friends. She believes that will provide the way to more significant conversations and perhaps one day a community of bikers who are practicing the 3C's.

Jeremy has a bunch of friends that love throwing darts in a local bar. They like Jeremy and are more than willing to talk about spiritual things. But they have not shown any interest in walking through the doors of a church. So Jeremy is asking God to redeem the community that is he is already a part of and he hopes to help his friends find their way back to God. Jeremy doesn't just wait for spiritual topics to come up. Because he is very interested in spiritual things, it seems appropriate for him to talk about this with his friends - so he brings it up. He believes that through intentional conversations that they will grow and learn together and perhaps his buddies at the bar could become a group that practices the 3C's.

As we fulfill the great commission we can either create brand new communities or we can redeem the communities of which we are a part.

Posted by Dave Ferguson, 4/7/08 Evangelism

THEOLOGICALLY RIGHT AND RELATIONALLY WRONG

This past weekend we continued our series on **Life's Toughest Questions**. We let the people of [Community](#) submit questions on our website and create the series. It has been a truly great series so far!

This week the question was, **"What does God have to say about homosexuality?"** That is a tough question. I don't think it's nearly as tough a theological question as it is a relationally tough question. The research amongst 16-29 year-olds who don't go to church in the best-seller [UnChristian](#) concluded, ***"When you identify yourself as a Christian to a friend, neighbor, or business associate, you might as well have tattooed on your arm: anti-homosexual, gay-hater, homophobic."*** That tells me that the church of Jesus has too often been theologically right and relationally wrong.

My biggest concern going into this weekend is that we would sound like we had all the answers but had no interest in trying to serve and love people who are a part of the gay and lesbian community. **Over and over again in scripture and in the person of Jesus it is clear that God wants to be not just morally right or theologically right, but also relationally right.** And if the church of Jesus wants to see God's Dream accomplished on this planet we can no longer be theologically right and relationally wrong.

Posted by Dave Ferguson, 5/5/08 Culture

5 LEADERSHIP LESSONS IT TOOK A LONG TIME TO LEARN

I was recently asked by Christianity Today's [Building Church Leaders](#) to compile a short list of leadership lessons that I've learned and then briefly explain them in a sentence or two. I spent quite awhile thinking about the leadership lessons that it took me a several years to learn. Here are five lessons that took me a long time to learn and now you can learn them in less than five minutes.

1. The “God-Thing” Comes Before The Vision

Most leaders make the mistake of thinking that change starts with their vision; change starts with a “God-thing”. It is the leaders’ job to identify where God is at work and to communicate the vision of what God is doing and how we must get involved in His work.

2. Money Always Follows Vision

People give money to a compelling cause with a clear vision. When economic times are hard leaders are tempted to reduce the budget and the vision. NO! Increase the vision and money will follow. Never forget - God is always at work and vision is free!

3. Make It Fit On A Napkin.

If it can't be explained on a napkin it is too complicated. Make sure everything from your slogan, to your process for disciple-making to how you will create a movement can be explained on a napkin. If is simple and reproducible you can mobilize the masses.

4. Lead With A “Yes” And Ask “How” Later

If you want to lead in bringing about innovation learn to lead with a “yes” and not “how”. People are born with dreams from God and they want to make a difference. What they need most is a leader who will say “yes” when they ask for permission to give it a try.

5. Take Risks On Emerging Leaders & Artists

Resist the urge of telling young leaders to wait a few years; they need and deserve opportunities to lead, so take a risk on them now! Good art always involves risk; so if you want good art in your church you must take risks on your artists!

OK, now I've told you five lessons of leadership that took me a long time to learn...leave me a comment and give me one or two of yours!

Posted by Dave Ferguson, 8/4/08 Miscellaneous

Mike Foster

BUILDING TRUST THROUGH CONFESSIONS

I was reading a book this weekend by Harry Beckwith and this jumped out to me.

People decide that a person who admits mistakes is honest. They will trust everything else you say.

A person who never admits mistakes is insecure and cannot be completely trusted. The heart of a great relationship is trust. Admitting mistakes is among the fastest ways to build it.

Do you think that's a good plan for building a relationship of trust? And how early in a relationship do you admit your mistakes/failures/struggles/shortcomings to someone? Early or late or midstream?

Posted by: Mike Foster

THE FIRST CALL

When the crap hits the fan in your life, who is your first call? Who is your "leadership life jacket" when the plane is going down and diving nose first into the ocean? I believe every leader should have that person clearly identified and stated. A friend who without reservation will be there in a moment's notice in times of weakness or struggle.

It's the person who will pick up the phone at 3am in the morning when you call. And they are truly glad you dialed the number. It is that friend who hops on the plane dropping everything to be at your side at the hospital. When you are in a financial bind and your company is in a money crisis, they write a check.

Think about who that person is in your life. Be thankful for them. If you don't have someone like that...upgrade your friends.

Posted by: Mike Foster

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

I'm reading this little book by Harry Beckwith. It had a great chapter on how to ask for help. We all know human beings readily offer advice. But there is a strategic way to get good advice. And it comes by posing the right question.

Don't ask, "What am I doing wrong?" You probably won't get anything valuable out of that type of question. In fact, people will probably try and encourage you verses give you open and honest feedback.

So phrase it differently. Ask “What could I do to be even more effective?” or “I think this might work, but I value your opinion. What might work even better?”

To get the right help. Ask the right question.

Posted by: Mike Foster

GO-GIVER

I read a great book on the plane a couple weeks ago called “The Go-Giver” by Bob Burg and John David Mann. It is one of those parable books with a short little story with some big messages inside. The book goes through the “Five Laws Of Stratospheric Success.”

The Law of Value: Your true worth is found in how much more you give in value than you take in payment.

The Law of Compensation: Your income is determined by how many people you serve and how well you serve them.

The Law of Influence: Your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people’s interests first.

The Law of Authenticity: The most valuable gift you have to offer is yourself.

The Law of Receptivity: The key to effective giving is to stay open to receiving.

Posted by: Mike Foster

HOW TO BE A HYPOCRITE

Last week at Catalyst I shared a personal story of being worked over by the Assassin of the Headless Sprinting Chicken.

You see I talked with my wife on the phone last Tuesday night. She shared with me what my 6 year old daughter Taylor told her. Taylor said that “Daddy has never been to my classroom, doesn’t know who my teacher is, and has never seen my desk.”

This statement hit me like a ton of bricks. My passion for the work I’m doing had impacted the things that were important to my daughter.

Also, I felt like a total hypocrite. Here I was traveling, writing, speaking about how to avoid the Sprinting Chicken, all the while being demolished by him. Telling others what to do and yet failing miserably in my own life. I compromised on every front all for the good of “the cause.”

So yesterday, I took a day off from work and went to Taylor’s classroom. I sat in a tiny chair next to her desk. We worked on Math problems together. I met her teacher. I saw her desk. I loved it and so did she.

This hypocrite is on the mend. And I think the smile on Taylor's face shows that she is glad I'm finally figuring out what's important.

Posted by: Mike Foster

POPULARITY PROSTITUTE #1: WHAT REALLY DRIVES YOU?

Can you answer this question honestly? What really drives you?

I think most of us could barely answer this question with transparency. Sure we could come up with some quick responses and some noble answers if we had to.

"I'm passionate about my work." "I believe in the cause." Blah Blah Blah. All good answers but not the REAL answer.

I have a simple theory. I think what drives many us is the need to be validated. Our personal self worth is the driving force in many of our decisions. How we feel about ourselves is the fuel of why we do things.

I've talked with leaders whose primary purpose is to prove their parents wrong when they said to them at a young age "they would never amount to anything." Those words have haunted them all their life and now drive them as leaders.

I've met with people who are driven by the toxic need to prove their critics wrong. They have been so beaten down by the nay-sayers that the criticism becomes the motivation to succeed. "Let's shove it in their face when I make it! I will show them!"

Think about it. We so desperately want to matter in the world that we will do anything to be successful. We will cash in our marriages, families, ethics, health, etc. to get to "that place" that will make us feel good.

We fantasize about speaking on the main stage at conferences, drive nice cars that we can't afford, and spend some serious change every year so we can be thin. These desires scream out VALIDATE ME! I MATTER! I AM DESIRABLE PERSON! PLEASE NOTICE ME!

So is feeling good about yourself a bad thing? Nope. Is having a healthy self worth wrong? Nope.

But I do want to make the case that until we understand and identify this hidden force in us, we are going to live dangerous and unfulfilling lives. Until we call it out in ourselves, it will quietly and subtly unhinge our true happiness. We must have the courage to recognize our own self obsession and how that impacts our decisions in EVERYTHING. Both in life and leadership.

So think about it. Stew on it. Get brutally honest and personal. And then take a stab and answer the question privately "What is really driving you?"

Posted by: Mike Foster

POPULARITY PROSTITUTE #2: TWITTER NARCISSISM

I love Twitter. Others think it to be a narcissistic self-absorbed activity. They might have a point.

I just checked and I have 821 followers. They are keeping up to date with where I go to lunch, my new purchase of a Chargers snack helmet, and when I take Napoleon the Dog to the bathroom.

Does this sound absurd? Yes. Does it feed my hidden need for “followers” and for those to pay attention to what I think and do? I’m not sure. It could be a slippery slope if you think about it.

Many use Twitter to let people know when they post a new blog, or some event is coming up, or to direct people to other cool things. Los found a place to stay when he was stranded on travel by using Twitter. I think that’s cool.

You decide. Is it a Popularity Prostitute app or just a fun way to connect with people?

Posted by: Mike Foster

POPULARITY PROSTITUTE #3: DON’T FALL IN LOVE WITH THE GREEN ROOM

When leaders have success in their organization, the temptation is to withdraw. Green rooms are built, the posse is created, and if you really hit it “big” you get your own security detail.

But here is my challenge to every successful leader out there. Don’t fall in love with the green room. It is a formula for that will bite you in the butt. To separate yourself from people, especially your customers or congregants, is a bad move.

I love the example that Herb Kelleher sets. He is the founder and long time CEO of Southwest Airlines. You will find Herb riding on the planes, talking to customers, serving snacks, and hanging out with the baggage handlers. He is fully engaged in the work of Southwest. With his tremendous success, he would have every right to isolate himself in his corner office. But he doesn’t retreat.

Let’s do a quick check about whether you are isolating or engaging. Think about the stories you share. Are they second hand stories that staff have relayed to you? Or are they first hand accounts? Are you reading about significant things that happened in your organization or are they actually happening to you?

And let me say this, if you have some pumped up security detail on you all the time, please reconsider. I’m not sure if you know this, but Bono(U2) walks the streets of New York City with no body guards and no posse. I’m just sayin.

Posted by: Mike Foster

Seth Godin

LAYERING

Someone asked me which post on this blog represented the turning point of its growth. The 'breakthrough' post. It turns out that there wasn't one. Instead, there were 2,500 posts, one after the other, each building (and I was learning from each) as we went.

Wikipedia is built on a bold idea: launch with a few hundred mediocre articles. Challenge people to add a few more. And then, day after day, layer on top of that, improving each one, improving a hundred thousand of them, improving a million of them. One after another, layer after layer.

Squidoo is a bit different. Let each person layer their own page, instead of a crowd. And then, as time goes by and the crowd gets bigger, the new folks are smarter (and building better pages) because they've watched the results that others have layered up.

Organizations that make the same mistakes every day (hidebound ones, rulebook based ones, airlines) rarely get to layer. They don't grow and improve, because they're not organized to do so.

And thus the challenge. We live in a layered world now. Those that plan and plan and then launch are always going to be at a disadvantage to the layerers.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Persistence

WORKAHOLICS

A workaholic lives on fear. It's fear that drives him to show up all the time. The best defense, apparently, is a good attendance record.

A new class of jobs (and workers) is creating a different sort of worker, though. This is the person who works out of passion and curiosity, not fear.

The passionate worker doesn't show up because she's afraid of getting in trouble, she shows up because it's a hobby that pays. The passionate worker is busy blogging on vacation... because posting that thought and seeing the feedback it generates is actually more fun than sitting on the beach for another hour. The passionate worker tweaks a site design after dinner because, hey, it's a lot more fun than watching TV.

It was hard to imagine someone being passionate about mining coal or scrubbing dishes. But the new face of work, at least for some people, opens up the possibility that work is the thing (much of the time) that you'd most like to do. Designing jobs like that is obviously smart. Finding one is brilliant.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Passion

SOLVING PROBLEMS

There are three ways to deal with a problem, I think.

Lean into it.

Lean away from it.

Run away.

You lean into a problem, especially a long-term or difficult one, by sitting with it, reveling in it, embracing it and breathing it in. The problem becomes part of you, at least until you solve it. You try one approach and then another, and when nothing works, you stick with it and work around it as you build your organization and your life. [I don't mean you just bully the problem, or attack it. I mean that you accept it, live with it, breathe it and whittle it until you've achieved your goal. Once you start looking forward to your interactions with the problem, then you're leaning into it.]

Some people choose to lean away from the problems that nag them at home or at work. They avoid them, minimize them or criticize the cause. Put as little into it as possible and maybe it will go away.

And sometimes, a problem is so nasty or overwhelming that you just run away.

I'm a big fan of the first approach. And sometimes, quitting isn't such a bad idea. The second approach, alas, is the one that many of us end up with by default, and the one that's least likely to pay off.

If that helps with this year's resolutions, it was worth thinking about...

Posted by: Seth Godin, Decision Making

SOGGY

New organizations and new projects are so crisp.

Things happen with alacrity. Decisions get made. Stuff gets done.

Then, over time, things get soggy. They slow down. Decisions aren't so black and white any more.

Why?

Here are some things that happen:

1. Every initiative, post launch, still has a tail of activity associated with it. Launch enough things and over time, that tail gets bigger and bigger.
2. Most projects either succeed or fail. Successful projects raise the stakes, because the team doesn't want to blow it. There are more people watching, more dollars at stake, things matter more. So things inevitably get more review, more analysis and slow down. Projects that fail sap the confidence of the group. They want to be extra sure that they're right this time, so, ironically, they slow down and end up sabotaging the new work.

3. The paper isn't blank any more. Which means that new decisions often mean overturning old decisions, which means you need to acknowledge that it didn't used to be as good as it was.

4. And the biggest thing is that there is a status quo. Something to compare everything to.

I'm not sure you can eliminate any of these issues. But, you can realize that they're there. And you can be really strict about priorities and deadlines... it's so easy to let things slip, rather than confronting the fact that you're stuck and probably afraid. Speak up, call it out... and ship!

Posted by: Seth Godin, Decision Making

GETTING VS. TAKING

Most people spend a lot of time to get an education.

They wait for the teacher (hopefully a great one) to give them something of value.

Many employees do the same thing at work. They wait for a boss (hopefully a great one) to give them responsibility or authority or experiences that add up to a career.

A few people, not many, but a few, take. They take the best education they can get, pushing teachers for more, finding things to do, exploring non-defined niches. They take more courses than the minimum, they invent new projects and they show up with questions.

A few people, not many, take opportunities at work. Marketers have the easiest time of this (sort of hard to commandeer the chain saw) but don't do it nearly as often as they should.

What have you taken today?

Posted by: Seth Godin, Encouragement

ARE THEY READY TO LISTEN?

Most marketers forget to ask this critical question.

When I was pitching for investors in Yoyodyne (1994/1995) I met with many of the biggest VCs on the East Coast. Same company, same pitch, very different results.

In retrospect, the reason was simple, and it didn't have a lot to do with the way I presented our company. Firms that had funded Federal Express and insurance companies and patented chemical formulations weren't ready to hear about an Internet company in 1994. It didn't matter what I said, they had decided before I showed up. Fred Wilson and Jerry Colonna, on the other hand, had a different worldview. They were choosing to pay attention.

A few years before that, I had published a book about a political issue. An activist's handbook. I had 20,000 copies in my garage when I found out about a large march in Washington. I bought an outdoor booth and trucked the books down to DC. I stood on the Mall in my little booth and watched more than 250,000 people walk by in less than two hours. Every single one an activist. Every single one a demographically perfect match for my handbook. After 100,000 people had walked by and we'd sold only one book, I lowered the price from around \$10 to \$1 just to prove

my point--that it wasn't the book and it wasn't the price, it was the ability of the audience to listen that mattered. This group, in this moment, was there to march, not to shop.

Most people, most of the time, steadfastly refuse to pay attention.

The tragic mistake of demographics and media planning is that they overlook the single most important issue: is the person you're talking to ready to listen?

Posted by: Seth Godin, Communications

FIXING THE ONE BIG THING

Joe Biden is long winded. His voters say so, so does the press. And now his new boss does as well.

The feedback couldn't be more clear. So why not fix it?

Verizon has mind-numbingly bad customer service. People hate to call them. People switch providers just to avoid this problem. So why not fix it?

DiFara's makes the best pizza in New York. But it takes 90 minutes or so to get a pizza. Everyone complains, so why not fix it?

In the case of DiFara's, the answer is easy: because fixing it would make it normal. It would take away what makes the place special. People wouldn't complain any more, but people wouldn't go, either.

If your 'one big thing' is a key part of what makes you successful, how dare you change it.

On the other hand, if momentum or laziness or lack of will (or focus) is the thing holding you back, it's time to get serious. When you remove the one big thing from people's list of objections, your career and organization will take off.

Joe Biden can carry a timer in his pocket. He can become reticent in public. He can, in just one day of hard work, solve his problem. Verizon can invest focus and and money and solve their problem. AT&T can invest and fix their wireless network. It just takes commitment, not a miracle.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Intentionality

TOO SMALL TO FAIL

One secret of being a large financial institution is that you can take huge risks because you're too big to fail. If you hit craps and lose it all, don't worry, because you'll get bailed out.

One secret of 'small is the new big' thinking is that you won't fail and you can't fail and you don't need to worry about a bailout. Not because you're small in headcount or assets, but because you act small.

A small acting bank would never have invested in tens of thousands of loans that they hadn't looked at. And a small acting startup wouldn't hire dozens of people before they had a business model... and then have to lay off a third of them just because their VC firm showed them a scary PowerPoint.

I've always been frightened by big-firm accounting. The sort of financial legerdemain in which skilled accountants work hard to make the numbers look the way the CEO wants, instead of making them clear. Cash accounting run on a simple bookkeeping system is the small way to do it... even if your company is huge. That's because sooner or later, management has to know what's actually happening as opposed to what they can pretend is happening.

Big-thinking companies lose customers all the time because big-thinking companies isolate the decision makers from the outside world. Angry customers who are leaving don't get heard... that news is heard by the poor shlub reading a script at the call center. 90% of the angry customer mail that people forward to me (I have enough for a lifetime, thanks) is angry because the (former) customer is tired of being ignored.

If you act small and think big, you are too small to fail. You won't need a bailout because your business makes sense each and every day. You won't need a bailout because your flat organization (no matter how large it is) knows about problems long before they're too big to deal with.

The media and the tech blogs glamorize businesses that act big. They write about the big checks VCs hand out and they lionize the organizations that make a splash. The untold story is in the organizations that are close to the customer, close to the product and close to each other. Acting small always pays off.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Discipline

DO YOU HAVE 16 BOXES?

Your career is not a boat. Neither is your business.

A boat with even a small leak is going to sink. You, on the other hand, don't need to be perfect to succeed. Imagine that you have a 4 x 4 grid to fill with assets. If it's a business, it might be location, reputation, staff, offerings that are in high demand and a sector that's robust... if you're doing it for yourself, it might include your resume, your network, your skill set, etc.

When someone chooses you or your products, they're considering everything you have to offer. Whether you're looking for a job or trying to make a sale, there is rarely only one thing that makes the difference.

That's why human nature is so enraging. When something is going wrong, when the economy is out of sync, we panic. We obsess about just one of the sixteen boxes and ignore the others. We talk ourselves into hysteria about how, "none of our customers have any money," or, "in this bleak economy, we'll never make a sale." Instead of using the relative downtime to build up the other 15 boxes, we just sit in the corner, keening, worrying about that one box that's out of whack.

By focusing on the red box, the sore one, and ignoring the other elements of what makes our product or career worth marketing, we cause two problems. First, our attention does no good at all on the problem at hand, and second, the other boxes suffer.

The problem with whining is this: human beings like to be right. If you persuade yourself and your friends that times are really tough and that you're bound to fail, you'll probably do the things you need to do to make that true in the long run.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Expectations

MAKING IT REAL BY MAKING IT CLOSER

Items in the future are closer than they appear.

If you're going across town, you're very specific: "188 Fifth Avenue, on the east side of the street please."

On the other hand, when you go on vacation, you tell people, "I'm going to Paris," not "we're going to 8 rue du Cherche-Midi." And if you're going even farther than that, you skip the city and country altogether and just say, "we're going to Africa." One day, Richard Branson will take you all the way to Mars--all you get is the name of the planet.

This makes sense, of course. We don't need to know which crater you're going to, just that it's far away.

Marketers spend a lot of time describing a future and making it real. The more general you are in describing it, the farther away people imagine it is. "We're going to launch a new product next year" sounds a lot more distant than handing someone a prototype and saying, "this launches on January 3rd at 2 pm at CES."

Short version: If you want people to embrace your version of the future, talk about it like it's right around the corner, not on another planet.

Posted by: Seth Godin, Communications

Craig Groeschel

SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY - 2

Do the Small Things Daily

When working with pastors, many are often looking for a “big win.” They want to have a big community event, a big servants’ banquet, or a big series that runs attendance higher.

While all these can be effective, I encourage consistency in the small things daily.

I’ll compare it to football. Most championship teams win games on many four-yard, six-yard, and eleven-yard gains. They might win one game a season on a last second hail-Mary pass, but most games consistently succeeding at the basics.

The same is true in ministry. Successful ministries are built on Christ by leaders who do the small things daily:

- They return calls and emails promptly.
- They show up on time.
- They pray for God’s guidance.
- They love and serve people.
- They study hard and preach passionately.
- They have a consistent and strong work ethic.
- They follow through on commitments.

You could hope for the perfect mailer, plan the killer youth event, or pray for a news story to build your church...or you could move the ball forward one play at a time doing the small things with integrity daily.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Focus, Simplicity

WHAT KEEPS MY PASSION ALIVE

I am as susceptible to spiritual droughts as the next pastor. Because I know my vulnerabilities, I work hard to keep my passion alive.

Here are a few things I try to revisit:

- See God working in another part of the world. God is so much bigger than what we see week in and week out and our churches.
- Visit an impoverished place at least once a year. Some moms choose what to feed their children. Some moms have to choose which children to feed. Putting yourself in a place that crushes your heart keeps the passion alive.

- Fasting. I don't know why fasting works, but it does.
- Develop friendships with non-Christians. Caring about people far from God helps keep me closer to God.
- Devoted time to prayer. If I don't spend time with my wife away from all the other pressures, it is hard for us to stay close. My relationship with God is the same. If I don't spend time with Him, how can I know Him?
- Give extravagantly. Something about giving big breaks the grip of this world and connects me closer to God.
- Cry. For a number of years, I didn't cry. I'm not sure I could cry. By God's grace, I broke through it and can cry easily now.
- Visit a cemetery. Seeing today in light of eternity always changes me.

What works for you?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Passion

HALF THE MEETINGS, TWICE THE PRODUCTIVITY

Over time at Life Church, our systems became more complicated and our communication more challenging.

To help people become better informed, we started adding meetings. Unfortunately, more meetings led to more inefficiency. (This may not always be the case. But it often is. Read *Death by Meetings* by Patrick Lencioni.)

We tried a radical experiment and cut the frequency of our meetings in half. If a group met once a month, we moved it to once every two months. If they met four times a year, we moved it to twice a year. If they met once a week, we moved it to twice a month.

Here is what happened:

- Instead of less communication, we had better communication. The infrequency of meetings forced us to be more intentional with our communication.
- Instead of planning out one week, we had to plan two. This forced us to become more organized.
- Instead of the meetings seeming dull and boring, people came more excited to be together.
- Instead of longer, more drawn out meetings, people worked harder, faster and smarter.
- We freed up a ton of time for other important ministry.

It might be a slight overstatement... if so, not by much. I honestly think we cut our meetings in half and doubled our production.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Meetings

TIPS FOR RUNNING THE EFFECTIVE MEETING

A skilled leader will effectively moderate and guide a meeting toward productive decisions and action. Here are a few tips I've learned.

Keep the discussion moving. You'll want to maintain a sense of polite urgency. You want to push hard enough to keep the meeting moving but not too hard that you don't allow time for adequate discussion and thoughtful consideration.

Encourage participation. Often the quiet attendees have the most to offer. They simply need some encouragement. Ask direct questions to keep everyone involved.

Compliment ideas and contributions. Whenever possible, make someone else look good in a meeting.

Press for a decision. Many meetings become a "talking circle." People talk around the ideas, but never make any decisions. Press for decision.

Create an action plan. Once a decision is made, you'll want to decide who does what.

Set deadlines. After each assignment is made, you'll either want to set a deadline, or ask, "When do you think you can have this done?" Once a person commits, you'll want to hold them to the deadline.

Plan your communication. Since you've intentionally kept your meeting on the smaller side, there will probably be several (or many) people who will need to know some of the content from the meeting. Ask "Who needs to know what?" Plan your communication strategy and execute it well.

Summarize the decisions made and the action plan. As you're wrapping up the meeting, you'll want to summarize what you've covered and who will take what action. Leave adequate time for a complete summary. (If the meeting is more formal, you'll want to make sure someone takes good notes and distributes minutes.)

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Meetings

MEETINGS

If you've been around churches for any time at all, chances are you've been a part of some inefficient, ineffective, and downright painful meetings.

This week, I'll share some tips I've learned the hard way about how to lead effective meetings.

My first and biggest recommendation is this: Work to keep your meetings small and communication from meetings large.

Too many ministries make the mistake of including too many people in too many meetings. The purpose of the meeting should determine the size of the meeting.

If the purpose of the meeting is to make decisions, keep the meeting as small as possible. Our Directional Leadership Team (the group that runs the church) consists of five people including me. Many have suggested that we make the group larger. I simply won't budge.

(I also like odd numbers. To me, 3 or 5 is better than 4. For some reason, relationships seem to gel better in odd numbers.)

If you have a board or elders, I would work to keep the group no larger than 12. In my opinion, 9 is better than 12, 7 is better than 9. (We have 11.)

This doesn't mean you don't seek tons of outside input. What you're doing is building a cohesive team that can move quickly.

More to come.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Meetings

RIGHT HAND TEAM

Many leaders have a right-hand-man (or woman). To maximize your leadership effectiveness, I would suggest a right-hand-team.

For years, many churches that grew large enough had a senior pastor and his right-hand-man, the executive pastor. In my opinion, this is a dated and limited model of church leadership.

I suggest breaking the traditional "second spot" into two to four roles. I can't tell you what those roles will be for you, but I'll offer some broad suggestions.

Serving alongside the leader, you'll probably want two to four team members that cover these roles:

An administrative player. You'll want to ensure someone is capable of building systems, structures, and accountability.

A relational player. Hopefully you'll have someone who is very good with people. This person could be an expert in recruiting, team building, pastoring, relational problem solving, or some combination of the above.

An innovative player. In the best environment, you'll have someone who is an idea-person. This team member is often young (but not necessarily). You'll want to make sure this innovative mind isn't rebellious and is a team player. When you find a person like this, she'll be a great asset to your team.

A stabilizing player. Most good teams have a person who can rise above the details and see the big picture. This person may not be the most visible, but is often one of the most important. He is someone who can bring objectivity and stability in the middle of challenges.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

TEAM DYNAMICS

In the early stages of ministry, I suggest you never make anyone a permanent member of a leadership team. Things change too quickly. Determine limited time periods for a leader to serve. You can always ask her to rejoin easier than you can ask her to leave.

When you're building a team, you have to remember a team takes time to build. (When you determine you have a "wrong" player on the team, you must remove him sooner rather than later.)

You must be willing:

- To fight together. A team that can't work through conflict will never be a team.
- To be loyal to the death. Even though you can fight behind closed doors, you ALWAYS stand together publicly. Disloyalty is never tolerated.
- To be transparent. If you can't be brutally honest about everything, you don't have a team.
- To care for each other. A team that is "all business" will eventually deteriorate. A ministry team must become a family.
- To have fun together. I always know a team is not healthy when I don't hear them laughing often.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

TEAM LEADERSHIP

I don't like committees. Big groups of people rarely make the best decisions and often slow things down.

When I talk about leading as a team, I am NOT talking about ministry by committees.

On any good team, there is a head coach. Someone must be in charge. But if the coach is wise, he'll build a team of coaches.

In any ministry, I suggest the following:

One leader who is ultimately responsible for the direction of the ministry.

Three to seven people who become some sort of a leadership team. (Two is not enough. Three drastically improves the dynamics. More than seven becomes bulky. For some reason, I like odd numbers.) This could be an advisory team, executive team, leadership team, directional team, or whatever suits your purposes.

When possible, the people on the team should be a diversified group.

Each person has an equal voice—but the leader reserves the right to make the final call. (On our team, it has been years since I have overridden the wisdom of the team. I still reserve the right at any time to make the hard call.)

More to come.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

LEADING WITH A TEAM

If you want to see the potential of a church or ministry, don't look at the charismatic leader up front. Look at the team the leader has assembled.

Most charismatic leaders can attract followers. It takes a humble leader to attract leaders.

Many pastors won't build a team because of several reasons:

Deep down they are insecure. These pastors are afraid someone else will get the spotlight. They will always be limited in their potential.

They are full of pride. Some honestly believe that no one can do it as well as they can. Again, this leader has a ceiling that will limit him until he changes.

They don't see the value of a team. Because team ministry isn't often practiced, too many pastors haven't seen a good model.

This week we'll talk about the values (and dangers) of leading with a team.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

AN OUTSIDER'S WORDS OFTEN MEAN MORE

I see it as one of my biggest roles to encourage and strengthen our staff.

Almost every time we gather, I remind them they are part of something special. But no matter how often I say it, it doesn't mean as much as when an outsider tells them.

We've been blessed to have Dr. Sam Chand, Chris Hodges, Perry Noble, Steven Furtick, Jentzen Franklin, and Bill Hybels speak to our staff.

Each time, I promise you they say things very similar to what I often say, but when they say it, it means so much more!

Invite the youth pastor from the other side of town to speak to your youth leaders.

Call another worship leader to lead your choir in worship.

Ask a neighboring pastor to speak to your volunteers.

Leverage the voice of friends to lift those around you in a way that you can't.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

INNOVATIVE LEADERS

Innovative leaders seem to find a way to get something done when others say there isn't a way. Here are a few of their positive qualities:

- Limitations don't seem to limit: Instead of feeling defeated by obstacles, these leaders are often inspired to create a new path.
- Exponential growth is possible: Instead of growth by addition, these leaders often see growth by multiplication. The right idea can change everything.
- These leaders generally attract other "out of the box" leaders: Innovative leaders attract other innovative thinkers.
- These leaders have some potential challenges including:
- Obsession: Sometimes these leaders can become so focused on one idea they forget the bigger mission.
- Boredom: When nothing "exciting or new" is going on, sometimes these leaders get bored and don't follow through with more normal, yet important, commitments.
- Wrong Ideas: Just because someone has an innovative idea, doesn't mean it is the right idea for this place and this time.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Innovation

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS

Some effective leaders would be called administrative or operational leaders.

1. These people are often effective at several things.
2. They seem to intuitively select the right people. These leaders have a gift at selecting, training and releasing the right people to do ministry.
3. They tend to build good systems. Administrative leaders build systems with clear guidelines and expectations. They set necessary accountability to make sure there is proper follow through.

They cover the details. While a visionary leader may overlook details, administrative leaders dot the "I's and cross the "T's".

1. Some of the challenges administrative leaders occasionally have include:
2. Focusing on the task more than people. These leaders often believe the end goal is no matter the relational cost.
3. Micro-managing others. Because these leaders care so much about the end product, they often hover over others and frustrate those they work with.

Forget the relational end of ministry. Without meaning to, administrative leaders can obsess details and overlook caring for people.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

VISIONARY LEADERS

God often uses visionary leaders to accomplish big things. These forward looking leaders can inspire large groups to make tremendous sacrifices toward a future vision.

I've noticed several upsides about visionary leaders:

1. They are inspirational. If you want quick movement forward, these leaders can get it done.
2. They are gifted fundraisers. God often uses these leaders to inspire people to give generously to help those in need, to start churches, to evangelize the lost, or to build buildings.
3. They're effective during challenging times. A visionary leader can move people to endure challenges and work through tough times with courage.

Some blind spots could include:

1. Some talk better than they do. They may promise a different future but not know how to get there. The visionary leader must have the right people around her or she'll stall in no time.
2. Some can be hardheaded. These visionary leaders often believe their way is best and fail to listen to the wisdom of others.
3. Some become vulnerable to pride lusts of the flesh. I'm not sure why, but these leaders seem to "fall" more than others.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Vision

RELATIONAL LEADERS

Some leaders accomplish a ton by leveraging their relational skills. These leaders often move others to do extraordinary things simply because they have relational equity.

I've noticed several things about relational leaders:

1. They tend to remember names. Relational leaders (who may not be naturally inclined to remember names) care so much about others that remembering names becomes a priority.
2. They are others focused. Instead of talking about themselves, relational leaders ask questions and love to listen.
3. They remember details. Because relational leaders care, they'll often remember anniversaries, birthdays, or details about previous conversations.

They extend gratitude. When someone helps a relational leader accomplish a goal, this leader never takes it for granted. She is quick to write a note of gratitude or brag on others publicly.

Even though these leaders have a ton of upside potential, this style has some potential challenges:

1. They may be slow to make difficult calls. Because these leaders care so much about people, they may hesitate making the right decision for fear of hurting others.
2. They can become people pleasers. By nature, relational leaders want to please. If left unchecked, this can become problematic.
3. They may place an unnecessary lid on growth. Some relational leaders will unconsciously limit growth because they can't get to know everyone. If this leader isn't careful, he might unintentionally slow momentum by trying to be friends with everyone.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel,

DIFFERENT STYLES OF LEADERS

As I've studied our different campuses and teams, I've noticed that many leaders exhibit one of four different styles of leadership. (I'm sure there are many more, but these are the common ones I've observed.)

The four styles I most often observe include:

1. Relational leaders: These leaders motivate others through personal connections.
2. Visionary leaders: These leaders move people by painting a picture of what "could be."
3. Administrative leaders: These leaders move the ball forward by organizing groups of people with clear boundaries, expectations, and accountability.
4. Innovative leaders: These leaders find new ways to accomplish old objectives.

Although no leader should be boxed into one style, recognizing and capitalizing on strengths and style can be extremely helpful. This week we'll spend some time discussing each style.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

THE PASTORS' PEOPLE PLEASING TRAPS

Proverbs 29:25 says, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

The Hebrew word translated as trap is the word, "mowqesh" (pronounced mo-kashe'). It is a noose used for catching animals or a hook for the nose. Some of us are trapped into pleasing people more than God.

I see three common traps.

1. “I will compromise for you” trap. Instead of doing what God leads us to do, we’ll often compromise and do what people expect us to do.
2. “I will over-commit for you” trap. Because we want to please people, we’ll often say “yes” to way too many things.
3. “I will let you limit my ministry” trap. People’s opinions can talk us out of taking a step of faith. Critics can distract us from God’s mission. The more God blesses our ministry, the more comfortable we’ll have to become moving forward in the middle of mixed opinions.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Decision Making

THE POWER OF TRUTH

During the course of your ministry, you’ll likely face challenges such as:

- A moral failure of a staff member or key volunteer
- Rebellion of a key leader
- Vicious and dangerous gossip or rumors
- False accusations
- Financial struggles

This week I’ll write several posts about the power of truth during challenging times.

In my opinion, many leaders foolishly avoid confronting problems publicly that should be confronted. (On the other hand, some leaders let small problems bother them so much they make public issues about things that should remain private.)

How do you know when to go public with a challenge? You might want to confront the problem head on if:

- The issue affects most of the people in the church
- Frankness would eliminate fear and rumors
- Your lack of visible leadership would be perceived as bad leadership

In the next post, I’ll show a five point strategy for going public during challenges and talk some about the first step.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Conflict

LETTING PEOPLE GO WITH GRACE

Every few years, it seems like a small wave of our faithful people leave the church. They often say things like:

- We just don't get time with you anymore.
- The church has gotten too big.
- Things have changed.

I wish I could lovingly express:

- I hoped your involvement in the ministry was based on much more than your time with me.
- Aren't you excited God is using our church to reach people? Would you rather we don't reach people and stay small?
- Isn't it great things have changed? Would you rather freeze in time?

Some faithful believers simply find it tough to be a part of a changing church.

Many pastors fight to keep them in church. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it is a mistake. While I try to express my genuine love, if the people are always going to be disappointed with the direction of the church, I've found it is better to let them move on.

I try to always speak well of them. I try not to take it personally. I try to always show them the love of Christ with each encounter. And I try to continue to move the church forward.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

EXPLAINING THE CHANGES PUBLICLY

As your ministry evolves, your role will change. You can't expect everyone to automatically understand.

I've found that redefining relationships and your role publicly is occasionally wise.

For years, I accepted every counseling appointment, made every hospital visit, performed every funeral, and officiated every wedding.

By my actions, I trained the church to know I was available.

A few years into the church, I was speaking six times each weekend. When I'd do a wedding, I'd be away from my kids on:

- Wednesday night (small group)
- Thursday night (wedding rehearsal)
- Friday night (wedding)
- Saturday (sermon prep and church)
- Sunday (church)
- Sunday night (membership or leadership meetings)
- And back in the office on Monday with no day off or family time.

By necessity, I had to start turning down most weddings. I explained to the church publicly why I could no longer do the weddings. Some didn't understand, but most were supportive-after I explained the reason publicly.

Your role might be changing or evolving right now. If some don't understand, maybe it would help to explain it publicly.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

REDEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

As God expands your ministry, you may need to redefine some relationships.

For example, our family functions differently with six kids than a family with two. As our family has grown, we've had to redefine how we spend our time, how we relate, what we do and don't do.

The same is true in ministries.

- If your youth ministry grows from 4 kids to 70, you may have to redefine your relationships with the first 4.
- If you lead a mission trip with 12 people one year and next year you take 110, your interaction will likely differ.
- If your church grows from 40 to 400, you'll need to make some changes.

These changes can be difficult for some people to understand. It doesn't mean you don't love them. You will always love them. But your relational rhythms will have to change.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

THE POWER OF QUESTIONS

Recently, I put together a list of questions to ask our team. I'll break them down into ten questions a day for the next three days. Today I'll share the general questions we're asking.

General Questions:

1. What are we doing that we should stop doing?
2. What are we not doing that we should start doing?
3. Who is doing something we need to learn from?
4. What are we doing that has gotten stale?
5. What area of ministry is under-resourced?
6. Where have we experienced inappropriate spending drift? Who is going to help cut expenses and when will it be done?

7. Are we avoiding any problem issues?
8. What are our blind spots?
9. What ministries are struggling? What changes are we making to them in the next 30 days?
10. What do we have to celebrate?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

THE POWER OF QUESTIONS - CONTINUED

Questions About Our Staff

Here are 10 questions about staff. They could also be applied to volunteers.

1. What staff member needs developing? Who is going to do it and when?
2. What staff member has more to offer than what she is currently doing?
3. Who are the future stars? What opportunities are we giving them to grow?
4. Who should have been moved or removed but hasn't been?
5. What volunteers or staff deserves recognition and/or promotion? Who is going to recognize them and when?
6. Which staff members are at risk of burning out? How will you help them?
7. Who has hit a leadership ceiling? How can you help him overcome it?
8. What are the next ten staff positions we hope to fill?
9. What are the ten staff positions that could be (should be) eliminated?
10. What is our written action plan based on the previous nine questions?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

10 THINGS TO DO WHEN NO ONE IS SAVED

1. Don't blame yourself.
2. Don't get discouraged and stop preaching Christ.
3. Encourage your church to invite people next week who don't know Christ.
4. Pray with your church for people to meet Christ.
5. Pray during the week for God to reveal himself to someone next weekend.
6. Pray for the opportunity to share the gospel during the week.
7. Pray for the opportunity to show the gospel during the week.

8. Talk to your church about people in the last service who did meet Christ.
9. Express that you know some are considering the decision. Encourage them not to put it off.
10. Stand up and boldly invite people to meet Christ next time you preach.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Persistence

SPIRIT LED INSTEAD OF MODEL DRIVEN

Many pastors copy models.

There is the “seeker sensitive” model, the “purpose driven” model, the “emergent church” model, the “contemporary church” model, the “spirit-filled classic charismatic” model, the “small group” model, the “multi-site” model, the “missional inner-city” model, the “dream center” model, and the list could go on and on.

Each of those models and the leaders who practice them have contributed a ton to the Kingdom.

Rather than copying the latest model that moves you, I suggest you let the Spirit of God direct your ministry based on the values, gifts, and people God gives you.

- What are YOU passionate about?
- What has God put in YOU?
- What needs can God use YOU to meet?
- What breaks YOUR heart?
- What are YOU uniquely equipped and called to do?

Even if you learn from another model, make it your own. Adapt it for your community. Improve on it. Tweak it. Take it up two notches.

Don't copy models as much as you follow what God leads you to do.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

THINK AHEAD

Successful people are often great at anticipating.

If you want to be promoted as an assistant, anticipate how you can better serve your boss.

If you want to be successful in business, anticipate what the market will do.

If you want to be successful in church, prayerfully anticipate. What new thing is God going to bless?

I try to think ahead by asking questions like these:

How are people relating differently? What will relationships and community look like in two years?

How are people going to communicate in the future?

What future technology/innovation can help spread the gospel?

What trends (business, entertainment, philanthropy, etc.) will affect the church?

Think ahead.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Focus

RISK INCLINED VS. RISK AVERSE

Less than two years ago, the church I was pastoring voted to become a campus of LifeChurch.tv. We faced many unknowns: Would I have a job? Would video teaching work? Would people leave? Was this just another crazy church growth trend?

People I knew well criticized me. People I trust. People who had always told me I could do anything. People with my best interests at heart suddenly froze with fear for me and my family. They said I was crazy, insane, desperate, misguided...I'm a bit of all of these, but I was a little offended at the negative vibes...Until someone said I was risky.

RISKY. That rhymes with sexy! I sensed real adventure, a big payoff. Last time I checked, you have to risk something to gain something. Every choice you make will cost you something.

What we risked to join LifeChurch.tv:

- Speaking every weekend. (I speak once a quarter now.)
- Livelihood. (I resigned and had to be rehired by LifeChurch.tv.)
- A major financial giver at the church threatened to leave. (He left for a place he could have more influence.)
- Lifelong friendships. (I lost my best friend.)
- Directional control.

What we gained:

- Each week, we hear from some of the best communicators in the world.
- 87 straight weeks of people making decisions to become followers of Christ.
- Clear vision and direction with a global perspective.
- We've grown over 700% in less than 2 years.
- I've grown as a leader, both with people and finances.
- Developed key friendships that will last... and challenge me.
- Financially, the church is much stronger, with a greater buy-in rate.

Are you inclined or averse to taking risks? Will you bet the farm? Every decision costs you something. Of course, if you don't take risks, that costs, too.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Risk Taking

LEADERSHIP FRICTION PRINCIPLE

There is something that hit me while reading Matthew 26:31-74. This is the infamous passage that ends with Peter's denial of Christ. This is a dark moment in a great leader's life, but I believe it sheds light on an important leadership principle.

Here are some quick highlights of the passage. Jesus predicts that all the disciples will fall away and that Peter will deny Him. Peter passionately declares his faithfulness to Christ, and all the other disciples follow suit and say the same thing. Peter follows Jesus when He is taken by the guards, and all the other disciples desert Jesus and flee. Peter then denies Jesus, and all the other disciples...well, they were not even there to make the mistake. There it is! I'll call it the Leadership Friction Principle.

Leadership Friction Principle:

Doing what no one else would (following Jesus) put Peter in a position to make a mistake (denying Jesus) that no one else could.

But the flip-side of this principle is true as well...

Doing what no one else would (standing to preach Jesus' resurrection in the same place Jesus was condemned) put Peter in a position to experience results (3,000 saved) that no one else could.

As a leader, you'll find yourself doing what others have not done and going where others have not gone. In exchange, you must understand that you will make mistakes no else can and feel pains no one else has. Many times this will bring criticism that others don't have to deal with. Just think of all the attention Peter's BIG mistakes has gotten him. The great news is that you will also experience victories and joys that no else could.

Be encouraged; embrace the friction; and lead on!

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Risk Taking

REMOVING THE WRONG PEOPLE

When you have an underperformer and you have tried to develop them but can't, you'll want to make a change.

Here are ten lessons I've learned:

1. The right person in the wrong spot becomes the wrong person unless I do something about it.
2. If you're always trying to develop someone's weakness, you probably have the wrong person.
3. Keeping the wrong person to protect his feelings is unfair to you and to your team member.
4. If God has shown you that a team member is not the right fit, you're cheating the person by not removing him.
5. You can't have the right person in a role when the wrong person is filling it.
6. The longer you wait to remove a wrong person, the harder it is for everyone.
7. If you're about to remove a person, they should already have a pretty good sense that things aren't working out. If they don't, you probably haven't been fair in your communication to them.
8. Honor the person you have removed even if they don't honor you.
9. Seek God, make a decision, and don't waffle on it.
10. If you aren't faithful to do what God shows you to do, He isn't likely to trust you with more.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

DEVELOPING PEOPLE

Once you start attracting good ministers, God will want to use you to help make them great ministers.

Here are ten lessons I've learned about developing people:

1. Honest, immediate, and consistent feedback on performance is invaluable.
2. Developing strengths nets a bigger return than developing weaknesses.
3. Developing others takes a ton of time in the early seasons and produces huge results with smaller investments in future seasons.
4. You will see a better ministry return by investing in your star team members than you will by investing in weaker players.
5. You will have to allow people to fail if you want them to improve.
6. Great coaches are great encouragers.
7. If you don't schedule intentional time for developing others, you aren't likely to do it.
8. God can use you to pull more out of a person than the person may believe exists.

9. The person you are developing can also help develop you—if you will ask questions and listen.
10. The best people builders develop others to develop others.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

PICKING PEOPLE

Selecting the right people to serve around you is one of the most important things you'll do in ministry. The right people can help you reach many more for Christ. The wrong people can hold you back like a thousand-pound anchor.

This week, let's discuss how to pick the right people.

Today I'll list ten of the biggest lessons I've learned on selecting great people:

1. Character is more important than giftedness.
2. God often uses those others overlook.
3. My wife is almost always a better judge about people than I am.
4. Past success is a good indicator of future success.
5. There is often a reason someone is looking for a job.
6. Teach-ability is non-negotiable.
7. When I'm trying to talk myself into liking someone, it's best to move on.
8. People from within the organization typically have a huge advantage over those who are from without.
9. One of the best ways to attract better leaders is to become a better leader.
10. We're all better off when we pray, listen, and obey.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Staffing

TIME OFF

Many pastors and church staff members don't take much time off from the church.

There are many reasons:

- The pastor might not have a staff, so he believes he can't be away from church.
- The pastor is worried a guest speaker won't do a good job.
- The staff member feels guilty when they take off.
- The student pastor might not be able to afford to get away.

- The church staff member is afraid she'll be viewed as a slacker if she isn't at church.
- Some pastors are so driven that they don't want to take time off.

Whether the reasons are fear, guilt, misplaced passion, or some combination of these, the tired and burdened pastor will be less effective in ministry, more vulnerable to sin, and at a higher risk for burnout.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Family, Life

BREAKING BARRIERS - 1

All growing organizations eventually hit barriers to growth. When the barrier becomes greater than the leadership's ability to navigate, the organization will stall.

This week, I'm rerunning a week of posts about how to break through barriers to growth.

(Let's not forget, God brings the growth. But there are certain things we do to limit or facilitate growth.)

Generally speaking, the longer your church has been beneath a barrier, the more dramatic step it will take to break through the barrier. If some small change would make the difference, you would have made that a long time ago.

Questions You Must Ask:

- Do we really want to change?
- Are we prepared to lose some people to reach more people?
- Would I be willing to resign my spot if that is what it took?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

BREAKING BARRIERS - 2

My wife and I always heard that when you go from two children to three, everything changes. (You move from man-to-man defense into zone.) Raising three children (or six in our case) is much different than raising two. It takes a different mindset. Our schedules are different. Our interaction is different. A lot is different.

If your church is going to grow from:

70 to 120
 180 to 250
 400 to 700
 1,200 to 1,800
 2,500 to 6,000
 7,000 to 20,000
 25,000 to 100,000

You are going to have to change your mindset. Much of what you are doing now won't work later. Some things that will be different:

- Your relationship with staff and church members
- Your meetings, organizational structure, policies, and financial management
- Your schedule
- Your inward comfort or discomfort
- Your style of leadership
- Your means of communication
- Your family
- If you are unwilling to change and grow, your organization will not likely follow.

Your assignment:

- Find someone who is where you want to be and learn from them. Don't just try to learn what they do, but learn how they think.
- And pray like you've never prayed before that God will grow you as a leader.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

BREAKING BARRIERS - 3

One of my friends, Sam Chand, has a series of books affectionately called the "Ladder Series." One of my favorites is called, "Who's Holding Your Ladder?" In it, he describes the limitations we put on our own leadership when we have the wrong people around us.

- One of the greatest barriers to growth is having the wrong people in leadership (paid or volunteer).
- The person who leads your kids ministry of 20 may not have the gifts to lead your kids' ministry of 200.
- Your worship leader may be effective for your 400-person church, but not if you're ministering to 1200.

Your finance person may be able to manage \$100,000 a year but not \$1,000,000.

It may be time to make a change.

(This doesn't mean these people aren't committed believers. It doesn't mean they aren't great. They deserve honor, love, and respect. But if they are a barrier to reaching more people, you may prayerfully have to make a transition.)

I've found that the unwillingness to make these hard decisions is one of the most common problems in leadership.

Which do you want more? To break through the barrier and lead many more to Christ? Or to “not rock the boat” and continue like this forever?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

BREAKING BARRIERS - 4

Yesterday we talked about having the right people with you. Let’s continue this discussion and add to it a twist:

Do you have enough “above the line” or “below the line” people?

Here is a rough definition of what I mean:

Above the line: this is primarily a person who draws people to the church.

Below the line: this is primarily a person who builds structure to sustain those in church.

Above the line leaders are generally a charismatic student pastor, a dynamic worship pastor, or a gifted communicator.

Below the line leaders might include a systematic student pastor (building structure and relationships), a small group leader, a finance person, or an administrator.

(The role doesn’t necessarily determine if it is above or below the line as much as the person in the role. A senior pastor can draw people with anointed preaching—above the line. Or he might be an average speaker who relationally holds the church together—below the line.)

With too many above the line people, your church will have a big front door and big back door.

With too many below the line people, your church will have a small front door and small back door.

A growing organization will see the need for both, those who drive the growth and those who help sustain it.

Are you primarily a below the line or above the line leader? Is your ministry out of balance in one way?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

BREAKING BARRIERS - 5

If your church isn’t growing, change something!

You might consider:

- Changing your preaching
- Changing your worship
- Changing your building

- Changing your personal prayer time
- Changing a staff member
- Changing the way you make decisions

Some define insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” Some churches are insane.

Don’t try to do what you’re doing better. Do something different!

What is God calling you to change?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

STRATEGIC DISRUPTION: DISRUPT YOUR RHYTHMS

The longer you do ministry, the easier it becomes to minister from memory. You tend to do what you used to do. It is safe, comfortable, and convenient.

To stay spiritually and creatively fresh, I suggest “strategic disruptions.” Today we’ll talk about disrupting life’s rhythms.

Because people can be creatures of habits, life often looks relatively similar from day to day, week to week, and year to year.

I suggest defining your rhythms—then disrupting them.

- If you drive the same way to work, take a different road.
- If you study the Bible the same way, try a different approach.
- If you listen to the same type of music, tune into something entirely different.
- If you read the same books, stretch yourself. Read out of your comfort zone.
- If you order the same thing off the menu, venture out and try something you’ve never had.

By disrupting your rhythms, you may experience just enough to change your perspective slightly. Suddenly, you could be more sensitive to hear something new from God.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

TAKE SOME RISKS

Most people will see you as a pastor first. I want people to see me as a follower of Jesus who happens to be a pastor. (In my mind, the difference is big!)

Accomplishing this goal takes some work. Many church members see pastors as a “step above” the normal person. (Some pastors even believe this to be true.)

To me, the pastor who is viewed as a normal person has an extreme advantage over the one who is viewed as the “perfect spiritual leader.”

To demystify your pastoral role, you’ll have to take some self-revealing risks. Here are a few suggestions when revealing personal flaws:

- If you’re courageous enough to expose selected spiritual doubts, people may relate to you as a real person.
- If you carefully reveal a marital struggle (with permission from your spouse), people may be more likely to listen.
- When you talk about certain personal failures, many people will feel an increased bond with you.
- If you are hurting and you express your need, your church family can be aware to pray for and minister to you.
- It’s not uncommon for someone to say to me, “Craig, when you shared about your struggle with _____ (fill in the blank), I knew you were someone I could relate to.”

A few people might reject you for your authentic confessions, but the vast majority will accept, embrace, and trust you as a genuine believer wrestling to grow closer to Christ.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Risk Taking

GUARDING AGAINST CULTURE DRIFT

Once the culture is healthy, you’ll want to guard against what I call “culture drift.” Organizations don’t typically stay healthy without intentionality.

Some suggestions for guarding against culture drift include:

- Design systems to highlight and reward living the culture. (What is measured typically gets done. Set appropriate goals in the direction of your values.)
- Publicly applaud when people live out the values. Celebrate the wins!
- Program toward your ministry values.
- Work hard on training new staff members and volunteers to serve Christ within the values and culture of your ministry.
- Privately correct those who step outside the culture.
- Renew the vision regularly.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Culture

GOING PUBLIC WITH THE CULTURE PROBLEM

Once your staff and key volunteers are on board, you'll want to go public. No formula exists for this. You'll want your public presentation to be born out of your time with God. Do what He leads you to do.

In the last year, I intentionally sought to change a couple of things about our church culture:

- To lead our church to be more missional.
- To lead our church to be more generous (outside the church as well as inside).
- Here are a few of the things I did:
- Expressed repeatedly how God had burdened my heart with these issues.
- Repented for not leading strongly in these directions in the past.
- Created multiple opportunities for our church to be involved in these types of activities.
- Worked hard to plant these values in the staff (so they would overflow to the whole body).
- Designed teaching series around these values.
- Showed videos and told stories highlighting when these values were exhibited.

Our church has made significant progress in these areas. I am very proud of their Kingdom-minded responses!

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

TAKING THE CHANGE TO YOUR KEY PLAYERS

Once you've identified what needs to be changed, it's time to go public. I'd suggest you have your first discussions about what needs to change with your staff and key volunteers.

(At this point, you're not making prophetic announcements to your whole student ministry, or to the whole 14-person choir, or to the whole church before receiving the offering. At this stage, we are striving for "buy-in" from our leaders only).

This phase of discussion could be as short as one conversation or as long as several months (depending on the level of buy-in from your team).

Typically, the longer the culture has been unhealthy, the more time it will take to change the mindset.

Here are a few things to remember:

- People typically resist change. Don't expect them to be completely on board just because you've been praying about this for some time.
- Own your part of the problem. If you don't do this, no one will follow you for long.

- Explain “why” things need to change. Don’t underestimate the importance of this step. Just because you know why doesn’t mean your team does. Explain the “why” over and over again.
- Unveil the plan. Once the team starts to understand the importance of the needed change, you’ll want to explain, “Here’s what we’re going to do to resolve this problem.” Make sure your plan is well thought out and doable.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

CHANGING A CHURCH CULTURE

Creating a healthy ministry culture takes prayer, hard work and intentionality.

Changing an existing culture generally takes more prayer, harder work, more intentionality, patience, endurance and more hard work.

You might have stepped into a ministry role with a culture that:

- Doesn’t care about evangelism
- Has poor stewardship habits
- Competes with other ministry areas within the church
- Thinks it is succeeding when it isn’t
- Has lost touch with what is happening in the world
- Puts systems and procedures ahead of people
- Has a scarcity mindset

If you’re the leader, it is your role to become the catalyst for change.

The first thing you must do is to identify the problem. (If you have been the leader for awhile, the problem may have developed on your watch. It might be harder for you to recognize the problem.)

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Change

TEN QUESTIONS EVERY LEADER SHOULD ASK

During this series, we’ll look at ten questions each leader should ask in several different areas of life.

Today we’ll examine some questions that surround our Relationship with Christ.

1. What did I learn in God’s word this week?
2. Is my burden for prayer growing or diminishing?

3. Does my heart break for the things that break the heart of God?
4. Have I grown accustomed to or accepted sin in my life?
5. Am I doing ministry out of an overflow of God's work in my heart or out of my own strength?
6. Has my teaching and ministry deepened, changed, or evolved in a positive way in the last year?
7. Do I have a sincere peace that I'm living an authentic life of spiritual integrity?
8. Is my heart growing larger for people and God or is it shrinking?
9. Am I closer to God today than I was a year ago?
10. Do others comment that they can clearly see evidence of God's work in my life?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

TEN QUESTIONS: MINISTRY

1. Is our vision so big that we obviously can't accomplish it without God?
2. Am I doing ministry from memory or from fresh direction from God?
3. What ministry (or program or meeting) has lost its effectiveness and should be stopped?
4. Is there a person who needs to be moved to another role (or removed), and I haven't done it?
5. What faith risk is God calling me to take?
6. Have I repented to my team at least once in the last year for a failure in leadership?
7. Have I done everything in my power to make sure my team is living without unconfessed sin?
8. Am I expressing love and care for my team members' families?
9. Am I living with delayed obedience toward God in any area of leadership?
10. Is Jesus my sole motivation for ministry or has my motivation become clouded?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

TEN QUESTIONS: INTROSPECTION

1. In what area of life have I lost my passion? (What can I do to get it back?)
2. If the enemy were going to "take me out," what are my three most vulnerable points?
3. What new burden has God given me in the last year?
4. What have I unlearned that has made me closer to God?

5. What new discipline is God calling me to do?
6. What has God asked me to do that I haven't yet done?
7. Is there something that I think about more than I think about pleasing God? (Money, possessions, ministry, family, recreation, something else.)
8. Do I have an increasing joy in serving Christ?
9. Am I handling the pain of ministry with integrity?
10. Am I still being persecuted for my faith in Christ?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

TEN QUESTIONS: FAMILY

1. Am I closer to my spouse today than I was a year ago?
2. Have I read God's word with my family this week?
3. Have I prayed with each member of my family this week?
4. Do my children know they come before the people in the church?
5. Are my children joyfully experiencing Christ at church or do they resent the church?
6. Does my spouse feel close to me spiritually?
7. If my spouse could have me change one thing about me, what would it be? (Why haven't I changed in this way? What am I going to do about it?)
8. Are we honoring the Sabbath as a family?
9. Do my wife and kids enjoy being around me?
10. Can my family clearly articulate our family values and vision?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Family

TEN QUESTIONS: MINISTRY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Are the people closest to me in ministry lifting me higher or dragging me down?
2. How have I intentionally developed the leaders around me in the past week?
3. Am I speaking transparently with at least two other close trusted friends on a weekly basis?
4. Am I submitting myself to the correction and coaching of at least two mentors?
5. Am I holding a grudge against someone?
6. Am I speaking well of other ministers?

7. Am I falling for the temptation of comparing, complaining, criticizing or gossiping?
8. Are my words and relationships characterized by words of faith or negativity?
9. Do people enjoy being around me or am I often “down”?
10. Have I made at least three new ministry friends in the last year?

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Asking Questions

THE MYTH OF THE “BALANCED LIFE”

One of the most common topics people ask me about is how I balance my life, family, and ministry.

My response is simple, “I don’t live a balanced life.”

In my opinion, the balanced life is unachievable and unbiblical.

Jesus didn’t call us to live a balanced life. He called us to follow Him.

While following Jesus, our life will often be out-of-balance. He may lead us on long stretches of ministry followed by a substantial season of rest. Ministry will rarely be predictable.

Some pastors are pursuing the illusive goal of the balanced life only to fail again and again.

Their marriages struggle.

Their ministries limp along.

They are spiritually exhausted.

This week, instead of talking about living balanced, we’ll look at how to be imbalanced in a way that honors God. Along the journey, I’ll share certain ministry rhythms that help sustain me. (I hope you’ll share some of yours.)

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Family

NOT LISTENING

Successful leaders often become successful partly because they listen to wisdom from others. Once they achieve some level of success, people start asking them questions. Without realizing it, the leader can start to become the “expert” instead of the “student.”

Before long, when others offer advice, the successful leader might think:

- They don’t have a clue what they’re talking about.
- Who are they to tell me how to do this?
- They are so out of touch with reality.

From my observation, the higher a leader rises, the more challenging it is to get trusted feedback. Not only should we listen, but we should seek to mine information from those around us.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Listening

THE NEED TO WIN

Most successful leaders are competitive. (For the record, I think God wires some people this way for Kingdom benefit.)

Some of us have an insatiable need to win. This can be a tremendous asset or a horribly destructive blind spot.

When I always need to win:

- I make myself look good at others expense.
- I pour too much time and money into ideas we should abort.
- I might win causing others to lose.
- I forget the value of teamwork or kingdom-mindedness.
- I find it hard to admit fault.
- I push people too hard.
- I might see myself as a driven, hard working, faithful achiever. Others see me as dominant, self-centered, and arrogant.

Sometimes as a leader, losing is the first step to winning.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Selflessness

THE LEADER'S BLIND SIDE

All leaders have blind sides. This week I'll talk about a few common blind spots.

Underestimating The Consequences of Words

I used to be in a conversation with a staff member and be thinking out loud, "What if we...?"

In my mind, we were simply having a casual conversation. In the staff members mind, the leader of the church was issuing an order.

As a leader, our words carry far more weight than we realize.

Casual suggestions are often interpreted as direct orders.

Constructive feedback is often interpreted as harsh criticism.

Tossing out an opinion can be interpreted as "law."

When we speak, we must be very careful and intentional. I've sent people into panic mode or running in wrong directions with sloppy communication too many times to count.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Communications

LEADERSHIP LIDS 1 (OF 5)

We all occasionally (or often) bump up against leadership lids. A leadership lid is anything that limits our leadership. For example, if we always have to be in control, our leadership reach will be diminished. Or if we are unwilling to delegate, our ministries will struggle to grow. We'll hit a lid or ceiling.

This week, I'll talk about five leadership lids:

Low Altitude Thinking

As usual, I'm writing this post on an airplane. The world looks very different from an airplane than it does on the ground. So will an organization.

As leaders, it is too easy to get bogged down in the details of our ministries that we rarely "rise above" for a different perspective. Instead of always working in our ministries, it often helps to work on our ministries. There is a big difference.

Low altitude questions might include:

- Did we have enough greeters?
- Did the bulletin have typos?
- Did all the first time guests receive a letter?
- Is the air conditioner in the kids' wing repaired?
- It is occasionally wiser to ponder high altitude questions like:
- How can we increase the spiritual climate of our church attenders?
- How can we as a church better live the gospel?
- What needs to change about our strategy to better make disciples?
- How can we create a bigger "vision-buy-in" from the people in our ministry?

It is challenging for me to get into a higher altitude mindset in the office. The urgent often distracts from the most important leadership issues. Getting away and disrupting the norm often allows me to get a higher altitude.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP LIDS 2 (OF 5)

Stagnant Styles of Leadership

When I find something that works, it is tempting to stick with it. In leadership, we must walk the fine line between staying with our strengths and becoming stagnant.

Most of us settle into comfortable leadership routines and styles. People generally do well under leaders when they know what to expect. Organizations can thrive in predictable routines. They also can become flat and stagnant.

As a leader, I constantly work to grow and allow God to evolve my style of leadership.

Here are a few examples of what I do to shake things up:

Invite outside feedback. Those who work closely with us quickly lose objectivity.

Ask peers and/or direct reports for suggestions. Those around us often hope for the chance to make suggestions for improvements but may not mention their ideas unless asked.

Follow a leadership hunch. This might be a theory or idea that may or may not work. Following the hunch may lead us into a short-term failure. Small failures are great at spurring growth.

Disrupt the rhythms. Working in different places and at different times changes our perspectives.

Traveling. Seeing more of the world and meeting other leaders is invaluable.

Probing the organization. Leaders can become isolated from those who are on the ground making things happen. Digging for ideas, information, and insight from people we rarely interact with is vital.

Work the “change” muscles. Changing anything is better than changing nothing. Eat at a new restaurant. Read a different kind of book. Hang out with someone outside your normal circle. Preach on something you’ve never preached on before.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP LIDS 3 (OF 5)

Choosing Easy Over Right

When things are running smoothly, most of us don’t like to “rock the boat.” Instead of addressing important issues, we’ll often let potential challenges go unaddressed. I call it “choosing easy over right.”

The easy thing might be to let a weak staff member stay weak.

The right thing may be to coach, correct, or release that staff member.

The easy thing might be to stay in your current building.

The right thing may be to build, move, or add an experience.

The easy thing might be to allow a struggling ministry to continue.

The right thing may be to overhaul it, change the leader, or dismantle it.

The easy thing might be to avoid talking about money.

The right thing might be to challenge the church to be more generous and be better stewards.

The easy thing might be to preach on a subject that will draw a crowd.

The right thing might be to preach on something that will shrink the crowd but honor God.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP LIDS 4 (OF 5)

Dreaming Small Dreams

One of the biggest leadership lids is lack of vision and dreams.

Some ministries stay mostly ineffective because the leaders don't have a vision for effective.

Some churches don't reach people without Christ because the leaders don't have a vision or heart for evangelism.

Some kids' ministries don't develop growing disciples because no one has a vision to do so.

People follow big vision.

(And by big vision I don't mean just big fund raisers and big buildings. More than big dollars and bricks, people value life change.)

When I was 22, I met a Methodist pastor named Nick Harris who had a vision to reach downtown Oklahoma City for Christ. He also talked about bringing life back into the Methodist Church and about sending missionaries around the world. His passion and vision captured my heart and it was an honor to join his team.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Miscellaneous

THE CHALLENGES OF THE SECOND DECADE

Yesterday I blogged about how ministry is better in the second decade. Today I'll reveal some of the challenges I'm facing:

Mistakes Cost More. In the first decade, when we made a mistake, it didn't affect as many people, didn't cost as much money, and didn't take as much time to correct. Now mistakes are more costly.

Value Erosion. In the early days, I trained all the staff. Years later, those I trained disciplined the newer staff members. Now staff members I barely know are training ministry rookies. With each new generation, it takes more and more work to guard the values of the church.

Personal Demands. A lot of people want a lot of things and time. Being wise and selective about "opportunities" is crucial for ongoing effectiveness and health.

Eliminating Ministry Baggage. Just like many families accumulate too much “junk,” churches can accumulate too many ministries. Pruning ineffective ministries and saying “no” are increasingly important in the second decade.

Diminishing Returns. Some things that used to work don’t work as well. It’s tempting to think, “We just need to do those old things better.” Instead we’re trying to say, “Maybe we need to attempt new things.”

Recognizing Weaknesses. Many leaders think they’re successful because of “the way they are.” The truth is that many are successful “in spite of the way they are.” I’m recognizing my many weaknesses. I’m learning to grow through significant points of vulnerability.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Learning

THE SECOND DECADE

2008 marks the 12th year of existence for LifeChurch.tv. It’s scary how fast time flies. This week I’ll share some insights I’m learning in the “second decade” of this ministry.

Things I Like Better in the Second Decade

Right Priorities. As I age (and hopefully mature), it’s nice to not feel like I’m trying to prove myself. In the earlier years, my emotions and self-worth revolved around the numbers. (By numbers, I mean attendance, giving, salvations, and ministry involvement.) In the second decade, I am learning to measure success more by obedience to God than by visible results.

Deeper Faith. God has been amazingly faithful. Knowing His goodness for a decade in ministry helps me trust Him all the more tomorrow.

Meaningful Relationships. I love having staff and church friends whose bonds have grown deeper over time.

Assurance of God’s Power. In the early years, I thought I had to do “awesome” things to get people to come to church and stay. We often seemed to be trying to outperform a previous experience. Now I’m grateful that teaching God’s word and loving His people is more than enough to get the job done.

Broader Perspective. Nothing can replace experience. Seeing God working in different places around the world helps me to appreciate His broader plan and not obsess with what we are doing.

My Marriage. Amy and I have always been blessed with a good marriage. But since I’m more in love with God and less in love with the church, our marriage is much better for it.

Posted by: Greg Groeschel, Learning

Alan Hirsch

VIOLA STRIKES BACK (PUN INTENDED) -- EXERPT

On that fine note, let me rehearse a story that captures the entire thrust of “Pagan Christianity,” which is essentially a polemic/deconstructive work that seeks not to offer solutions, but to challenge conventional church practices and thinking.

A mother and daughter were working together in their kitchen preparing their Easter dinner. As was her custom every year, the mother took a ham out of the fridge and put it on a cutting board. She would then cut about an inch off of both ends of the ham. Once the mother did this, the daughter stopped her and said: “Mother, why did you cut both ends off the ham?”

The mother stopped dead in her tracks and pondered the question. She was perplexed since no one had ever asked her why she did this before. She had done it that way as long as she could remember. The mother answered and said: “Well sweetie, I don’t know the answer to your question. Your Grandma always cut the ends off of her ham, and I have always done it the same way. I never ever asked why. Let’s call Grandma and ask her why she cuts the ham that way.” So they grabbed the phone and called Grandma. The mother asked her own mother if she knew why she cut the ends of the ham off before placing it in the pan. The Grandmother fell silent. She never thought about it. She simply said “that’s the way my mother always did it. Why don’t you call her and ask why?” She hung up the phone and dialed the little girl’s great-grandmother, and she asked the question: “why did you cut off both ends of the ham before cooking it?” The great-grandmother replied instantly: “It was because we couldn’t afford a pan large enough to hold the ham. So we cut both ends off to make it fit.”

This story can be applied to much of what we do for “church” every Sunday. (At this point, I can faintly hear someone retort... “I’m angry at you for telling this story. I didn’t think Christians were supposed to eat pork!”) And the discussion marches on...

Here are some wise words from F.F. Bruce to chew on — “Some institutions are allowed to grow so old and venerable that the idea of scrapping them is unthinkably sacrilegious.”

BTW, the title about puns is that there is a Frank Viola that is a baseball star. But only the Americans would know that.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch [Change](#)

MAKING BABIES IS FUN

Firstly, it is not hard to see that the reproductive capacities of the church are directly linked to the missional-incarnational impulse. It is not coincidental that this looks awfully similar to the way in which all organic systems reproduce and procreate themselves. (It [looks](#) like a genealogy doesn’t it?) We will explore this further when we look at the element of mDNA called organic systems, but it is important to note here that herein lies the impulse for the seeding and reproduction of God’s people into every culture and group of people. In this view each unit of

church can be conceived as a pod filled with seeds: each church ‘pregnant’ with other churches. And it is in following this impulse that the apostolic church extends itself. To frustrate this impulse is to block the church’s innate reproductive capacity.

If you think about it, this is actually how all powerful movements start. It begins with a group of people impassioned with a cause that reproduces itself through multiplication systems. It is fully consistent with the theory of how new movements begin, but sadly not how they end. Something happens when we try and control things too much that serves to lock up the power of multiplication and the movement moves on to addition and then on to subtraction. This is exactly what happened in Wesley’s revolutionary movement for instance. Wesleyanism was at its most influential when it was a people movement that was reproducing like mad. It eventually centralized and as they sought to control what was happening lost much of its power to really change the world.

Neil Cole reports that only 4% of Southern Baptists churches America will plant a daughter church. Extrapolated across the denominations will mean that 96% of the conventional churches in America will never give birth. Cole goes on to say that “Many think this is fine. I have heard people say, “We have plenty of churches. There are churches all over the place that sit empty, why start new ones? We don’t need more churches but better ones.” Can you imagine making such a statement about people? “We have plenty of people. We don’t need more people, just better ones. Why have more babies?” This is short-range thinking....no matter how inflated you think the world population is, we are only one generation away from extinction if we do not have babies...Imagine the headlines if suddenly it was discovered that 96% of the women in America were no longer fertile and could not have babies. We would instantly know two things: this is not natural so there is something wrong with their health. We would also know that our future is in serious jeopardy.” The missional-incarnational impulse is a fundamental indicator of ecclesial health.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Discipleship

EXERT: WHAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP IS THIS?

I can find no situation where the church has significantly extended the mission of God, let alone where the church has achieved rapid metabolic growth where apostolic leadership cannot be found in some form or another. In fact, the more significant the mission impact the easier it is to discern this mode of leadership.

Apostolic leadership, as in all types of influence, is both identified and measured by the effect it has on the social environment in which it operates. And in these terms it is always present in periods of significant missional extension. Such people might not always call themselves ‘Apostles’ but the apostolic nature and effect of their ministry and influence is undeniable.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Staffing

FIELD OF DREAMS PT.1

Part of the resistance to the reception of apostolic ministry in our churches has been because at times when people who claim to be apostles have assumed that this involved a dictatorial approach to the leadership of the church. All too often, this has resulted in a disempowering of God's people, and instead of seeing them mature and grow in the faith; they basically remain childlike and powerless, dependent on the autocratic and overwhelming paternal power of the 'apostle.' This is both a distortion and misrepresentation of authentic apostolic ministry. Apostolic ministry is authenticated by suffering and empowerment, not by claims of positional leadership with its institutional levers.

In our day I believe that the predominant, top-down, CEO concept of leadership has co-opted the apostolic so that many who claim apostolic title actually function like CEO's. In the Scriptures the Suffering Servant/Jesus image informs and qualifies the apostolic role, not that of the Chief Executive Officer. Apostolic ministry draws its authority and power primarily from the idea of service, calling, and from moral, or spiritual, authority and not from positional authority. Perhaps a useful way of exploring the nature of apostolic authority is identify the distinctive form of leadership involved and see how this creates authority.

In a relationship based on 'inspirational' or 'moral' leadership both leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality by engaging each other on the basis of shared values, calling, and identity. It involves a relationship between leaders and followers in which each influences the other to pursue common objectives, with the aim of inspiring followers into becoming leaders in the own right. In other words, influence runs both ways. Inspirational leadership ultimately becomes genuinely moral when it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leaders and led, thus having a transformational effect on both. In this view, followers are persuaded to take action without threatening them or offering material incentives but rather by appealing to their values. They use moral persuasion rather than material reward to influence their followers, appealing rather to higher values and calling. This can be clearly seen in the way Jesus develops his disciples as well Paul's relationship with Timothy, Titus, and the other members of his apostolic team. But it is forms the basis of his letters to the churches.

Perhaps we can best call this type of influence 'greatness.' To be a great leader in this sense is to inspire, to evoke, and to nurture something correspondingly great out of those who follow. Through an integrated life, great leaders remind their followers of what they can become if they too based their lives on a compassionate notion of humanity framed by higher moral vision of the world in which we live. We seldom call a leader with significant technical or managerial ability 'great.' We don't build statues to commemorate great bureaucrats, do we? And it is with understanding in mind that we can identify spiritual 'greatness' as the basic substance that provides genuine apostolic form of leadership with its authority. And it is the strongest form of leadership available because it awakens the human spirit, focuses it, and holds it together by managing the shared meaning. Like many leaders in the Chinese underground church, it has the power to hold vast movements together without much external structure. It's the kind of

leadership mythically reflected in the William Wallace character in the movie Braveheart. A man who the people willingly followed, not because they ought, or that he had some official position (he didn't) but because he reminded them of their right to freedom and helped them obtain it at the cost of his life.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Staffing

EXERT: FIELD OF DREAMS PT. 2

The universe in which we live is filled with fields of influence. Whist being invisible, fields nonetheless assert a definite influence on objects within their orbit. There are gravitational fields, electromagnetic fields, quantum fields, etc which actually form part of the very structure of reality. These unseen influences affect behavior of atoms, objects, and people. But fields don't just exist in nature and physics; they exist in social systems as well. For example, think about the power of ideas in human affairs—a powerful idea has no substance, but one cannot doubt its influence...

Such is the power of a person who embodies vision and values—they bring inspiration, coherence, and a sense of direction and purpose to the people in their orbit. Leadership is influence. It is a field which shapes behaviors. This is the basis of authentic spiritual power and authority. Nelson Mandela is a great leader not because he was President of South Africa, but because long before he was president, he was a deeply moral person who embodied his personal code of freedom in his own life. It is the greatness of his life that gives his leadership substance and impact...

To conceptualize leadership as influence, think of a magnet and its effect on iron filings scattered on a sheet of paper. When the filings come into the orbit of influence of the magnet, they form a certain pattern which we all recognize from our school days. Leadership does exactly the same thing—it creates a field which in turn influences people in a certain way, just like the magnet's influence on the iron filings. The presence of a great leader in a group of people changes the patterning of that group.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Staffing

EXERT: FIELD OF DREAMS PT. 3

The problem with such forms of CEO-type leadership is that it tends to be disempowering to others, and when, for various reasons, that leader should leave the group; it tends to leave the organization weak and under-developed. This is the very thing that apostolic influence is at pains not to do—rather apostolic ministry calls forth and develops the gifts and callings of all of God's people. It does not create reliance, but develops the capacities of the whole people of God based on the dynamics of the gospel. In a word it involves empowerment.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Staffing

EXERT: FIELD OF DREAMS PT. 4

...there are powerful metaphors that help us to avoid the alluring notions of top-down coercive power; ones which aid us in understanding our task of creating environments where missional church can arise. At Forge Mission Training Network, we like to think of ourselves as midwives to a new dream. Our stated mission is to ‘help birth and nurture the missional church in Australia and beyond.’ And while this describes is our own particular calling, the idea of being midwives is both a very biblical and humane image of leadership and I recommend it to you here as describing the actual mode of leadership which informs all authentic apostolic influence. A midwife aids and assists in the birth of a child. All that he/she makes sure that all the conditions are right for a healthy birth—the birth is the result of things beyond the midwife’s influence. It is interesting that Socrates called himself a midwife and that he saw his role as helping others discover the truth for themselves. This he did by the constant use of questions which drove the learner to their own insights and observations. Jesus is very ‘midwifery’ through his use of questions, stories, and parables.

But perhaps one more image of this quality of leadership is needed to pin this concept down in our minds, and this is the image of a farmer. A good farmer creates the conditions for growth of healthy crops to develop by tilling the soil, replenishing it with nutrients, removing weeds, scattering the seeds, and watering the field. He/she is wide open to natural rhythms of nature which are out of hihe/sher control and so they are reliant on God for the sun and rain. The seed itself, if given the right conditions, will flourish in this type of environment and produce good crops. All that the farmer does is to create the right environment for this mysterious process of life to take place.

Apostolic ministry works in precisely the same way...

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Staffing

MANDELA ON LEADERSHIP

I have to admit that I totally love Nelson Mandela. I do believe he is the greatest leader alive today and a remarkable example of grace. Time magazine recently did an article on him and his view of leadership. Interestingly he says that these are not principles but tactics. He is a man of principles but in terms of leadership he says it is all about tactics. Here are his eight principles...

1. Courage is not the absence of fear — it’s inspiring others to move beyond it
2. Lead from the front — but don’t leave your base behind
3. Lead from the back — and let others believe they are in front
4. Know your enemy — and learn about his favorite sport
5. Keep your friends close — and your rivals even closer
6. Appearances matter — and remember to smile
7. Nothing is black or white

8. Quitting is leading too

Read the whole article [here](#).

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Miscellaneous

WE ARE EXPLORERS

“The reward of the search is to go on searching. The soul’s desire is fulfilled by the very fact of its remaining unsatisfied; for really to see God is never to have had one’s fill of desiring Him”
- Gregory of Nyssa

We really are explorers. Its part of what it means to be human. To taste God is to be driven to an eternal quest to know him more. It always amazes me when people think they have arrived at the knowledge of God. When people come to that point, all they believe is an idol.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Spiritual Health

WHEN THEOLOGY BECOMES IDOLATRY

“Every concept formed by the intellect in an attempt to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not in making God known.” - Gregory of Nyssa, “Life of Moses” -

Our ideas about God are only meant to direct our attention toward God, who is always greater than our ideas.

Posted by: Alan Hirsch Focus

Scott Hodge

SIMPLICITY.

One of the things we value here at The Orchard is simplicity. We don't just say that, we really DO keep things simple here.

So what does that look like for us?

Well it means that we pretty much stay focused on a handful of things we *know* we can do well and consider anything above that "bonus." For example, we don't have a lot of the "ministries" and "programs" that you'll find at most churches (*i.e. men's ministry, women's ministry, classes out the whazoo, etc...*) I'm certainly not saying that having these programs are *bad* or *shouldn't* be done in some churches - they're just something we've decided we're not going to do here at The Orchard.

Here are a few reasons why simplicity rules at The Orchard:

1. **We'd rather keep people freed up throughout the week to engage missionally in the community around them and to gather in small groups.** (*Instead of keeping them inside the walls of the church three or four nights a week.*)
2. **We're not interested in having programs JUST to have programs.** If we're going to offer a class, environment, etc... we want to make sure that it is a STEP TOWARDS something else. (See [Seven Practices of Effective Ministry](#) by Andy Stanley.) On a side note - the only people who WANT a gazillion programs are churched people. And that's not who we're trying to reach. I NEVER get asked by an unchurched person why we don't do women's ministry.
3. **By keeping things simple, it allows us to maintain a good amount of "asking equity" from our volunteers.** Since we don't have to maintain numerous programs and events throughout the month, it keeps our volunteers fresh and focused on what's most important. This is especially helpful when it comes to things like FUEL - our monthly leadership gathering. I'm convinced that the reason we don't have a problem getting our leaders to FUEL is because we aren't asking them to be at numerous other meetings throughout the month IN ADDITION to this one!
4. **Keeping things simple allows us to pour a good amount of resources, time and energy into the things that we are most passionate about and consider to be missional priorities.** So instead of doing a hundred different things half-a**ed, we are able to do a handful of things very well. It communicates to EVERYONE what is most important.
5. **Being simple helps clearly define what we will and will not do.** This is beneficial all the way around! For example, because of this, staff meetings can stay focused on what they need to be focused on instead of wasting hours having conversations debating and going back and forth as to whether or not we *should* or *shouldn't* do a particular ministry or program. Does it mean we don't come up with new, innovative ideas? Of course not!

But we don't *add* just to *add*. It's always strategic and directly tied to the mission - or else we don't waste time talking about it.

Now, with all that said, let me also say that keeping things simple is not always easy. It requires a lot of "NO's", tons of vision casting and lots of reminders as to WHY we value simplicity. It also requires a willingness to recognize that this is just one more reason why The Orchard isn't the right church for everyone. And that's ok!

How about you? What does simplicity look like for you?

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Focus, Simplicity

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS!

Environment matters. And I was reminded of this a couple of nights ago when my family made a quick stop for dinner at Boston Market.

We should have known right away... Because the first thing we noticed when we pulled up was ONE - ok, MAYBE two cars in their parking lot. Usually not a good sign, but we decided to go for it anyway.

So we walked in.....ordered our food... And as we were ordering, I noticed a couple of *strange looks* from the food servers standing behind the counter. One of them almost seemed agitated about my order in particular - Chipotle meatloaf - which, ironically enough, was the "special" that they had advertised on the large sign when we walked in.

Within a minute or two of getting our food and sitting down to eat, I looked over at Amanda and said, "*Is it just me, or does something seem weird about this place?*" She agreed.

Although it was hard to pinpoint, we finally figured it out. It wasn't just ONE thing in particular. It was a lot of small things that made the overall environment feel awfully strange. For example:

My order was wrong. I didn't get what I ordered - Chipotle meatloaf! Did I ask them to fix it? No... I was too afraid! Especially after the look the dude behind the counter gave when I placed my order! Too risky...

The room was FREEZING! I kid you not, the temperature HAD to have been set at around 58 degrees.

Our food was cold. Because the room was so cold.....our food quickly became cold *too!*

There was no music. The restaurant was dead quiet. And as more people came in and sat at tables around us, it was awkward! You could tell that nobody felt like they could have much of a conversation in a room that was so quiet that you could hear people chewing their food.

The bottom line? Even though Boston Market was "open", it only seemed about HALF open.

It felt like they were only HALF-WAY expecting people to show up to eat. And on top of that, it felt like they didn't really care a whole lot about creating a great experience for those who DID show up and walk through their doors.

I have a feeling....

That this is exactly how a lot of people feel when they walk into some churches for the first time.

So I have to ask.... ESPECIALLY the week before Easter where almost every church in America WILL have guests.....

What are you doing to create an environment that says to people, “*We KNEW you were coming and we were EXPECTING you!*”

At [The Orchard](#), there are a handful of things that we consider to be *non-negotiables* when it comes to creating a great environment for our guests.... Here are a few of them:

GREAT MUSIC. When people walk into The Orchard, they’ll hear music. Everything from Coldplay to Matt Kearney to Hillsong United. The *only* rule we have is that it needs to be positive, upbeat and stylistically consistent with who we are.

GREAT SMELLS. There’s no reason that churches should smell like Ben-gay and mothballs. So we use [Henri Bendel Scentports](#) scattered throughout our auditorium using a scent called Firewood - which is a mix of birch, cedar, sandalwood with a slight hint of tobacco. This fits the wood-beamed architecture of our auditorium perfectly. (*On a side note - please leave the flowery smelling potpourri at home. And DON’T spray Lysol before starting a service. That makes the room smell like someone just threw up minutes before people arrived.*)

GREAT COFFEE. There is something incredibly disarming about walking into the auditorium with a latte or cappuccino in hand. Plus, one of the first things you’ll notice when you walk through our front doors is the smell of coffee. It’s familiar, comforting and sends a huge signal to people that we understand coffee’s place in our culture.

GREAT PEOPLE! I’m convinced that we have THE MOST welcoming church in our community. I’m serious! And that’s due, in large part, to our Welcome Teams - who are **intentional about making sure that people have a great experience** when they walk through the doors at The Orchard. They greet people authentically.... They walk people to their destination (*instead of POINTING*).... They help people find seats when they walk into the auditorium... **They do WHATEVER is needed.** They are a HUGE part of creating a great environment on our weekends.

There’s more, but the post is getting too long. The bottom line is that MOST guests are walking into your church with defenses up, not having *any idea* what to expect. What are you doing to help bring those defenses down?

And please.....don't tell me you can't be MISSIONAL *and* ATTRACTIVE. They go hand in hand. Part of helping people become missional is creating an environment where people feel welcomed, loved, and expected.

Now it's your turn! **How do YOU create a great environment in your church, business, organization?**

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Environment, Culture

THE ORCHARD'S CRITIQUING CULTURE

One of the things about [The Orchard's](#) culture that I'm REALLY proud of is our constant desire to DO BETTER! And one of the ways we accomplish this is by intentionally diving in and doing POST-reviews of all of our events and weekend gatherings.

For example, not only do we spend a lot of time creatively planning our weekend gatherings on the FRONT end....But we also critique, review, and improve IN BETWEEN services and again AFTER the weekend is over. Here's what it looks like....

Saturday Nights:

- *During* the Saturday night service, Mike Jones (*creative arts*) meets with his teams and discusses music, transitions, video pieces, and whatever else needs to be discussed. Notes are taken and any adjustments or changes are assigned to the teams.
- Immediately *following* the service, I meet with Mike and a handful of others where we review the entire service from FRONT to BACK - everything from quality and flow of music to specifics of my teaching. We really take our time walking through our production schedule and EVERYTHING is put on the table for discussion on how to improve and make better for the next day.

Sunday Mornings:

- After our 9am service, we do another service walk-through, except with a larger group. And since there's not a lot of time before our 10:45 service begins, we run through everything fairly quickly, but also make sure we cover all of the bases. And let me tell you.... It's amazing how much we've been able to improve our 2nd and 3rd services because of this!

Monday Mornings:

- Every Monday morning, a [Zoomerang](#) survey is sent out to all staff and a rotating list of people in our church. The survey covers everything from how welcoming and warm our environments were to the appearance of our campus.
- The survey asks the participant to rate each area based on the following scale: It Rocked, Exceeds expectations, Meets expectations, Below expectations and Poor (Address this immediately!). There are also places to make notes on each area and give feedback on why something was rated as it was.
- The deadline for filling out the survey is Tuesday mornings at 11:00am. We then go through the reviews at our weekly staff meeting that occurs on Tuesdays at 12:00pm.

Overall, there are a couple of reasons why I think this works so well for us.

For one, everyone has an understanding that when it's time to sit down and critique that it's not about DEFENDING our areas or making excuses. Instead, it's about the overall experience and figuring out what needs to be corrected, made better, or sometimes just left alone.

Secondly, there is a mutual respect and trust among the team that allows us to sometimes say some hard things to each other, yet still walk away loving and in support of whatever decision is made.

And of course, I realize that it all starts with ME - modeling the ability to open my ears and receive feedback, criticism, and input on how to make it better. Is it always easy? No, of course not. But having a team around me that I trust, respect, and who believes in the mission like they do sure makes it a lot easier

Posted by: Scott Hodge Feedback

WHO ARE YOU FOCUSED ON LEADING?

One of *the most* empowering moments in [The Orchard's](#) journey of transition & change occurred a few years ago when someone said to us:

"Until you get your focus OFF of the people who are disgruntled, unhappy, unsupportive, and resistant to the direction God has called you to go, and ONTO those who are excited, supportive and on board, you will NEVER gain momentum and see a new culture created in your church."

That statement set us free.

It really did. In fact, I can remember our team making several tough, but GOOD decisions that day that literally sped up our momentum by leaps and bounds.

Some of those decisions had to do with things we were going to *STOP* doing. Decisions that:

- We were NO LONGER going to try and get people to stay at our church who weren't happy.
- We were going to stop spending time and energy trying to get the naysayers "on board" when it was very evident that most of them were not going to support the new direction.
- We were going to stop allowing some of the "small things" to continue just to keep a few people happy (*You know those programs and committees that are OPPOSITE of where you're headed, but you're keeping in place just to keep 12 people happy? Yeah, those...*)

We also made some decisions about what we going to *START* doing or focus on being more intentional about. Decisions that:

- We would stay focused on God's mission for The Orchard NO MATTER WHAT. Even if it were just the three of us in the end!
- The focus of our leading and teaching would be turned towards the people we were reaching and those who were excited about where we were headed.
- We would only engage in ministries, programs, and events that aligned with our mission - regardless as to whether or not every other church in town was doing it or not. The mission would dictate everything - not what was "popular" with other churches or even what programs or events might have seemed "successful" in the past.

It wasn't easy, and yes, we lost a lot of people. But....it eventually created a momentum that led towards reaching the people that God had called us to reach. **By 400% since 2003.**

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Focus

NOTICING EVEN THE SLIGHTEST SHIFTS....

I'll be honest. As a leader, I'm not always so good at this when it comes to leading staff and others.

Sure, I do pretty well noticing the slight steps people take on their *spiritual* journeys - but this is not always natural to me when it comes to day to day people leading.

More often than not, I tend to miss out on recognizing and celebrating the *slight shifts* in the right direction in people's attitudes or behaviors. It's like all or nothing.

But what I'm realizing is that even the SLIGHTEST shifts in the right direction need to be recognized, pointed out, and celebrated.

I'm learning that as a leader, it's not just about helping others "get there" - it's also about being a part of their JOURNEY of getting there. And by acknowledging the slight positive shifts, people feel more empowered to keep making those slight shifts - until eventually.....they're there!

Anyone care to add to that?

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Encouragement

"WHO ARE WE WILLING TO OFFEND?"

Someone just asked me, "*How can a church embrace diversity without offending someone?*"

My answer: "*I don't think it can. Everything a church does will offend SOMEONE. I think the question has to be, 'WHO are we willing to offend in order to reach the people we're called to reach?'*"

That's what she said.... :)

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Risk Taking

READY, SET, LEARN!

I *love* the responses that I got from [this post](#) asking you to share what you've been learning about leadership in whatever context you are leading in right now. Here are a handful of the responses that really stuck out to me:

If you don't train your leaders right-it will cause massive growing pains for the church and a lot of extra work for the pastors. [Chris Marlow](#)

...pursuit of consensus signals the death of vision. [Randy Bohlender](#)

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION! One of the HARDEST things for me to do is find the medium and the occasion to cast vision and direction for our church.

[John Baw](#)

Vision must be communicated with clarity or people will decide what the vision is for themselves, amidst the confusion. [Matt P.](#)

A test of one's leadership is not how well one leads when they are in charge, but how well one serves when they are NOT in charge. [Ted](#)

You lead out of who and what you are. If you are not growing then whatever you are involved in will not be growing. If you are in conflict in many areas of your life then the thing you are responsible for will be in conflict. We can go to conferences and get methodology but what works for one leader works because it is flowing out of there essence. [Tory](#)

No copy and paste...just listen to God and obey....sure you use other leadership tools and learn best practices, but real vision comes from God. [Dale Schaeffer](#)

It amazes me what a phone call, post card, voice mail, a written note can do to encourage a team member. (E-mails don't seem to have the personal touch.) [Joy Spencer](#)

I'm learning that even if there is frustration with the leadership you are under...God is working and using it grow you and make you better. Shane

As with Joshua, be CAREFUL to do the small things God tells you to do. [Stephen Gibbs](#)

I keep learning that it's incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to lead young women (or older women for that matter) who don't seem to respect and honor their own husbands. The two issues seem to go hand in hand for some reason. [Samantha Connour](#)

It's impossible to follow Jesus and lead a reproducing movement without being intentional about personally making disciples. [Jay Hardwick](#)

I must be consistent. Confident in my mission. Able to act without swaying to resistance...or my kids will walk all over me, they will not learn the lesson at hand, and they will not trust me to make the correct decision next time. [Joni](#)

I was reminded this week to not pigeonhole people by their personality or abilities. That when I've been mentoring, sometimes people are ready to go to the next level, and I need to give them the opportunity. God is growing people, and sometimes, they/He can surprise us. Kim Martinez

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Miscellaneous

JOURNEY LEADING

Every person in our church community is at a different place in their spiritual journey.

For us at The Orchard, we are continually finding ways to infuse this awareness in with how we communicate and teach people in our large, weekend gatherings. For example, we are intentional about....

1. Recognizing and acknowledging it!

There are a LOT of ways to do this, but we are intentional about doing this during our welcome time at every weekend gathering. Usually, it sounds something like this:

“Our mission here at The Orchard is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. And what that simply means is that no matter where you might be at in your spiritual journey, first of all - we’re glad you’re here. But secondly, our hope is that we can help you take your next step forward on that journey.”

Quite often, I’ll say things like this during my talks:

“One of the things that I love about The Orchard is our diversity! If you’ve been around our community for any length of time, you’ll notice that we are diverse in so many ways - ethnically, in age, and of course, spiritually. Which is why we work so hard at being the kind of community that you can be a part of, regardless of where you’re at in your spiritual journey....to learn more and experience this way of life called ‘following Jesus.’

2. Helping people locate where they’re at in their journey.

Often times, I’ll wrap up my talks by having a few moments of reflection where I’ll ask the question, *“Where are you at right now in your spiritual journey? And what does your next step look like?”*

To help people think through this, I will often times say things like:

“For some of you, you are very new to this journey and it’s just a HUGE deal that you are even sitting in church today.... Perhaps for you.....your next step is making the decision to come back again next week.”

“For others of you, you’ve been learning more and more about the ways of Jesus.....you’re pretty well convinced that following Him is the best way to live your life.....and so for you, your next step is to reach out to him to solidify that desire....”

“Perhaps you’ve been following Jesus for a while now - maybe even for years.... Maybe your next step is a matter of taking that step of faith in your life that God has been leading you towards.....”

You get the idea, right? And of course, there are not just *three* “categories” - these are just three examples. Really, it’s just a matter of us being sensitive at each gathering to however God might be working in people’s lives.

On a side note, I think it’s important that we don’t forget that **God is at work in people’s lives LONG before they step foot into our doors.** For some reason, there is this crazy idea out there that says, “As soon as we get them IN....then God will start doing something great.” What the heck!?! Why do we think that God only resides in our buildings and services?! No way.

God is so much greater than that. And He is at work in people and places everywhere.

(I’m reminded of walking through the rampant sex-trade districts of Bangkok during a visit last year, yet feeling God’s presence and work happening around me in a very strong way.)

Continued tomorrow...

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Discipleship

JOURNEY LEADING - CONTINUED

Continuing sharing some of the things we are intentional about in our weekend gatherings knowing that everybody is at a different place in their spiritual journey...

Avoiding extreme categorizations.

This is huge, because as communicators, it can be easy to make assumptive or black and white statements about where people are at in their journey.

For example, let's say I'm teaching on the subject of generosity... And in building tension with where people are at, I might decide to talk about how the opposite of generosity might be "greed."

I could approach it making this type of statement:

"As much as we know that generosity is a great way to live, the truth is.....all of us find ourselves being greedy in our lives, don't we?"

Ok, well that's an *ugly* statement. Even if it's true! But it's one that will more than likely raise defenses quickly - which then cuts a lot of people off from hearing what you have to say next.

So what if instead of making such a black and white statement, we tried saying something more like this:

"Let's say that on one end of the spectrum we have "extreme generosity" and on the other end we have what's called "extreme greed." Well chances are, there are probably very few of us here that would categorize ourselves as being 'extremely greedy.' But yet, on the other hand, I wonder how many of us could actually say that we are way over here on THIS end of the spectrum (extreme generosity)?"

Or let's say you were to look at the last year or two of your life.... What DIRECTION have you been headed on this spectrum? Has your life been pulled the direction of extreme generosity? Or.....has it been headed the opposite direction?"

This type of approach allows people the opportunity to get honest and identify FOR THEMSELVES where they're at in their journey. Chances are, most people would not categorize themselves as either extremely generous or extremely greedy - most would probably find themselves somewhere more in the middle. So to block people into one of the two categories does nothing but cause unnecessary defenses to rise and people to disconnect before they even hear what the solution is!

(On a side note - it's one thing for the scriptures to offend someone... There's not much we can do about that. But it's completely different for me - as the communicator - to offend in a way that shuts down half my audience.)

The point in a talk like this would be to help people learn how to live in such a way that they are constantly moving in the direction TOWARDS extreme generosity. No one gets there

overnight. And for most people, imagining themselves going from where they're currently at to the far other end of the spectrum *overnight* is overwhelming and unrealistic.

I'm aiming for ONE MORE STEP forward. That's it. And I'm trusting that because God is *already* at work in their lives, that His Spirit will continue working in them and will get them where He wants them to be.

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Discipleship

LEVERAGING YOUR SIZE

Ok, that title sounds a little weird... But it's a little bit of what I shared at [Community Christian Church's](#) staff meeting yesterday as I discussed some of the lessons we're learning through our ongoing journey of growth at [The Orchard](#).

Here are a few of those thoughts:

You can't lead a church of 200 or 300 like you would lead a church of 5,000.

The truth is, most of us would utterly fail if we tried leading a church of 5,000 because **it's the journey of growing that God uses to grow US as leaders** so that we're prepared and equipped to lead at a larger level.

My "natural" strength as a leader and pastor is to be big picture focused, entrepreneurial, culture shaping and driven. But there were seasons when we were smaller that what our church needed was not "Scott the visionary leader", but "Scott the pastor." We need to be sensitive to this and make sure we're not so far ahead in the way we lead that we fail to gain momentum in our churches.

Some say that we should lead our churches as through they are twice the size they are. This is probably good advice when it comes to things like systems and organization. But I have to wonder where the balance is to that when it comes to how we lead and relate to our staff and leaders.

The 200-500 range is a CRUCIAL time for our churches. Our church cultures are shaped and created at this stage - which is why we have to be sensitive in how we lead.

There are unique ways you can leverage being small that you will never have the opportunity to leverage again.

Don't be so focused on getting to the "next level" that you miss out on leveraging opportunities that will in turn build great momentum for the future.

I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Focus

TWO EARS, ONE MOUTH.

Several weeks ago I had a couple of interactions that got me thinking about the topic of "listening" - specifically in the context of *listening* and *learning* from people who are further ahead than us on their journey of leadership and experience.

Let me tell you... I am *blown away* by the level and quality of people I've had the privilege of being surrounded with in my life. Because of that, I try to make sure that I'm extremely intentional about listening and learning from these people to the greatest extent possible.

And now that a pretty good segment of my *own time* is given to encouraging and offering guidance to pastors and church leaders, I want to share some very simple tips on how to prepare for and engage well in conversations with the people we interact with. (*By the way...this isn't rocket science, but I think it needs to be said - especially since I find myself constantly walking away frustrated by people who seek out my time but often fail to truly listen.*)

1. **Prepare.** Think about the person you are going to be meeting with. If they're an author, **READ THEIR BOOK FIRST!** Don't waste time thinking through questions that are already answered in a book. This is a great opportunity to ask *unique* questions that will pay out unique and rewarding answers.
2. **Take Notes.** I literally have *at least* a half dozen moleskin journals filled with notes written down from one on one conversations with leaders. Don't be concerned with how it looks sitting there writing while someone is talking to you. When I'm talking with someone and they start writing down what I'm saying, I love that because it shows me that they're hungry to learn AND.....that they value our time together.
3. **Shut up.** Seriously. You'd think this is a given, but it's not! Recently someone sought me out after a conference to ask me a few questions and I kid you not.....they would not **STOP TALKING!** And so guess what I did? Nothing! I just stood there and looked at them! And guess what else? They didn't get ANY of their questions answered because by the time they were done talking I had to go!
4. **Ask questions.** Prepare some questions! Think through your current leadership challenges and what angle this person might be able to offer insight on. Prepare more questions than you think you'll need. It's always better to be over prepared and walk away with more.
5. **Shut up.** Please.
6. **Be kind with their time.** I've learned that not all leaders know how to break away when they need to. And often times, because they really love talking leadership, it's easy for them to just keep pouring and pouring, regardless of the fact that they have a lot of other people they should be connecting with or other priorities to tend to. Be considerate of their time! If they offer 45 minutes, take the 45 minutes and then let them go! I guarantee you that they will be way more apt to meeting with you again if they know you respect their time.
7. **Blog about it.** Share the wealth! **BUT....ask them first.** If the person you are listening to feels comfortable around you, they may share more than they should - and the **LAST**

thing they want to see is the conversation posted on your blog. So be considerate, ask permission, but by all means.....if you get the green light - share it!

P.S. Stop trying to figure out if you are the person I'm referring to. You're probably not... :) And if you are, go back and read this post 4 times.

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Listening

PLASTICKY, PRODUCED....AND THE MOST AMAZING, OFF THE CHARTS BLOG POST EVERRR!

Craig Groeschel touches on something in his book, [It](#), that's been on my mind quite a bit lately. It has to do with finding the balance between doing things with "excellence" and still keeping things feeling raw, authentic, and real.

Over this past year at [The Orchard](#) we have added some pretty significant elements to our weekend gatherings in terms of media and technology. Yet as we've taken those steps, we've also worked hard at being very intentional about *not* coming across "over produced" or inauthentic in any way.

And honestly, it helps that most of us involved in the creative process hates anything that feels *too* produced or plasticky. So our radars are always up when it comes to things feeling too canned.

So anyway... This got me thinking about some of the things we try to be intentional about in order to keep things feeling fresh and authentic. Here are a few off the top of my head:

We are intentional about avoiding "churchy" and cliché-ish sounding words and phrases during worship and teaching. Our communication style is very conversational in approach - across the board. Still passionate and full of life....but *mostly* conversational. We don't go from sounding like "regular people" to Southern Baptist radio preachers once we hit the stage.

We are very careful not to over-hype everything we do. What's great about this is that when we *do show* excitement or buzz about something, people *really do* believe and expect that something unique is getting ready to occur. **Avoiding over-hyping everything builds excitement equity with people.** I intentionally shy away from overusing words like "awesome", "off the hook", "amazing", etc... because using these types of words too liberally *cheapens them*, and over time, causes them to lose effect. (Plus, the phrase "*off the hook*" just bothers the crap out of me.)

We don't try to hide or overcompensate for production mistakes. Not that we encourage them, but we do play them off pretty well! We've learned to laugh and make light about slip-ups during our gatherings.

Our style of music lends itself to feeling raw. Don't get me wrong, it sounds and feels AMAZING, but it doesn't sound like an overproduced band

We stay away from anything that looks, feel, or sounds scripted or canned. We try to say things in a way that feels fresh every time.

Moving video backgrounds and cool lights are fun, but they need to be used strategically. Same thing with lights and video pieces. Too much motion can get old FAST!

We are intentional about dressing in a way that communicates to people, "Hey! We're normal! Just like you!" And then after a few weeks, everyone realizes that there's nothing normal about us whatsoever! :)

So I'm curious.... **Is this a challenge for you?** If so, what types of things *do you do* to help keep things feeling real and authentic?

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Intentionality

YOU ASKED: SIMPLICITY

Question: We've been talking a lot as a church about "simplifying" -- the most difficult question we wrestle with is when someone says, "we need X ministry - to single moms or new moms or alcoholics or divorce recovery etc etc" We feel like we're in a no-win situation because if we say, "no" we sound like we don't care about single moms or we don't love the poor or what have you. And if we say, we don't have the resources, the person pushes back with, "well, I can serve there and I can recruit people to help me etc etc"?? Any ways you could help us communicate with people - I'd love a phrase or two to use in addition to any thoughts you have on the subject???

Thanks! Jason

Great question Jason! A few years ago, we made the decision to simplify our entire approach to ministry at The Orchard. It was a tough decision, but one that we haven't looked back on since!

Simplifying involves two things: 1) Making the decision to simplify and 2) Being committed to STAYING simple. Both involve the need to be very, very clear about what God has called your church to be and do.

Here are a few thoughts about simplicity....

1. **We are unapologetically focused on doing a few things we know we can be great at.**

I typically tell people that there are about five or six things that we are committed to doing very, very well and anything above that should probably be considered a "bonus." We try to be very clear about this with people from day one because we know that there are people who are looking for a church that can do a great job at meeting every need for every segment of every member of their family. And the bottom line is.....we're just not going to do a very good job at that. Which means, that The Orchard is not going to be the right church for everyone. And that's ok!

2. **I have never seen an unchurched woman get upset that we don't have a women's ministry.**

Selah.

3. **Being simple is costly.....but in a good way.**

We know that being "simple" has cost us. But that's ok. Because in my opinion, the

greater cost is ending up with a church full of consumers who think that church is all about them and meeting all of their needs.

4. **Being simple provides a greater degree of equity - all the way around.** (Volunteer equity, giving equity, asking equity, etc....)

Less truly is more! When people aren't being asked to give to "special projects" twelve times a year or be at the church three or four times a week, it builds equity! And as a result, people end up being more committed to a few things instead of getting burned out and giving their half-arsed leftovers to a million things.

5. **Being simple is a lot easier when you talk openly about it and help people understand why it's important!**

The bottom line is that simplicity MAKES SENSE! And when you take the time to explain and cast vision for WHY it's important, people will respect that! I constantly hear from people how much they appreciate and respect our commitment to simplicity! In fact, there are people who use our "simplicity" as a "selling point" in inviting their unchurched friends to The Orchard. It's amazing!

6. **It's awfully hard to empower people to live missionally when they are expected to be in church four or five times a week.**

So.....instead of starting or joining a church softball league or some other church program, why not pop the bubble and get out in the community and be a part of one that already exists?

Listen....a lot of ministry ideas that people have are actually awesome ideas that could turn into incredible opportunities to reach out and love our community!

I recently had a woman in our church share her desire to start a reading program for disadvantaged children in our local community. She didn't share this with me hoping that the church would assume responsibility by starting it, funding it, promoting it, staffing it. Instead, she shared the idea because she simply needed someone to empower and encourage her to go for it! I love that! And ultimately, that's one of the ways that our churches can truly become irreplaceable in our communities.

Do you have a question about transition/change/leadership/ministry? Shoot 'em to me at scott (AT) orchardvalleyonline (DOT) com.

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Simplicity

TURNING THE WHEEL

Here's a recent question I received via email:

"Most of the times, established churches are set on tracks that move in one direction. No matter how much you turn the steering wheel, you cannot change the direction the church is moving. What things did you do/change to help the organization adapt to moving in a new direction quickly?"

Ok....a few thoughts I'll throw out.

First of all, the only person who can really initiate change in the direction of the organization/church is the senior leader. The staff, the leaders, the volunteers, etc... can turn the wheel all they want, but if the senior leader is not *fully committed* to taking things a new direction.....then forget it!

(And on a side note - if the senior leader is NOT committed to change, DON'T try to bring it! All you'll do is bring chaos and division - and that is WRONG.)

But *even if* the senior leader is committed to change, there is still a very important question that needs to be considered before making the leap. Here it is:

Is our organization structured for change?

In other words, do the current bylaws, structure, governance, etc... *allow us* to make the necessary changes?

The last thing a senior leader (*and the church for that matter*) needs during a tough season of change and transition is dissension among a pastor and the elders, deacons, or key decision makers.

The bottom line is - if you're not structured for change, it doesn't matter how passionate or committed you might be to it - there will *always* be a chance that the wrong people could step in to infiltrate, hijack, or sabotage what God is leading you to do.

Another thing... The number one concern shouldn't necessarily be to get the church members or even the staff 100% unified on the transition. The **MOST IMPORTANT THING** is having a strong, unified leadership team. For us, it was my dad (*the lead pastor at that time*), me (*his executive pastor at the time*), and our elder team. Without *all of us* being united and on the same page, we knew that there was no way we would be able to push through the resistance and pain of turning an 80 year old church an entirely new direction.

Well thankfully, we *were* united. And believe it or not, *today* our elder team is made up of the **SAME** guys who were on it **PRIOR TO** our transition.

Now THAT'S a miracle! :)

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Change

SACRED REMINDER

The **programs** aren't sacred.

The **methods** aren't sacred.

The **ministries** aren't sacred.

The **service times** aren't sacred.

The **communication style** isn't sacred.

The **committees** aren't sacred.

The **bylaws** aren't sacred.

The **denomination** isn't sacred.

The **style of music** isn't sacred.

The **color of carpet** isn't sacred.

The **font that's used on in the bulletin** isn't sacred.

The only thing that's sacred is the mission of Jesus.

Sometimes we just need to be reminded...

Posted by: Scott Hodge, Culture

Michael Hyatt

DON'T LEAVE GOD OUT OF YOUR PLANS

I have written much about planning and goal setting. It would be easy to get the idea that if you just plan well enough or persist long enough you will succeed. Frankly, I don't think this is enough.

I was reminded again this morning of a Bible verse that has become very important to me in recent years:

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (Psalm 127:1)”

Ultimately, we cannot do anything of lasting value unless God blesses our work. The Apostle Paul reminds the believers at Corinth:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6)”

This statement doesn't diminish the work of Paul or of Apollos. If you have read anything about either of their lives, you know that both men possessed incredible faith and courage. They worked hard. They endured setbacks without losing heart. But, at the end of the day, they also knew that it was all in vain unless God “gave the increase.”

No one knows this better than a farmer. The farmer can till and fertilize the soil. He can plant the seed. He can chase off varmints. He can spray for bugs. He can even irrigate his fields. But he can't make it rain. Nor can he restrain the winds, the lightening, or the hail. At the end of the day, whether he acknowledges it or not, he is dependent on God for a successful harvest.

This is true in any endeavor. This has at least three implications for today's success-oriented leaders:

1. **Stay humble.** The Bible says “pride goes before a fall” (see Proverbs 16:18). Just when you think you have it figured out, things change. To remain successful, you have to keep adopting the posture of a beginner. I like the prayer, “Lord, forgive me, a beginner.”
2. **Trust God.** If you don't need God to pull off what you are planning, you are not dreaming big enough. In case you are wondering, no, you are not smart enough. No, you don't have enough experience. and, no, you don't have enough resources. But with God, all things are possible (see Mark 10:27).
3. **Work hard.** Too often, people want to exercise faith in lieu of real work. But these should never be pitted against one another (see James 2:14–18). They go hand in hand. Trust God and then work your buns off.

This sounds pretty simple, right? The problem is in living it out.

Many people do #1 and #3 pretty well. But it is #2 that we can forget if we are not careful. I believe that man was created to be in a relationship with God. This is the real purpose of life. If success serves that purpose, great. But if it causes us to forget God and act as if he doesn't exist, then, in his love for us, he is quick to remind us how finite our own resources are and how much we need him.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

TURNING FAILURE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

In 1991 I, along with my business partner, suffered a financial meltdown. We had built a successful publishing company, but our growth outstripped our working capital. We simply ran out of cash.

For a while our distributor funded us in the form of cash advances on our sales. But eventually, their parent company wanted those advances back. Although we didn't officially go bankrupt, the distributor essentially foreclosed on us and took over all our assets.

This was a difficult time personally. I was confused, frustrated, and very angry. Initially, I blamed the distributor. If they had only sold more, as they had promised us, none of this would have happened, I thought. It's their fault.

But eventually I looked in the mirror and had to acknowledge that I could not move on until I learned from this experience. Though incredibly difficult and humbling, I am now thankful for this period in my life. I learned some critical, life-changing lessons. I am convinced that I would not be where I am today if I had not had this failure.

But not every failure ends so well. Sometimes, people suffer a setback and never recover. I don't think it has to be this way. It is all in how you process it. I am convinced, that if you are going to succeed, you must learn to deal powerfully with failure.

I think there are at least five components to turning failure to your advantage:

1. **Acknowledge the failure.** This is where it begins. To my knowledge, I have never fired anyone for failing per se. Failure is natural if you are striving to deliver big results. The problem comes when you fail and then refuse to acknowledge it.

Several years ago, I had an employee who was floundering. He wasn't delivering the results we expected. That was certainly a problem, but it wasn't the primary problem. The problem was that he refused to acknowledge that he had a problem. He kept defending himself. In doing so, he only convinced us that he didn't "get it." As a result, we had no choice but to let him go.

Once you acknowledge failure, you take away its power. You can then begin to turn it into something positive.

2. **Take full responsibility.** You won't get anywhere as long as you blame others for your failure. As long as the responsibility is external—outside of you—you are a victim. Why? Because you can't control others. You can only control yourself.

But when you take responsibility for the failure and become fully accountable for it, you take back control. Suddenly you realize that you could have done things differently. You open the

door to possibility—and to creating a different outcome in the future. But this can only happen when you acknowledge the failure and own it.

3. Mourn the failure. I am not simply exhorting you to have a positive attitude. Failure stings. It hurts—sometimes deeply. Many times there are very real and serious losses. Often times there is collateral damage. Other people are hurt. Sometimes innocent people.

It's okay to feel sad about these things. Sometimes it takes a while to recover. When I had my financial setback in the early 90s, I mourned for weeks. It couldn't be rushed. In fact, I think the reason I was able to bounce back relatively quickly was because I mourned the loss so deeply. I dealt with it thoroughly and got it behind me.

4. Learn from the experience. Even failure can be redemptive if you learn something from it. It doesn't have to be career-ending. In fact, it can be career-building—if you take the time to wring all the juice out of the lemon.

Honestly, there are just some things you can't learn—or won't learn—without failing. I wish it were different. But pain is a powerful teacher. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th century German philosopher, once said, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” So true.

But it only makes us stronger if we thoroughly process the experience and determine what we could have done differently and will do differently next time around.

As Ilene Muething of Gap International has taught me, it is helpful to ask “What was missing?” rather than “What went wrong?” The former shuts down possibility and often results in blaming. The latter opens up possibility and results in learning.

5. Change your behavior. George Santayana, another philosopher, said, “Those who cannot learn from history are destined to repeat it.” And we really haven't learned anything until it affects our behavior.

If we keep doing the same things that led to the failure, we are destined to get more failure. We have to be willing to change. And it really does start with us. This is the one thing we have control over.

6. Enter whole-heartedly into the next project. You can't allow failure to hold you back from the next venture. If you fall off the horse or a bicycle, you have to get back on—immediately.

If you don't do this, the failure gets magnified in your mind. Wait long enough and you might never get on at all! Instead, you have to put the past behind you and move forward.

Again, failure is inevitable if you are going to tackle significant goals. You have to learn to make it work for you. In doing so, you are planting the seeds of your eventual success.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT KEY TO ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

Several years ago, I wrote out a list of “100 Things I Want to Do Before I Die.” It’s really an amazing, audacious list. Whenever I review it, I am both inspired and stunned by how many of the items I have already accomplished. And yet, there is so much more. The list keeps growing.

I’ll bet you have a list, too. Perhaps you’ve written it down; perhaps not. Regardless, you doubtless want to accomplish things—probably a lot of things. Really important things. Unfortunately, life is short. I have more to accomplish than I could probably do in seven lifetimes.

So how do you actually make significant progress on your goals? How can you get more things done and squeeze as much juice out of life as possible?

One of the most important things you can do, of course, is to write down your goals. I have written about this in *The 90-Day Challenge*, so I won’t repeat myself here. But assuming you have done that, what’s next?

I’m going to tell you the single most important thing you can do to make your dreams become reality. I have done this over and over again in my life. To the extent I have achieved any level of success, I believe this is the secret:

Enlist the help of the best coaches and instructors you can afford.

My assumption is that someone, somewhere has already done what you are attempting to do—and done it well. If you can tap into their experience and learn from it, you can get to where you want to go faster and with fewer missteps along the journey.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN FOUR YEARS OF BLOGGING

I began blogging in April 2004. (I actually began writing articles and posting them on my Web site in 1998, but that was before we used the term “blogging.”) Since that time, I have posted 344 entries. At an average of 800 words per post (which, for me, is conservative), that is 275,200 words—almost four 256-page books.

During this time, I have learned a good deal about blogging. I’m sure I still have a long way to go, but I thought I would summarize what I have learned so far:

1. **Blogging helps me clarify my own thinking.** This is probably the primary benefit of blogging for me. Sometimes I am not sure what I think about a topic until I have written on it. Writing helps me untangle my thoughts.
2. **Blogging has given me first-hand experience with emerging technologies.** I have listened to many CEOs pontificate on this or that technology. But they are not speaking from personal experience—and it shows. When you actually use a technology, your learning and insights go to a higher level.

3. Blogging has provided me with a mechanism for instant feedback. I love the fact that people can comment on what I have written. Whether the comments are good or bad, they help sharpen my thinking. As James Surowiecki said in *The Wisdom of Crowds*, the “many are smarter than the few.”

4. Blogging has given others a “peek behind the curtain.” The publishing process is a mystery to most people. So is the life of most CEOs. Blogging pulls back the curtain and gives people a behind-the-scenes peek. Based on the emails I receive, this is consistently what most readers like about my blog.

5. Blogging has given me a way to engage my employees. This is really the reason I started blogging. I wanted a way to transmit what I was learning to my colleagues. At first, I was going to do this on an internal blog. Then I decided to open it to the public. Regardless, when I am writing, I have my employees in mind first.

6. Blogging has helped me bypass traditional media when necessary. I didn’t really understand this at the outset, but it has proven very helpful. When the media fail to get the story right, I can quickly address it and provide my side of the story. This has been particularly helpful when we make big decisions that cause people to speculate. A blog post can stop a rumor dead in its tracks.

7. Blogging has made our company more visible. I currently have more than 15,000 readers a week. I have received scores of emails from people who had never heard of Thomas Nelson before stumbling onto my blog. Also, my blog has given me a way to “put a face on the company” and, I think, make it more personal.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

CREATING A LIFE PLAN

I have met very few people who have a plan for their lives. Most are passive spectators, watching their lives unfold a day at a time. They may plan their careers, the building of a new home, or even a vacation. But it never occurs to them to plan their life. As a result, many end up discouraged and disillusioned, wondering where they went wrong.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. You can live your life on purpose. It begins by creating a “Life Plan.” This won’t insulate you from life’s many adversities and unexpected twists and turns, but it will help you become an active participant in your life, intentionally shaping your own future.

About six years ago, Daniel Harkavy, CEO and Head Coach of Building Champions, helped me create my very first Life Plan. It was the first time I ever thought systematically about what outcomes I wanted to see in the major categories of my life.

About a year later, Dan Meub, one of Daniel’s associates, began to work with me. He’s now been my executive coach for almost five years. During this time we have reviewed and updated my Life Plan numerous times. I now also review it formally during my Quarterly Review.

This process of creating and regularly reviewing my plan has been transformational. As my family, friends, career, and other interests have grown, this document has kept me on track,

ensuring that I keep everything in balance (more or less). When things get chaotic, it serves as a map, telling me where I am and how to get back on the path to my intended destination.

In this post, I want to share with you how to create such a plan for your life. My comments will get you started, but I would also suggest that you read Chapter 5, “Your Life Plan,” in *Becoming a Coaching Leader* by Daniel Harkavy. The whole book is excellent, but this chapter in particular will describe the process in more detail. You should also note that my Life Plan outline is slightly different than Daniel’s. I have modified it through the years, but the essence remains the same.

My Life Plan is surprisingly short; it is only five pages long. It consists of three sections:

- Outcomes
- Priorities
- Action Plans

Outcomes

In the *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, bestselling author Stephen Covey says that Habit 2 is to “Begin with the End in Mind.” Similarly, Daniel asks, “How do you want to be remembered?”

This is an incredibly powerful question. To answer it, you have to “fast forward” to the end of your life and look back. You are forced to think about the things that matter most.

I selected six key constituents or audiences: God, My Spouse, My Children, My Parents, My Colleagues, and My Friends. (You may have others.) I then simply answered the question, “How do I want them to remember me?”

For example, I said this under the “My Spouse” category:

I want Gail to remember how I loved her, understood her, and helped her accomplish her dreams. I want her to remember specific times that we shared together—times we laughed, times we cried, times we spent discussing things that were important to both of us, and times we just held one another and watched the sunset.

Under the “My Colleagues” category, I said this:

I want my colleagues to remember my servant-leadership, my integrity, my humility, and my commitment to having fun. I want them to remember how much they learned and grew as a result of knowing me. Most of all, I want them to remember how I empowered them to accomplish far more than they ever thought possible.

As you go through this exercise, I would encourage you to visualize your own funeral. I don’t intend this to be morbid, but you must understand that life is short. When you are gone, the only thing left are the memories that you have created.

What will people be saying about you at your funeral? What will think as they reflect on their relationship with you and your impact on their life? The good news is that you can shape these conversations beginning today.

Priorities

Next, you need to identify and prioritize your “life accounts.” As Daniel explains in his book, life is like a collection of bank accounts. Each has a certain value. A few have giant balances, a few others might have respectable balances, and a few might be overdrawn.

For example, your career might be going great, but your health account is overdrawn—you are eating too much junk food and you are getting absolutely no exercise. Or perhaps you’re in great shape physically, but your marriage has gone flat. You and your spouse have become two strangers living in the same house.

In the Priorities section, your goal is simply to answer the question, “What is important to me?” Identify your key accounts and list them in priority order.

By way of example, I have eight accounts:

1. God
2. Self
3. Gail
4. Children
5. Friends
6. Career
7. Finances
8. Ministry

I actually cheated a bit by creating three sub-accounts under my Self account. Under it, I have Health, Growth, and Rest accounts.) Fewer accounts are better, of course, but you also want to make sure you cover everything. If you want to know why I put Self second, read my earlier post in answer to the question, “How do you balance work with the rest of your life?”)

Action Plans

This is where it all comes together. You take each account and think through where you are and where you want to be. I break each account down into five parts:

1. Purpose Statement:

This is where you state what your purpose is with the account. Again, using my Health account as an example, I say this:

My purpose is to maintain and care for the temple God has given me.

The Statement of Purpose for my Friends account is this:

My purpose is to befriend and love a few people well who will in turn love, challenge, and hold me accountable.

2. Envisioned Future:

This is where you describe how the account looks when you have a positive net worth. In a financial account, it is easy to see. If the number is positive it is good; if it is negative (or red), it is bad.

Here, however, you have to do a little more work. You need to describe the account when it is functioning at its best, using the present tense, like it is already a reality.

For example, here's the Envisioned Future for my Health account:

I am lean and strong, possessing vibrant health and extraordinary fitness. My heart is strong and healthy. My arteries are supple and clear of obstructions. My auto-immune system is in excellent condition; I am disease-, infection-, and allergy-resistant. I have more than enough energy to accomplish the tasks I undertake. This is because I control my mental focus, workout six days a week, choose healthy foods, take supplements as needed, and get adequate rest.

3. Supporting Verse:

A Bible verse is optional, of course. It may not be important to you. But it is important to me, because I want my life to be built on transcendent values that have stood the test of time.

The Bible verse I chose for my Children account is this:

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.” (Psalm 127:3-4, NKJV)

The Bible verse for my Career account is this:

“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’” (Matthew 25:20-21, NKJV)

4. Current Reality:

Now it's time to be brutally honest with yourself. Where are you in relationship to your Envisioned Future? Don't pull any punches. The more honest you can be, the more progress you will see.

I list these as a series of bullets and try to write down the first things that come to mind without too much analysis. For example, here's what I wrote a couple of weeks ago in my Health account:

- I feel great. My stamina is great. It's been a long time since I have been sick.
- I feel good about my weight and my overall fitness.
- I am running (or cross-training) four days a week for at least 60 minutes.
- I am not presently doing any strength training. I am concerned this will eventually catch up with me.
- I am eating pretty well, but I could be more consistent in choosing more healthy foods.

I would share more, but, frankly, it's too personal. And that is just how you want it. You want it to be so personal and so honest that if anyone else read it, you would be embarrassed.

Keep in mind that you will not be sharing this document with anyone, except for one or two people you will intentionally enlist to keep you accountable. (In my case, I only share my Life Plan with Dan, my coach, and Gail, my wife.)

5. Specific Commitments:

This is where you specifically commit to certain actions in order to move from your Current Reality to your Enhanced Future. Again, I list these as a series of bullets. Again, using my Health account as an example, here are my specific commitments:

- Run (or cross-train) four days a week.
- Do strength training three days a week.
- Drink four liters of water a day.
- Make healthy food choices, as recommended in The South Beach Diet.
- Get an annual physical and semi-annual dental check-up.

When you initially create your Life Plan, I recommend that you set aside a full day to do so. It's not the writing that takes this long. It's the thinking. In fact, this is the most important aspect of Life Planning: thinking long and hard about your life and where it is going.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

CREATING A SENSE OF URGENCY

Twenty years ago, Robert Wolgemuth and I started a publishing company. We had a dream to publish books that truly made a difference, in people's lives and in the overall culture.

The only problem was that we didn't have much money. Our competitors had seemingly every advantage, including piles of working capital (or so we thought). All we had was a dream and our ability to respond quickly.

As it turned out, we signed numerous authors for less than the competition was willing to pay, simply because we moved fast and got the deals done. Many authors were willing to give up some advance money, believing that our hustle in signing them would translate into similar hustle in selling their books. More often than not, they were right.

Thus, responsiveness became our competitive advantage. We could never pay more than our competition and usually offered much less. But we could out-maneuver and out-flank almost all of them. We were lean and mean. As a result, we grew rapidly.

Unfortunately, in the 20-plus years since we began that venture, I have learned that there seems to be an inverse relationship between a company's size and the sense of urgency embedded in the culture.

More often than not, small companies have a sense of urgency. Why? Because their very survival is at stake. If they don't move quickly, they get squashed by larger, more established competitors.

On the other hand, it is rare to find large companies that truly have a sense of urgency. Their circumstances rarely demand it. They can continue with business-as-usual and do pretty well. Nothing has to be done today or even this week. Nothing is really at stake—or so they think. Often, by the time they wake up, it's too late.

But in today's environment, no one can afford to drift along with the status quo. Growth is not a foregone conclusion. Even survival cannot be taken for granted.

The companies that thrive in today's economy will be those that can shift their cultures from the slower pace of business-as-usual to urgency. Because of this, I have made "Urgency" our annual theme for Thomas Nelson. I want this attribute to permeate every aspect of our culture. I know we have a long way to go.

But first, we have to understand it. To create a sense of urgency, we must do four things well:

Urgency Diagram

1. **Activate.** Like many larger organizations, we do lots of analysis. Obviously, this can be helpful. No one wants to go into battle without a carefully thought-through battle plan. But as everyone knows, analysis can easily lead to “analysis for analysis sake.” When this happens, the organization becomes paralyzed.

Often the real issue is courage. The point of absolute certainty never comes. It is foolish to assume that it does. Instead, urgency requires that we activate quickly: Make a decision. Get off the dime. Do something!

As the old adage goes, “it is easier to steer a moving object.” If you’ve made the wrong decision, you can adjust. But if you wait too long, you miss the opportunity entirely.

More than ever, people want fast decisions. Speed can be a competitive advantage. But this requires leaders who are willing to activate and get themselves, their teams, and their projects into motion.

2. **Accelerate.** Urgency requires more than activation. Yes, you have to start quickly, but you also have to keep things moving. Getting a project green-lighted is only the beginning.

There are hundreds of impersonal forces (and some personal) that will conspire to slow you down—paperwork, approvals, processes, committees, budgets, etc. Some of these things are necessary—but not as many as you think or the organization would like you to believe.

It is the nature of bureaucracies to become self-serving. When they do, the process becomes an end in itself. As a leader, you have to fight this. You have to identify obstacles and remove them. You must keep the pedal to the metal and keep things moving. If you don’t, inertia will take over and your project will die.

3. **Achieve.** Cultivating a sense of urgency is all about producing results. All the stuff that it takes to produce results—paperwork, approvals, processes, committees, and budgets—are not an end in themselves. They are only the means. If you do all this and don’t accomplish your goals, you have lost.

Too often people think that the objective is to complete their task list. If they do so, they think they have actually accomplished something. This is not necessarily the case. Tasks are a necessary but insufficient condition of achievement.

My goal at Thomas Nelson is to create a culture that is outcome-focused rather than task-focused. I don’t care how we produce the results (within the appropriate ethical boundaries), so long as we produce them. We need to stay focused on the what and give our people room to decide the how.

4. **Assess.** Urgency does not rule out assessment. In fact, it demands it. If we are going to get faster at producing results, we have to assess what is working and what is not. We must then eliminate the waste.

Everything should be questioned in light of whether or not it impedes or facilitates the outcome. Does a meeting enable us to move more quickly? If so, great. Call a meeting. But so often we call meetings as a way to procrastinate the decision. Then a single meeting begets more meetings. Before you know it, you’ve built a slow, lumbering bureaucracy.

The only antidote to this is to eliminate everything that does not facilitate the desired outcome. Our job as leaders—as opposed to bureaucrats—is to remove the obstacles and give our people the best chance of achieving their goals and ours.

What specifically can you do to create more urgency? Try these:

- Walk faster—show some hustle.
- Respond faster to emails and voice mails. Don't allow yourself to become someone else's excuse for not getting their work done.
- Get to the point quickly and insist that others do the same.
- Keep meetings short and on-point. Always insist on an agenda.
- Eliminate every piece of paperwork that doesn't facilitate a specific outcome. My motto: "When in doubt, throw it out."
- Be quick to change tactics. If something is not moving you toward your desired outcome, do something else.
- Do it now!

It's easy to see a lack of urgency in others, but can you see it in yourself? What else can you do, beginning now, to create a sense of urgency in yourself, your department, and with your projects?

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

LEADING POWERFUL CONVERSATIONS

The old model of leadership is all about having the answers. According to the theory, you get to the top by being able to answer the tough questions and come up with compelling answers—usually on your feet.

But I am noticing that a new model of leadership is taking root in many organizations, including our own here at Thomas Nelson. In this model, the leader's primary role is to initiate conversations that bring out the best thinking of the tribe and direct those conversations toward a positive outcome.

In our company, we pull our extended leadership team together once a quarter, usually before the All Employee Meeting. I prepare specific content for those meetings. For example, I report on our financial performance and then I try to put those results in context. I then usually talk about where we are going as a company.

However, for the past several quarters, I have also tried to lead meaningful conversations around specific topics. This, I think, has had several positive benefits:

- It has given people an opportunity to speak their mind and thus play a role in shaping the future.
- It has brought forth the group's best thinking—with sometimes surprising results.

- It has revealed where we have confusion or misunderstanding and given us an opportunity to provide clarity.
- It has given us a chance to create alignment and move forward as a single, more unified team.

As a practical matter, prior to the meeting I select the topic. For example, last week, I wanted to discuss “corporate strategy.” So I created a series of questions about this topic. I thought it would be interesting to begin with this one, “Based on what you know or have experienced at Thomas Nelson, how would you describe our corporate strategy?”

We had about 60 people sitting at eight round tables. I asked people to discuss the question at their table with their small group for 10 minutes. Then I opened the question up to the whole group, and we discussed it for another 10 minutes. The comments were fascinating.

I then made a brief presentation about our corporate strategy, using a model based on Jim Collin’s Hedgehog Concept. I then asked a series of questions based on this.

Sometimes I had the team work on their own for several minutes, sometimes at their tables with their small groups, and sometimes we started directly with the larger group. Each time I would display one or two questions on my slides to guide the conversation.

I tried hard to create an environment that was “safe for dissent,” where people could “speak the unspeakable.” (I think this is especially important if we are to experience true breakthroughs in our company.) When people said something controversial or contrary to the status quo, I affirmed them in real time and attempted to fold their comments into the larger conversation.

As you could imagine, initially people were reticent. They were afraid that if they truly said what they were thinking, they would get into trouble. But gradually, over several quarters, that has largely faded. No one has been fired, or even reprimanded, for speaking their mind. In fact, I find that it has created a much more energetic discussion. More importantly, it actually accelerates the rate of change. The sooner we get issues on the table, the sooner we can address them and find real solutions.

As the leader, I think the key has been to crafting the questions carefully before the meeting. But at the same time, I have had to remain flexible. I have had to sometimes abandon questions or create new ones on the fly as the conversation has unfolded.

Leading powerful conversations is a new way of leading—at least for me. Sometimes it feels a little scary because it is largely unscripted. But I am convinced that all of us are smarter than some of us, and that this is the best way to tap into the wisdom of the team.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

SILVER BULLET THINKING

In the Western literary tradition, the silver bullet was the only weapon that could destroy certain types of monsters. As a result, it became a metaphor for a singular solution that solves a giant problem.

Many touted the Financial Stability Bill (a.k.a. the \$700 billion bailout package) as a silver bullet for the economy. “If Congress will just pass this legislation,” the argument went, “everything will return to normal.” Not so much.

Unfortunately, in times of crisis, it’s not just the government that resorts to the thinking represented by this metaphor. Leaders in business and elsewhere are also guilty. Whenever we embark on a quest for a singular solution to our current woes, we are guilty of “silver bullet thinking.”

Examples might include:

- Trying to develop a killer product that will crush the competition;
- Employing a new technology that will provide a strategic advantage;
- Buying or merging with a competitor, supplier, or even a customer;
- Slashing expenses to the bone; or—the usual favorite—
- Reorganizing the company.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not against creating great products, employing new technologies, acquiring companies, and all the rest. What I am opposed to is the simplistic notion that one of these items can be the “silver bullet” that fixes all your problems.

In my experience, success is rarely the result of one singular action or break-through. Instead, it is the result of hundreds, if not thousands, of incremental improvements over time. There’s no quick fix.

To succeed in the current environment, I think four things are required.

1. **Be clear about your vision.** We can’t drag the past into the present. What has happened has happened. It’s over. We can learn from our mistakes, but we have to get crystal clear on the future we want to create and let that inform the present. This is what separates the real leaders from the pretenders in times of crisis. We need to be moving toward something that is compelling, not away from something that is frightening.

2. **Reaffirm your strategy.** In Jim Collins book, *Good to Great*, he compares the hedgehog to the fox (pp. 90f). The hedgehog does one thing well. The fox, on the other hand, jumps from strategy to strategy. In the end, the hedgehog wins. This is the time for each of us as leaders to focus on our core strategy—or to use Collin’s term, “Our Hedgehog Concept.” What is the one thing that we can be the best in the world at? What will drive our business forward and get us from here to where we want to be?

3. **Stay relentlessly focused on your core strategy and competencies.** This takes courage and discipline. When things are tough, the temptation is to try too many new things in an effort to find the silver bullet. But usually these are a waste of time and resources. They all have a learning curve. There are no easy solutions. It is best to stay focused and do the hard work of executing your core strategy. You should say “no” to everything else.

4. **Keep believing in the future.** This is a mark of great leaders. It is what Collins calls “The Stockdale Paradox” (pp. 65f). Great leaders acknowledge the current realities and don’t pull any punches. But at the same time, they have an unwavering belief that they will ultimately prevail.

As tempting as it may be to think something or someone will be the answer to all your problems, I think it is more prudent to work diligently on the fundamentals. Keep focusing on execution. One decision—one action—at a time. In the end, this will get us through—and enable us to succeed.

Posted by: Michael Hyatt

Gary Lamb:

EARLY ADAPTERS

There is hardly a day that goes by that we don't receive a phone call or e-mail from another church who is wanting to learn from something we are doing. I am honored that they take the time to call, that they think we are doing something they can learn from, and that they like what we are doing. However, I always laugh they talk about how innovative we are. We are a lot of things, innovative isn't one of them. I refer to us as early adapters.

We basically take what the innovative churches are doing and we very quickly adapt what they are doing to fit us.

For example, we are doing a Easter Egg Drop this year. We are excited about it, feel like it fits our vibe as a church, and will be a great thing for our community. Since I put on this blog that we are doing it, we have had a church every day call us asking for details about how to do it.

Here's the deal: We've never done it. We are thrilled to help out with what we have learned, but we have never done it. We are not that innovative, but we are GREAT early adapters.

We have a close relationship with a church called [Elevation Church](#) in North Carolina. We are honored to be part of their [Ground Level Network](#) and we consider them mentors. They are a innovative church. They did the Easter Egg Drop two years ago and we simply are adapting that to fit us.

We get calls daily about meeting in a movie theater. I'm cocky enough to say we do it as good as anyone and we LOVE helping churches that meet in movie theaters. But, we were simply early adapters in that. We took what innovative churches were already doing (meeting in a movie theater) and adapted it to fit us.

There are very very few innovative churches in America. There are more early adapters but there isn't actually many of them either. Most guys won't adapt what they see from other churches for a good 5-6 years. For example there are several guys I know that would like to do the egg drop. They heard Elevation did it two years ago, they are hearing about us and other churches doing it this year, but they will still wait another 2 years to try it. By that time, it will be old news.

Believe it or not, I think we have some things we have planned in regards to multi-site in small towns that I think we might be innovative in, but I have learned we function a lot better as early adapters.

I am not a systems guy so being innovative is easy for me. Pulling off innovative is not. By being early adapters we get to play to our strengths and actually do things at time better than the innovators. The great thing about being an early adapter is you get to learn from the wins and loses of the innovators. So when it comes time to do it, you have a better chance of success with a lot less heartache.

So keep calling us and we'll keep sharing what we know, but just remember we are learning from the same people you are!

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Innovation

DISCIPLINE: I SUCK AT IT!

As our church continues to grow and as I have taken some things back on my plate that NEEDED to be back on my plate, I am being forced at being more disciplined. I have to admit it is a struggle. But, I am seeing the benefits of it in major ways.

I am focusing on three major areas of my life in regards to discipline:

Physical Discipline - I have let myself go and it is 100% a discipline issue. I am very focused right now on my physical health. I am two weeks into working out and eating right and I am already seeing a difference and I am already feeling better. I have a long way to go but without discipline in this area I won't make it.

Spiritual Discipline - The last two weeks I have been up at 5 every morning. I have started my day in prayer and in the Bible. Again, this has been huge and I am already seeing the benefits.

Time Discipline - THIS ONE IS HUGE FOR ME! My job is to lead this church and I all too often lead in the spur of the moment due to my lack of discipline in the area of time management. I am being very intentional about my time lately. I am planning my day the day before, I am sticking to my schedule, I am going into meetings prepared, and I am letting our guys lead like never before while also keeping them accountable to their actions like never before.

Right now none of these three areas come naturally to me, but they are so important for me to be the husband, father, pastor, leader, and believer that God wants me to be.

Discipline sucks, but it is life changing!

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Discipline

WHAT'S YOUR MESSAGE?

I have spent A LOT of time listening to preaching over the last month. I love listening to preachers and I think podcasts are the greatest invention ever! As I have been listening to different preachers, I have noticed an interesting thing about great preachers. They ALL have one message. What I mean is almost every preacher who I have listened to has ONE theme that runs through their preaching no matter what the subject they are teaching on. It is the one thing that over everything else gets their fire going.

For example:

It doesn't matter what Ed Young Jr. is teaching, he is going to get it back to creativity

[Perry Noble's](#) message throughout his messages is Christians need to be dangerous and not settle for Christianity as it is

TD Jakes always has a message of encouragement. No matter what he is teaching, the underlying theme is "you can make it."

When I listen to [Steven Furtick](#) I always hear that God is BIG and wants to do BIG things.

Mark Driscoll could be preaching on ANYTHING and it goes back to the gospel and the bible

I don't think this is an intentional thing, I just think it is an outflow of their passion and their message God has put them on the earth to convey. Listen to your favorite preacher and you will begin to see over and over that their message, their passion will come out in one form or another. I believe it is born in them from a life experience.

I think for me, my message is GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE. It doesn't matter what I preach about, I am going to get it around to the fact that God has a purpose and plan for your life. Almost every message I preach I talk about the fact that God can use anybody. I love to talk about the fact that God doesn't care about your past, He doesn't care about education, He just cares about you being willing to be used and discover your purpose.

I never thought about the fact that this was my message until everyone started pointing it to me. If you go back and listen to my old messages, I talk about the fact that God can use you non-stop. But if you knew my past, it makes sense. I am a perfect example of God can use anyone. I have never been the smartest, the most athletic, or best looking (well, maybe that one isn't true.). I was the LAST person you thought would ever be a preacher, a leader, much less a pastor of a great church, but I am proof that God can use anyone. God is in the business of taking that which seems unusable and doing great things through it.

Revolution Church is a church that is full of people who no one will mistake as superstars. Yet, God has used the people of Revolution to do great things. Why? Because God can use anyone. I think that is awesome.

I have had critics talk about the fact that I am a broken record in my preaching. It use to bug me, but I just realize that it is my message, it is my passion, and I think I'll keep the repeat button turned to the "on" position.

Look back over your teaching, what is your message? We all have one whether we realize it or not.

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Preaching/Teaching

PRACTICING WHAT I PREACH

I am a broken record when it comes to teaching on the importance of married couples taking time away together WITHOUT the kids! Thank God for the awesome gift He gives us in children, but you are doing your children a favor when you leave them for a few days and go off and enjoy your spouse. I think couples should try to go away at least twice a year for a few days. You are teaching your children that your marriage comes ahead of them, you are showing them the love you have for your spouse, and you are teaching them what a healthy marriage looks like.

Trust me, I will be a better husband when I get back, a better parent when I get back, and even a better pastor when I get back because I took time and rested and recharged.

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Marriage

BEING STRETCHED

Change sucks. It is painful. It isn't fun. But I refuse to let the discomfort of change keep us from fulfilling the mission God has given us. One of the the areas we are trying to change our culture is through asking questions. We are asking the WHY behind everything we do. We are asking what do we want to accomplish through EVERYTHING we do. We are asking where do we want to take people once they walk through our doors. We are asking what do we do with a person once they accept Christ. We are asking questions, challenging each other, and talking about what has to happen to change a city. They are tough conversations that anger me, embarrass me, and leave me frustrated with how I have led Revolution Church. Yet, they are questions that HAVE to be asked. They are questions that must be asked. They are questions we should have been asking all along.

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Asking Questions

CHANGE OR DIE!

When I gave my life to Christ, I was radically CHANGED. I quit smoking dope, quit drinking TOTALLY for about 10 years, gave up getting drunk forever, and believe it or not I even cleaned up my mouth (you think it's bad now, you should have seen me then).

I turned my life over to Christ in a great church. It had a great preacher, some great leaders, a BRAND new building with a 900-seat auditorium, and was located in the fastest growing county in America at the time. On top of that the church was full of great young guys who were called to full-ministry (There were probably 15 guys around there that should be in full-time ministry). The church was a KNOWN church in the circles it ran in and truly was a great place. That was 12 years ago. Today that church doesn't exist. The pastor is gone, a Russian congregation bought the building, and the few people who remained are meeting in a warehouse under a new name in a totally different community.

The problem is this church never changed and when you don't change you die.

The sad thing is these people that I know are sharp guys. They are hard workers, some of them are really good preachers, they have a passion for lost people, and deep inside they have a burning desire to do great things for the Kingdom of God. Yet, they won't make the changes they KNOW deep inside they must make.

[Perry Noble](#) told me one time something that has rocked my world lately. He said, "Every church is one major change from doubling in size." The problem is change is hard, especially when it is our ideas and thoughts that need to change.

The thing about not changing is we hinder the Gospel from being advanced. That is exactly what happened in Acts 6. The church had grown in size and the way things had been operating need to change. Widows were being neglected, but that isn't what this portion of Scripture is about. It is about the fact that changes were needed in the way the church was running. As soon as they made the changes, I love what the Bible says in Acts 6:7.

Acts 6:7 (NIV) So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

After they were willing to change, the Gospel spread and the number of disciples increased. The church grew and got healthier because they leaders were willing to make the necessary changes.

We are in a mode of change right now at Revolution. We are evaluating everything and making the changes we think have the ability to stop us from reaching people for Christ.

I've thought alot about change lately and why churches won't change. This week I am going to share some thoughts on this subject if for no other reason then to preach to myself.

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Change

CHANGE ISN'T COMPROMISE

I think one of the reasons pastors are so unwilling to change is because they equate change with compromise. They feel if they change the style of music, start using an update translation of the Bible (don't get started on this one), start making their messages relevant to those in their community, or any number of other crazy man made rule the church in implemented that they are compromising the Gospel.

The problem with that line of thinking is the Gospel has NOTHING to do with the type of music we play, the type of clothes you wear, what version of the Bible you use, etc.

I would venture to say when you DON'T change you are compromising the Gospel. Because your church is so out of touch, so stuck in its ways, so driven by tradition that the Gospel doesn't advance. That is true compromise.

Christ didn't die for the King James Bible

Christ didn't die over drums on stage

Christ didn't die for Sunday night church services

Christ didn't die for Sunday School

Christ didn't die for man-made dress standards

So why do churches keep dying over them?

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Change

PEER PRESSURE DOESN'T END IN HIGH SCHOOL

When I was in High School I always was amused at the amount of peer pressure there was to look a certain way, hang out with certain people, and be like everyone else. When I left High School I thought I left that...until I got in ministry. There is more pressure in ministry then I've seen in most places. Depending on which "tribe" you run with there are unwritten rules on the way you will do church, the way you will dress, the beliefs you will have, and the traditions you will hold to.

Change is hard! It will cause you to lose friends, people, mentors, and it will cause you to be public enemy number 1. That's ok. Every day when I get emails and messages from people who have had their lives radically transformed, I am reminded just how ok it is. I never saw that before, today I see it every day.

Posted by: Gary Lamb, Change

Brad Lomenick

LOBBY FOR YOUR HOBBY

Over the next three weeks we'll be rolling out some questions and ideas that will hopefully help in taking inventory of the past year- looking back over the past 12 months to analyze, reflect and plan for 2009.

The first question: How much have your hobbies been part of your normal life routine over the past year? Hobbies and life passions are a huge part of helping us stay in balance as well as staying healthy and emotionally energized. Most of us don't have the luxury of our full-time vocation and our hobbies completely overlapping. If that is you, you are blessed!

For me, my hobbies have not been exercised this past year as much as I would like. The four biggies- golf, snow skiing, hunting, and music/guitar have been unfortunately placed in the corner over the last 12 months. It's time to get them back out and rediscover why I love these four things- they give me energy and margin. They help in creating the rhythm of rest and season. And they allow for time with friends and family. In fact, I am duck hunting with some of the team from Healing Place Church in a couple of weeks down in Baton Rouge. Quack, quack.

Take inventory for yourself. Did you put your hobbies in the corner this past year?

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Life (Family, Marriage)

LEADER(LESS) LEADERS

Are you one of these? Unfortunately, this is more common than you would think. They're all around us- mid managers, entrepreneurs, start-up founders, senior executives- up and coming leaders, seasoned leaders, young and old. It doesn't matter where- you'll find Leaders who have no leader to follow.

Maybe you've find yourself in an organization where your boss or board or elders or manager is non-existent. Not willing to make decisions and not willing to effectively lead you. What to do? Well, a couple of thoughts.

First- LEAD up. Find ways to influence not just your peers and those who work for you, but also influence this person above you. Positionally they are your superior, but that doesn't mean you can't lead them.

Second, don't wait on someone else to create vision, direction and strategy for the team or organization. Create your own and move forward. This is paramount. It doesn't lessen your loyalty or commitment to your boss, it only enhances it. Remember, without vision, your people and your team will struggle (perish)

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Miscellaneous

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Part two in the year end review series. Here are some great questions to ask as you wrap up the year.

1. What are the 2-3 themes that personally defined 2008?
2. What people, books, accomplishments, or special moments created highlights in 2008?
3. Give yourself a grade in the following areas of focus: vocationally, spiritually, family, relationally, emotionally, financially, physically, recreationally
4. What am I working on that is BIG?
5. As I move into 2009, is a majority of my energy being spent on things that drain me or things that energize me?
6. How am I preparing for 20 years from now?

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Asking questions

DON'T BE AVERAGE

Are you just being average? In your job? In your family? Your friendships? Your community? Your Church?

Are you typical? common? ordinary? all right? common? decent? moderate? All common synonyms of average. Yuck.

Don't be that person who just does enough to get by and keep your job for one more day. Don't be that person who everyone says, "yeah, it was an ok presentation, nothing out of the ordinary." Don't be that person who is the last option when it comes to helping out or volunteering because you have a reputation for just showing up but not helping out. Don't be that person who your boss or employer has to painstakingly consider every quarter whether to have a sit down conversation about your performance.... "I like you Bob, but your performance and contribution to the team is just average." Don't be that.

There are way too many average people. Right now, get up, straighten up, stand up, and do something extraordinary. Something outstanding. Make today remarkable.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Expectations

ARE YOU CREATING SIDEWAYS ENERGY?

Are you busy but not intentional? Do you feel like you are just spinning your wheels and not getting any traction? Could be you are dealing with way too much "**sideways energy.**"

There is good energy and bad energy- and bad energy usually shows up as sideways... not because it is necessarily bad, but because it is usually a distraction.

Bad energy would be not showing up to work. Sideways energy is showing up but spending two hours talking about what you should have done an hour and a half ago.

Bad energy would be gossiping. Sideways energy is procrastinating.

Bad energy is no new ideas. Sideways energy is the same meeting eight times in a row regarding the same idea that still has yet to be implemented.

Bad energy is having three sales to close and not calling them back because you are lazy. Sideways energy is an organizational or personal system that takes 4 weeks to move a sale through the process because there is too much bureaucracy.

Paper shuffling is sideways energy. Dealing with the same problem multiple times is sideways energy. Too many cc'ed emails is sideways energy. Micromanaging is sideways energy. Lack of trust is sideways energy.

And many times, the reason sideways energy becomes such a regular happening is because there is pressure coming from all sides with an organization- the very top, your boss, and those who you are leading. And the *side* seems to be the only place to find some relief and maybe focus on *something*, even if it is not the right thing to be focused on at the time.

And growth can cause pressure that facilitates MORE sideways energy. Ultimately, this all leads to a lack of focus, which causes pressure because you choose not to deal with reality and instead want to focus on things that ultimately don't matter.

How to combat sideways energy? First, realize it exists and will paralyze an organization. Second, identify it and deal with it. Third, measure your productivity and create a system that will help you determine how much sideways energy you are creating, both for yourself as well as for your team. And finally, be clear on your goals and what the right kind of energy looks like for your team- if you model the right kind of energy, your team will follow in the same direction.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Focus

WHY MOST GOOD COACHES ARE GREAT LEADERS

My dad coached high school football in **Bristow, Oklahoma** for almost 30 years. They won three state championships, played in the state championship game another three times, won district titles basically every year, and in the 1980's were the winningest high school program in the state. Growing up in Bristow meant high school football.

I asked him the other day what makes a good coach. Here were his responses:

1. First and foremost, they have to be **great leaders**. Players and other coaches want to follow them. They will make the tough decisions, and also have no problem surrounding themselves with other coaches who are more talented than they are.
2. Ability to **motivate**- they have enthusiasm, and are able to pull the best out of kids. They also create great camaraderie among their staff.
3. Create a **great program**- great coaches carry with them a certain aura; they are incredibly competent, but also have the "IT" factor. People want to be around them. Kids want to do their

best for them, parents want their kids playing for them, the school embraces them, and the community loves them. They create a **winning tradition** and other schools don't like to play them.

4. **Competent**- they know X's and O's. They are highly organized, lead well, and skilled at their profession.

5. **Teacher at their core**- there really is a connection between a great coach and great teacher. Coaches love to teach- the best coaches can take a player and raise their level of skill and ability because they not only can motivate them, but also can instruct them on how to be better.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Modeling

WHO IS THEY?

I am walking through the airport 2 days ago, and overhear a conversation among several employees griping about something. Their conversation was centered around "I can't believe **THEY** decided to make that decision.... **they** are asking us to show up early but **they** don't understand." Who is **they**?

You hear it all the time.... "they" don't want me to succeed. "they're" the reason the project is failing. It would have worked if "they" wouldn't have messed things up. It wasn't my fault- "they" were supposed to take care of that.

As leaders, we need to constantly be aware that the idea of "**we**" and "**me**" instead of "they" should be our compass. Passing the buck to an unknown entity like "they" just causes confusion and frustration. It's easy to put all the blame on "them" because "they" don't have a name or face or personal connection. The onus is on US, WE and ME, not THEM or THEY, whoever those folks might be....

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Staff

DON'T GET STAGNANT

Recently spent some time with **Pete Richardson**, who is a good friend and consults with tons of ministries, not for profits, and businesses. Pete brought up a great analogy between growing as a spiritual leader and fly fishing, ultimately the **inflow and outflow of life**. For those who love to fly fish, you know that stagnant water is bad. The best water and ultimately the best fishing is in areas where water is moving and stays pure and filtered- areas that have a current and water flow. Areas of a river that don't have great **inflow** and **outflow** tend to get stagnant, dirty, polluted and impure.

Similar to our life as a follower of Christ and spiritual leader. How are you creating rhythms in your own personal development, and creating a great inflow and outflow system that keeps you fresh and protects against becoming stagnant? All of us are aware how quickly we can become

stagnant- in personal development, in Scriptural study and engagement, in community, in prayer and spiritual disciplines, and many other areas of life. It is important that we are constantly purging the things that are impure, and flowing in to our lives new things that are fresh, clean, and will purify.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Spiritual Health

TAG IT

What's your tagline? When people ask, "do you know so and so?" and someone says about you, "yeah, he/she is the _____?" What is the fill in the blank?

I guess the first question is "do you have a tagline?" I have one- "**networker.**" That defines what I love to do, and hopefully adds value to those around me. But it is the tag that most people use who know me well, as well as those who are simply acquaintances.

Let me give a few other examples, strictly based on my opinion:

[John Maxwell](#)- leadership; 21 Laws

[Don Miller](#)- blue like jazz

[Tony Morgan](#)- strategic blogger

[Darlene Zschech](#)- Hillsong worship

[Lanny Donoho](#)- funny emcee

[Beth Moore](#)- women's bible studies

[Rick Warren](#)- Purpose Driven

Jeff Shinabarger- ideas

[Mark Batterson](#)- DC coffee shop

Marcus Buckingham- strengths

You may argue with some of the "tags" I've given to these folks, but the point is, whether you like it or not, you are being tagged. I believe "branding" and "tagging" are different. Branding is more about identity and emotion, where tagging is more about what I do. Sometimes they overlap, but most of the time they are closely associated but not necessarily the same. A tag is the subtitle of your book, if you were writing a biography. A tag is what comes to mind first when people think of you, that split second chance for someone to properly pull your file from their short or long term memory. A tag is no more than 10 words- a quick and concise snapshot of what someone **sees** you doing.

So are you creating your own tag, or is someone else creating it for you?

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Focus

TURNING IDEAS INTO REALITY

We get asked all the time about how we come up with new and fresh ideas for Catalyst. It's a pretty simple process that has proven to be effective. This can be useful in any organization or scenario, whether you are launching ideas, or just looking to make sound decisions. Here you go:

1. **Create**- we spend a ton of time just brainstorming, which is obviously a very important part of the process. The more ideas on the board, the more opportunities for one of those to make it through the process. For example, we have probably 300-350 programming ideas every year for our October conference. And creative meetings are "yes and" meetings, not "but or". Important!
2. **Criticize** - every idea, in order to stay in the process, has to be critiqued and criticized significantly. This is key in order to make sure you don't spend tons of time chasing too many rabbits and driving everyone crazy with lots of good ideas but nothing ever happening. And make sure everyone doesn't take things personal- criticizing an idea is much different than criticizing the person who came up with the idea. It's not personal.
3. **Optimize**- anything that makes it pass the criticize phase has to be built on. In some ways, this is a second and third wave of innovation. Most of the time the original idea will turn into something that looks totally different. This is really the essence of putting icing on the cake.
4. **Validate**- every idea has to be validated- financially, operationally, personnel wise, and direction/vision related. Lots of big ideas appropriately get held up in this phase, either to be released later or put on the shelf for good. Conversely, lots of bad ideas make it through this phase because of bad systems and/or leaders who aren't willing to say no.
5. **Execute**- it all comes down to getting things done. Hard work is time consuming and tiring. We take tremendous pride in execution on ideas. If it has gone through the entire process and made it to this point, the idea deserves the attention and focus to make sure it happens. And if every level of the Idea process grid was correctly put in motion, the idea is probably going to be good!

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Discipline

A GREAT QUOTE

"The number one battle for a Leader is overcoming one's selfishness

- Jim Blanchard, former CEO of Synovus

Unfortunately, selfishness comes very naturally to all of us.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Selflessness

RECALCULATING OUR LEADERSHIP GPS

We had David Salyers at our office last week from Chick-fil-A. David is the VP of Marketing for the chicken sandwich giant, and a frequent speaker and consultant on leadership. He had some great points during his talk to our staff, specifically as it relates to the idea of **Recalculating our leadership GPS**.

- We tend to think that Leadership is mainly about leading those who are subordinates or work FOR us.
- However, 360 degree leadership is first and foremost about leading ourselves.
- 50% of our energy should go towards leading ourselves. 20% should go towards leading across (peers), 20% towards leading up, and only 10% towards leading down (those who work for us directly).
- With this scenario, 90% of leadership is for everybody, regardless of whether you have a team you manage or not. We tend to think that the only kind of leadership is when we have a team we are managing, but that is not accurate.
- Most of us view leading up as “brown nosing.” Instead we need to recalibrate- leading up is not “sucking up.” Sucking up is selfish, but truly leading up is serving.
- A self serving leader is one who is usually money motivated, while a servant leader is one who is mission motivated.
- Significance is about impact we have ON others. Success is about comparing ourselves TO others. And comparison is the thief of joy.
- We cross the line of selfless to selfish as leaders when what we receive goes from appreciation to expectation.

(Many of his thoughts on 360 Leadership he gave credit to [Bill Hybels](#), and a talk that Bill gave at [Leadership Summit](#) several years ago).

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Focus

WHAT MAGAZINES ARE YOU READING?

Reading magazines is a great way to stay up to date on culture, trends, news, and fresh ideas. Here are five (actually six) that I recommend you subscribe to:

1. [Fast Company](#)- what I believe is the best combination of business and innovation content available. Always great articles and lots of profiles on young business leaders.
2. [Paste](#)- if you are a music fan, definitely make sure you are subscribed. Paste is headquartered here in Atlanta, and run by friends Josh Jackson and Nick Purdy.
3. [Wired](#)- technology driven magazine. Sometimes a bit too futurist, but always great articles and ideas that are fresh.

4. [GOOD](#)- a relatively new magazine that donates all revenue from subscriptions to several different charitable organizations of your choice. Really good design, and each issue focuses on areas of “social good” in culture, and also innovative trends in grassroots networking and marketing.

5. [Risen](#) and [Relevant](#) - both considered Christian magazines, even though both take a unique approach in terms of looking at culture and faith. Risen is more interview driven around celebrities, and Relevant focuses primarily on issues for twenty somethings.

What magazines do you recommend that aren't on this list?

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Learning

WHO IS YOUR STEVE WILLIAMS

Saw a great story on ESPN this evening on the [E:60](#) documentary style show that features several notable reporters who go behind the scenes with famous (and sometimes not so famous) folks. One of the profiles this evening was on [Steve Williams](#), the most famous caddie in all of professional golf. Steve caddies for Tiger Woods, and has been on the bag with Tiger for 12 majors, and over 50 PGA tour titles in 9 years. Pretty impressive record. Interestingly, they work well together, but also are really good friends away from the office (or the course in this case). Steve is a no-frills, shoot straight kind of guy, which I am sure helps in working with and trying to give direction and assistance to the most famous sports figure in the world. He keeps Tiger grounded.

I think we each need a Steve Williams in our life, a caddie to tell us when to back off a shot, someone to tell us to hit the 7 iron instead of the 6 iron, to trust it, and that you are the best in the world and have made this 8 foot putt before, so no problem, just sink it.

Posted by: Brad Lomenick, Learning

Shawn Lovejoy

THE SECURE LEADER...

Some of you know that I had a successful real estate career going before God miraculously called me into vocational ministry. I was the top selling agent in the county the year I quit! Even after entering the ministry, God enabled me to see a lot of spiritual fruit quickly. I was able to see a lot of changed lives and experienced a lot of growth in the ministries that I led over the first several years of my ministry. But then I planted a church!

I had never doubted myself and my abilities more than the first few year of planting Mountain Lake Church. During the first several years of the church plant, I questioned EVERYTHING about myself, my abilities, and my calling. That's why I believe that the calling to plant a church requires an AMAZING amount of EMOTIONAL FORTITUDE and SECURITY as a leader! It's so important during uncertain times, that we become certain about who we are, who God as uniquely called us to be, and what God wants to do UNIQUELY through us!

As a pastor, I must derive my sense of self worth, security, and sufficiency from God! I must have confidence, not in myself, but in what God can do THROUGH me! I can totally relate to the apostle Paul: "But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies so everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own." 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NLT).

There is a need to be extremely SECURE as a leader in my church. Doubt and insecurity can be the undoing of spiritual leaders! It's still a weekly battle for me, but I am winning the battle in the area of my security as a leader. I believe I can do anything if that is what God wants me to do! I CAN lead this church wherever God wants to take it, because it is HIM through ME that will take us there! I believe today's churches need SECURE leaders to lead it where God wants to take it. Are you willing to be a secure leader? Are you willing to believe in the treasure inside of you? Are you willing to believe that NOTHING is impossible with God

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Persistence, Perseverance

DISCIPLINE (PART I)...

Every great leader I know has one thing in common: DISCIPLINE. Dictionary.com defines it this way: "Discipline (n): activity, exercise, or regimen that develops or improves a skill." If you want to know what I believe it takes to be the leader: at work, at school, and in the church, it's discipline. We need to be disciplined spiritually, physically, and intellectually! We need to be involving our lives in activity and exercise that help us improve: spiritually, physically, and intellectually. We become the leader and STAY the leader, we must be constantly improving and growing! Simply put, disciplined people are in control of themselves. BTW, self control is a fruit of the Spirit (see Gal 5:22)!

Some of you know that physical discipline has been a weakness of mine for years. But I haven't given up! I made a commitment this year to not miss a single day on the treadmill. I missed one

day on January 6, but only because I completely forgot! I jumped right back into it and have not missed a day since! I feel better and the weight is dropping off!

I'll write more about how I am leading in the area of physical discipline tomorrow.. In the mean time, I am talking about this subject at our churchplanters.com conference EVOLVE on Feb 18-19. If you haven't signed up yet, don't procrastinate! Have discipline!

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Discipline

EVOLVE...

To evolve means to change. Darwin didn't invent evolution God did. God is all about change. He really changed things up when, after eons of dark and silence, He created the universe, then you and me. While He was creating it all He created our world to be full of change: Wet places and dry places; the day and the night; Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Flying animals and swimming animals; Male and Female (talk about change!). God loves changing it up! God is not a monotonous God!

To change, then, is to live out part of what it means to be created in the image of God! God created us to be people who are constantly changing; constantly growing; constantly becoming. So from time to time, I think we ought to be asking ourselves:

How am I changing?

What about me has changed lately?

What have I been part of changing around me?

How can I shake things up to break the monotony: At work? At school? At church?

What is my plan for personal change?

At MLC, we are constantly shaking things up and changing things. **Change cultivates passion.** Here are some of the things we've changed, just in the last 30 days or so:

We STOPPED serving Starbucks Coffee after 7 years. We now serve Land of A Thousand Hills Fair Trade Coffee.

We moved our Saturday Night Worship Services to Sunday Nights and have seen attendance spike immediately!

We launched a new campus with live communicators teaching the same message at both campuses!

So go for it! Change something! Shake things up! Will it be uncomfortable? Yes. Will people resist? Yes. But at MLC we like to say that " We'd rather scare you and shake you up than kill you slowly spiritually!". Change. It will cultivate passion: in you, and those around you.

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Change

THINKING TEAM...

One of the great challenges of a leader is building and leading our teams. Frankly, it's always faster and more efficient to do things by ourselves. It's HARD to do team! That's why one of the things I'm constantly doing is challenging leaders to THINK TEAM as a leader. We must build teams at every level of our churches and organizations! Jesus actually MODELED thinking team. Here's some thoughts on how to build and lead more effective teams based on the life of Jesus:

Determine not to do life and ministry ALONE. Jesus had a team of 12. If He had a team, don't you think we need one?

Pick the right people for the team. Jesus didn't pick superstars. He picked men who were moldable, teachable, and loyal.

Cultivate our team. Jesus spent A LOT of time with His team. He was constantly pulling away from the crowds to invest in His team.

Function as a Team. Jesus taught the disciples HOW to work together to accomplish more than they could accomplish on their own. He introduced them to the Upper Room, where they could come together, huddle, and then go tackle Hell with a water gun.

How about you? Are you thinking team these days? How much of your time is spent on picking the right team members, cultivating your team, and functioning as a team? BTW, I'll be leading a Breakout @ our churchplanters.com conference on cultivating a team environment. Join us!

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Staff

I LOVE MY CHURCH LESS TODAY...

God smacked me today. I realized that I love my church too much. Why do I say that? Today I was convicted by the reality that I think I love my church more than I love my community. I have come to love Mountain Lake so much that I feel like it has, over time, diminished my love for this community that my church does ministry in. Yes, I believe my church IS impacting our community. However, as our church grows, it's so easy to get so caught up in church activity and church relationships, that I lose my love for the community. As I'm reading through the book of Acts, here's the pattern I've seen emerge: As people in the early church fell more in love with God, they fell more in love with, not their church, but their community. Their love for God produced in them a love for people and a passion to share Christ's love to EVERYONE in their community!

So today, I started loving our church less and loving our community more. Do I love my church? YES! Do I love the people in my church? YES! Are there tons of things I love about our church? YES! I just think that a REAL love for God shouldn't produce more love for my church, but MORE love for my community! My passion for God should produce a passion to share His message. If it doesn't then that passion is not from Him! I want to love my community so much that I can not REST until EVERY PERSON in my community knows Jesus Christ as their

Forgiver and Leader! And I've been reminded again that, frankly, eternity hangs in the balance based on my decision!

So Today I committed to allow God's love for me produce more love in me and through me for the people in my community. I can't love everything THE MOST. So today, I committed to God that I would love Mountain Lake a little less, and my community a lot more. How about you? Which do you love more? Your church? Or your community?

BTW, we're going to be talking A TON about this issue in our new message series starting this weekend: It's called: "Re:Act". I'll talk more about this later...

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Evangelism

A CAUTION FOR PASTORS...

Mountain Lake Church was founded on the message of Acts. Everything our church is today and everything we seek to accomplish is based on the pattern we see emerge among the early Christ followers found there. However, I have a confession to make. While our ministries have always been based on the MESSAGE in the book of Acts, I'm sorry to say that there have been times when we weren't basing our ministry on the POWER in the book of Acts.

Recently, God has been teaching me that if I want our church to Re:ACT--to allow God do in our church what he did in the early church, our church has got to be based, not just on the MESSAGE of Acts, but also the POWER of the Book of Acts: We MUST be asking for, and allowing God's Spirit to be the guide and sustainer of our ministries! We have to allow HIM work in and through our church more! Here's the way it works in its simplest form:

THE MESSAGE + THE POWER = THE RE-ACT-ION

God is showing me more and more these days that BOTH are important! It's not enough for our church just to be doing the right things. Biblical patterns and methods are empty without God's power. Disciples are powerless without God's Spirit and power living in and through them (Read Acts 1). EVERYTHING we do must be in God's power and under His influence!

OK, so here's the deal: If God's power is so necessary, how do we tap into it the way the early church did? WE SLOW DOWN. We go back home. We WAIT. We get still and get with God. We start listening and watching for what He wants to say and reveal to us. THEN, we move...But not before ...If we jump ahead of God in our own effort, it's all going to crash and burn...THAT'S my caution today for all pastors.

But if there's one thing the book of Acts proves, it's the fact that a bunch of common ordinary people can do ANYTHING when God's power is present among His leaders and His people! How about you? Are you willing to slow down for the Power today?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Authority

THE HEALTHY LEADER...

More and more these days, God is speaking TO me and THROUGH me to other leaders (in both the corporate and ministry worlds) about the importance of healthy leadership. And by health, I'm not just talking about JUST physical health; but spiritual health; relational health; emotional health; and professional health! Earlier this month, I talked about discipline at our churchplanters.com conference and blogged some self assessment questions. I want to add some questions today that can help us asses whether our leadership and pace are HEALTHY these days. Here they are:

Do I leave work at the same time every day?

How often do I open up my laptop once I go home at the end of day?

How often do I end up working on my off day?

Do I answer work related phone calls/after I go home? On my off day?

Do I check email after 5 PM?

Am I often so emotionally drained when I get home that I have nothing else to give?

If I asked my spouse: "Do you feel like # 1 in my life?" how would they respond?

Am I involved in my kids' extracurricular activities?

Do I feel like God is being honored in my my pace of life right now?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Boundaries

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING...

It's been said that there are two kinds of people in the world. Those who KNOW that they don't know; and those who DON'T know that they don't know. I used to be the latter. I THOUGHT I knew everything: I thought I understood God, understood what it meant to follow Jesus; understood clearly how to lead a great church; understood spiritual leadership; understood how to be a great husband and dad.

Recently, however, I have realized this startling truth: I don't know ANYTHING I thought I knew. I don't understand God; I DON'T know how to be a great Pastor, spiritual leader, husband, or dad. I DON'T know how to lead this church in to the future he has for us. I don't know what the future holds; and I don't know what God has in store for my life or my church!

Mountain Lakers, Does that scare you? It shouldn't. It SHOULD scare you instead that at one time I THOUGHT I knew all this stuff, because I didn't know it in the first place! I just didn't KNOW that I didn't know. To me, that's when we should be scared. To me, THAT'S when we're really stupid: When we are too dumb or too prideful to ADMIT that we don't know all the stuff we think we know; to think that we can put God in a box; to think that just because God speaks to us that we can go do it in our own power.

No, I'm glad God is bringing me BACK to the point of realization that **I don't know anything**. NOW I need Him. NOW I can't do without Him. NOW I'm desperate to hear from Him. I'm desperate for Him to bring clarity to my calling and my church's mission and strategy. NOW, I'm getting smart enough to realize that what I don't know many of the things I thought I knew; smart enough to realize that what I don't know, God knows! So am I discouraged to realize I don't know anything I thought I knew? Are you kidding me?! I'm so encouraged to know that I am back in a state of dependency on God AGAIN because I know that I don't know. I actually hope I never know anything!

But I know this: I'll once again FEEL like I know something--that I've got some things figured out. Then I'll fall right back into self sufficiency and stupidity again; Then everything will come crashing down; then I'll repent again and admit again that I don't know anything I thought I knew. Now there's a summary of life this side of Heaven! Does any of this make sense e to you?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Learning, Teachability

NOT-SO-COMMONLY LISTED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES...

I read A LOT about leadership. Nothing great ever happened in the Bible, without a Godly leader in place who made some good choices. I have been a student of leadership for over 15 years now, and I've seen a TON of "Leadership Best Practices Lists." I even have my own (I'll talk about that later). However, here are some not-so-commonly listed leadership practices.

Leaders pray about decisions.

Leaders NEVER do what's best for them, but what's best for the organization.

Leaders work harder than everyone else.

Leaders are more disciplined than everyone else

Leaders are willing to sacrifice more than anyone else.

Leaders don't shy away from making tough calls

Leaders realize that the people that got you to HERE usually won't get you to THERE.

Leaders are honest. Even when it's hard.

Leaders love people.

Leaders believe in who God made them to be and are confident in their identity.

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Selflessness

NOT-SO-COMMON LEADERSHIP PRACTICES II...

I've had a ton of feedback and questions regarding my post last week: "No-so-commonly talked about leadership practices." A lot of you asked to unpack some of these, so that's what I'll be doing some over the next week. The one I want to unpack today is this:

"Leaders never do what's best for them, but what's best for the organization."

For some of us, this statement makes a lot of sense. Others of us struggle with this. Few of us understand the implications of this leadership practice. In Jim Collins' book *Good To Great*, Collins discusses the most important aspect of building a great organization: He calls it "Level 5 Leadership." In the book, he states that a level 5 Leader is someone who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will. He says: "Level 5 Leaders channel their ego and personal comfort needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great organization." To live this way, however, it will often mean that:

- * I must be willing to take blame and give away credit.
- * I must balance results with the relationships I have with my team(s).
- * I must value being respected over being liked.
- * I must value effectiveness over personal comfort.
- * I must value the organization's mission over my own.
- * I must stay even when staying is the most difficult thing to do.
- * I must step aside when that's when that needs to happen.
- * I must understand that being the leader WILL cost myself and my family (It always did in the Bible).
- * I must understand that the best thing I give to my organization is a healthy me and a healthy family.
- * I must live my life the way Jesus lived. He NEVER put His desires first.

GOT IT? Now go live it...

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Selflessness

MY GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT...

This past week, God reminded me that my greatest accomplishment in life is not having the largest church, impacting the world, being a great preacher, speaking nationally, or even helping to start hundreds of churches in my lifetime. God reminded me again that to live a life of no regrets, the most important accomplishment in life has got to be loving the people closest to me. Jesus modeled it for us: **John 13:1 (NIV)** "...Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

I want my greatest accomplishment in life to be showing the full extent of my love to the people closest to me. This past weekend, our church facilitated ministry for hundreds and hundreds of people in six worship services on two different campuses. God used the message I taught. DOZENS of people came up to me and told me about how the service impacted their life and their future. After church, we held our Newcomer's Lunch. Nearly 100 people were there and 14 adults made a commitment to go public with their faith through baptism at the end of the class. What an incredible weekend! But do you know what I'm most proud of this past weekend?

Having lunch with my 9 year old daughter at her school on Friday. That was my greatest accomplishment. What is your greatest accomplishment this past week?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Family

DO NOT BE AFRAID...

I think one of the biggest emotions Pastors deal with is fear. We fear making the wrong decision. We fear leading our church off the edge. We fear losing God's favor on our church. We fear how people are going to react. We fear not being used mightily for God. We fear being in over our heads and not knowing what to do about it. Pastors really are scaredy cats! I know I am, a lot of times. That's why it encourages me to remember that one of the most common phrases God used to encourage the great leaders of the Bible is: "Do not be afraid". This phrase is used 65 times in the Bible (NIV). Why was God so often telling the leader He had chosen to not be afraid? Because most of the time, he was afraid! He was being plagued by fear in his life!

Today, once again, I sensed God speaking to me, just as He did with Joshua thousands of years ago. Here is what He said "...Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged by the size of the task, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will see to it that all the work related to the Temple of the LORD is finished correctly (1 Chronicles 28:20)."

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Fear

MY #1 MOST OFTEN PRAYED PRAYER...

Over the last twenty years, there is DEFINITELY a #1 thing I have asked God for most often: WISDOM. Of all the things I've prayed for wisdom has been the most consistent theme of my prayers. wisdom is defined (by dictionary.com) as "having the power of discerning and judging properly as to what is true or right; possessing discernment, judgment, or discretion." Ironically, this is the BIBLICAL definition of wisdom!

Why has my number one prayer been to ask for wisdom? Several reasons. First of all, the Bible tells us to ask for it: "If any of you lacks discipline, he should ask for it" (James 1:5). Second of all, God is clear in Scripture that He gives favor to those who make their number one prayer, a request for wisdom. Check this out: "The Lord was pleased with Solomon's reply and was glad that he had asked for wisdom. God replied: "Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people and have not asked for a long life or riches for yourself or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding mind such as no one else has ever had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and honor! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life" 1 Kings 3:10-13 (NLT).

But do you want to know the #1 reason I ask for wisdom? I NEED IT! I am overwhelmed on a daily basis by the demands placed on me, the responsibility I have to God and His people in my church, and the complexity of the decisions I am called to make. I need God's perspective on the

decisions I make, because eternity hangs in the balance. The number one thing I need as a man, parent, a husband, a spiritual leader, and a pastor, is wisdom. And praying for wisdom has payed off. God has protected me SO MANY TIMES. God has allowed me to make the right call SO MANY TIMES. Have I always made the right decision? NO! I'm human! But God has given me wisdom and it has made all the difference.

Can I challenge you today? Stop making PEACE your # 1 prayer; Stop making FAITH your # 1 prayer; Stop making PROTECTION your #1 prayer. Stop making BLESSING your #1 prayer. Make WISDOM your #1 prayer. And God has hinted at the fact that WISDOM could be the key to all the other stuff we need and desire.

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Decision Making

"YEAH, BUT..."

Are you a "Yeah, but..." person? Are you skeptical by nature? Do you tend to look for loopholes? Do you struggle with God's call and commands? Ever give excuses as to WHY you can't obey God the way He wants you to? Do you ever discount yourself from being further used by God? Gideon did, too. When God called Gideon to lead the Israelites in overthrowing the Amalekites, Gideon said: "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!" Judges 6:15 (NLT). What are some of the "Yeah, but..." situations you're facing right now?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Change

PASTOR, STICK YOUR NECK OUT...

When was the last time you REALLY stuck your neck out? Yesterday, I did. I stuck my neck out and laid it on the line. I was so uncomfortable sharing in the vulnerable way I did yesterday with our people. I laid it on the line. I was transparent. I was confessional. I was a little mean at times. I was passionate. I cried. I shared my heart in a real way. It was all I knew to do. I just told people the way it was: in our church, our community, our nation, and our world. I boldly challenged people. I called for commitment. I called for people to get off their wallets and get in the game. I led the way. I put my money where my mouth was. Wow, it was difficult. I just knew that when I stuck my neck out, someone would cut off my head!

I'm sure I ran a few new people off who figure I'm an idiot. I'm sure some skeptics still don't trust me or this church. Nonetheless, I was obedient. I stepped out there. I felt like God was leading me to stick my neck out in front of my people. And guess what? No one cut my head off! I lived to tell about it! Guess what? the people responded to my transparency and God showed up in our services. People were moved. People gave. People stepped out in faith. Many people stuck their necks out just like I had done.

Pastor, when was the last time you stuck your neck out? the last time you got GUT HONEST with your people about the reality of the situation in your church? Quit the pie in the sky talk.

Quit saying EVERYTHING is great. EVERYTHING'S not great. There are areas your people need to grow in. Your church needs workers and resources to accomplish God's mission for your church. You are overwhelmed? Tell the people. You're afraid? Tell the people. You're willing to lay it on the line? Do it. Then tell the people. Let them hear your determination to see this mission through. Share your heart with them. Stick your neck out. Even if someone cuts it off, you'll suddenly hear a voice saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

IN case you'd like to see the message from this past week's message, it will be posted here before the day is out (look for WOW Wii Message Three).

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Risk Taking

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET...

God spoke to me today about my "gift of discernment." By nature, I tend to see more wrong than I do right. Trust me, when it comes to my church, don't worry about me getting the big head about all that God's doing. I often see more wrong than I do right! Not because it's wrong, but because that's what I naturally see! The truth is that we see what we're looking for. Ever gotten a new car and suddenly realized EVERYONE ELSE has one? Why? Because all of a sudden that's what we're looking for!

This truth applies to our attitude towards life, our work, our ministry, our family, and any other area of our lives. What we see is what we're looking for. What we see is what we'll get. If we see a terrible spouse, guess what? If we see everything that's wrong at work, guess what? If we're looking for the faults in someone, guess what we'll find? If we're looking for something wrong in the church, guess what we'll find? We see what we're looking for, and then what we see is what we get.

So what do we do about this? Change what we're looking for. Look for the good. That's what God did when He sent Jesus. He didn't just see sin. He saw children worth dying for. When Jesus picked the twelve disciples, there was plenty that Jesus could've seen WRONG with them. What did Jesus see? Potential. No one else saw it in them. What did Jesus see when He looked at Jerusalem? He said: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (Jn. 4:35). What did Jesus see when He looked at people? Potential! Want to be like Jesus? Stop seeing everything wrong with everything and everyone. Start seeing potential. Start seeing the good in people. You may not have needed to hear this today, but I sure did. Thanks, God...

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Encouragement

RAISING EVANGELISTIC RISK...

In a conversation recently with one of my heroes, Bill Hybels, of Willow Creek Church, Bill mentioned that one of Willow's new goals was "raising evangelistic risk." When I heard this phrase, my skin crawled! I got goose bumps all over! I thought: "That's it! That's what I believe God wants for the church! He wants us to take greater risks (than we're currently taking) to reach people far from God!"

What does that look like? I don't know. But now at Mountain Lake, I believe God wants us to dream about "raising evangelistic risk" in our context. What are some risks we could take that could potentially reap a greater harvest than we're experiencing now? What does it look like to raise evangelistic risk: In our worship services? In our Children's ministry? In our Student Ministry? I don't know. We've got more questions than answers; but at least we're asking the question. What kinds of risks are you taking to introduce people to Jesus?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Risk Taking

I LOVE MY JOB...

I love my job...Why? Because it's easy? No. Because it's always fun? No. Because it offers great pay and great benefits? No. because it offers a flexible schedule? No. Because it allows me to be at home with my family more? No! Even though my job offers part or all of these things at different times, none of these things are why I love my job. I love my job because I am CALLED to do it! I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am CALLED by GOD to be the Lead Pastor of Mountain Lake Church! There is NOTHING MORE fulfilling in life than knowing you are where God has CALLED you to be. I can't tell you how much joy it brings to my life to get up every morning and know that I'm CALLED to do what I do. Some days my job is easy. MANY days my job is hard. Some days I feel like I'm doing a great job. Other times I feel like I'm not. But I still love my job, Because I'm CALLED. What about you? Are you CALLED to be in your job? If so, thank God today for His calling on your life. If not, what are you doing there? Quit and go do what you feel like God has called you to do! Yes, it really is that simple...

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Passion, Calling

TIME "STEWARDSHIP"

In the Christian world, we often talk about "stewardship" in terms of money. However, from God's perspective, stewardship is about so much more than money! Being a good "steward" is about being a good MANAGER of all that God has entrusted to us. That includes how we spend our time! In fact, I would even be so bold to suggest that TIME management is more important than MONEY management, because how we spend our TIME greatly affects how we spend our money! Currently, through a Re-Read of *Ordering Your Private World*, I was reminded once again that for me to be everything that God wants me to be, I must think of my time just like my money:

I must track where I'm spending it.

I must separate, not just in my mind, but on paper, fixed expenditures, from variable expenditures.

I must plan ahead.

I must think in terms of budget categories.

I must reserve some on myself, for my own personal health and vitality.

If I don't decide where to spend it, other people will decide it for me!

I must say "No" to the good things to say "Yes" to the best things.

It all belongs to God, so I must ask myself daily: "Is God happy with the way I managed it today?"

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy,

MEETINGS...

Today I meet with our entire Team for our Ministry Team Meeting. We meet every Wednesday from 2:30 to 5PM. I LOVE meeting with our team! We have a TON of meetings in the different pockets of our teams here at Mountain Lake. Here's the cool part: I can absolutely say that virtually every great decision we've ever made at our church, has been in a meeting. We have definitely found our strength in what we do together in Team Meetings at Mountain Lake! However, over the years, I have learned a TON about what makes a good meeting and what makes a BAD meeting. I'll share these here:

Celebration. At our meetings, we celebrate people: b'days, anniversaries, and the guys who have knocked it out of the park recently.

Vision. Vision leaks. Staff people tend to forget WHY they're doing what they're doing. Meetings are a GREAT PLACE to remind them of the vision behind WHY they do what they do. We call it Belong/Become Time, because that's our mission!

As the senior leader, do NOT stay for the entire meeting. It's not good for me to be at the FULL TEAM meeting for the entire meeting. It stifles what people are really thinking and keeps me in the details TOO MUCH. So my being at our FULL TEAM MEETING is for the purpose of loving on my team and investing into them from a vision and leadership perspective. Then I leave the meeting and turn it over to my Exec Pastor. He handles the communication, the details and gives assignments from there.

Make the Team communicate. At our FULL TEAM MEETING, all of our major departments of the team communicate what they're working on in just a few minutes, so everyone knows at least A LITTLE of what each others' doing. This keeps us from forming silos on our team!

Take minutes. This seems elementary, but I'm amazed how many people I talk to do NOT keep minutes

Execute. Also, we don't just keep minutes. Our minutes are taken with an eye for EXECUTION. Each person's name is BOLD-ED in the minutes with their responsibilities from the meeting, and they are held accountable for EXECUTING what they agreed to do before the next meeting. Nothing kills the effectiveness of a meeting more than talking about stuff, making decision, but never doing anything about it meeting after meeting!

Don't handle EVERYTHING at the FULL TEAM Meeting. Many decisions will need to be made off line and in the smaller team meetings throughout the week. Once the full team meeting reaches anywhere NEAR 10 people, many of the decisions for the church or organization need to be made at smaller, team specific meetings, NOT the FULL TEAM meeting.

Get the right people at the right meeting. Forget titles when you're having meetings. Just get the right people there with the right gift mix and the right info to make the right decision.

Laugh. Don't be so stern and business like that you can't have fun! Laugh! Cultivate laughter!

Spice it Up. Every once in a while, change location, go for ice cream or Starbucks or just go play Office Chair Football (yes we've done that) to break the monotony! The next meeting will be better!

HOPE THIS HELPS!!!

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Meetings

WHY CAN'T THE CHURCH BE MORE LIKE JACK JOHNSON?

Last night, my wife Tricia and I went out to the Lakewood Amphitheater in ATL to the Jack Johnson Concert, and it was SOLD OUT: 10,000 fans! It was packed! We had a great time! We were singing, celebrating, dancing, and having a great time! While I was there, it once again occurred to me, though: "Most of these people don't go to church every week...but they PAID money to come in here; sit on the GROUND; and watch a tiny little man on the stage HUNDREDS of feet away play the same songs they listened to in their CD player on the way here! What gets these people so excited about, that the church, overall, can't seem to connect with? Why don't these people want to come to church? What is it these people love about this concert?" Here were my thoughts:

They can be themselves

They can dress any way they want to.

They can act any way they want to, as long as it was legal.

They can smoke, drink, and curse.

They can meet new people of the opposite sex and leave with them.

They can re-connect with old friends.

They can sing to the top of their lungs and no one can hear them (OK, I could hear a few of them).

They can forget their terrible day at the office and with the kids.

They can dance.

They can sit back, chill, and allow some grooving tunes and the words to the songs minister to their soul, and no one is going to ask them to do anything!

So... If we KNEW this is what UNCHURCHED people were looking for, would we be willing to offer it in the church? Does that make you uncomfortable? That was my point. If the church is going to reach unchurched people, we are going to have to get a little bit more uncomfortable! We are going to have to CHANGE the way we think about church!

How? By changing the way we think about Jesus! In fact, go back through the list: THESE people were the ones Jesus hung out with the MOST! He accepted them! He loved them! He

partied with them (remember water into wine?!). Yes, He was different! But He didn't expect non-believer to act and think like believers before He became their friends. Are you willing to do that? Is your church willing to do that?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Culture

MARRIAGE AND MINISTRY...

I know so many people look at Pastors and think we have it easy. You think that because of the nature of our jobs, that our marriage relationships must be easier than yours. We only work one day a week, right? Whatever! Just to give you perspective: I probably spend 20-30 hours weekly, simply preparing for to teach the message for Sunday...not to mention the tons of meetings, counseling appointments, emails I answer, weddings, and even funerals I officiate. On average, I probably work 60-70 hours a week. This doesn't even take into account the enormous spiritual, physical and emotional toil that ministry takes on a Pastor! We bear a lot of people's burdens and the responsibility for an entire church!

Because of our schedule and work pace, I actually believe Pastors have a tougher challenge maintaining healthy marriages than anyone else! I believe we have to work **HARDER** than everyone else on the Marriage Project! All this being said, I can gladly tell you that I am **NOT** a workaholic. I **HAVE** been, but I'm not. Even though I work hard, and I work long hours, I have made a commitment not to sacrifice my marriage on the altar of ministry.

Every day, I make decisions that keep my marriage as the number one prioritized relationship in my life. I don't see my marriage as coming **AHEAD** of ministry. I see marriage as my most important ministry. And I make decisions every day that keeps it that way. Here are some I've made and keep making on a daily basis:

I quit at 5PM every day. Period. Almost **NO** exceptions.

When things are really crazy, rather than working late, I just get up earlier. I will get up as early as 3:30 AM (though that's rare) so I can spend time with God, then get to work! I can get a half day's work in by 8:30!

I don't schedule **ANY** meetings on my off day. None.

At the end of the day, I get off my cell phone before I enter my home. If I enter my home on the cell phone, I am not fully present to my family.

We celebrate Family Night on Tuesday Nights. No appointments when possible, and if something falls on Tuesday Night, we celebrate it on another night.

I schedule a date night 1-2 times every month with my wife and I handle childcare and what we're going to do. Wednesday Night we're going to a Braves Game together!

I try not be away from home more than two nights a week.

I limit the number of weddings I will say "yes" to in a year, because they almost always fall on the weekends and take me away from my family we have eight other pastors that can perform weddings. I don't have to do every one of them!

Yes, sometimes people even get upset with me when I can't meet with them at a good time for THEM; OR be at their particular function. However, I have made a commitment: my wife and my family is my most important ministry, and I preach this to our people at Mountain Lake! I just let them know that I believe the best gift I can give them is not my time with them, but a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with my wife! When put that way, they always agree with me. Thanks, Mountain Lake, for allowing your Pastor to do life and ministry in my marriage AND THEN do life and ministry with you! I am grateful for you today!

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Marriage

RISKING IN THE NAME OF JESUS...

There's a lot of buzz going on, in regards to our Wedding Vow Renewal Service tomorrow! The Paper has been talking about it. People have been calling in. People have asked if they can wear their wedding veils. People are inviting tons of family and friends. I honestly don't know exactly how the service is going to turn out! Tomorrow is a risk! I'm a little nervous! We're having ONE HUGE WEDDING CEREMONY at our church! But not just any old wedding ceremony! Over 200 couples will renew their vows in our worship services on our two campuses this Sunday! We haven't attempted anything REMOTELY like this before. It's risky.

But this is also why I think I'm so excited! I think there's something exhilarating about trying something we've never tried before! I think I'm also coming to realize more every day, that for BIG payoffs, we must take BIG risks for God! We must put ourselves out there! We must try things we've never done before. One pastor friend of mine has said: "If we want to reach who nobody's reaching, we've got to do what no one else is doing." That's what we're doing this Sunday! Taking a risk. Trying something that's never been tried in our community.

Mountain Lakers, I can't wait to share this with you! Yes, I will be renewing my vows with my wife this Sunday in one of the services, as well. I can't tell you more about it right now. I'd have to kill you. It's top secret. But it'll be cool. And THEN we're tying everything back to Jesus with communion! Another risk! the greatest risk is attempting to accomplish everything we're attempting in 65 minutes! Pray for a miracle!

Pastors, are you bored or burned out at your church? Is your church struggling? Does the mood need to change? Wondering how things could turn around? Could it be that you're only one risk away from a breakthrough and a BIG payoff for the Kingdom?! When's the last time you REALLY took a huge risk in your service? What would it look like to risk it all next Sunday?

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Risk Taking

TWO THINGS WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE...

It's been said that the two biggest life change factors are:

The people I hang out with;

The books I read.

God's been reminding me lately that this is so true in my life, and this truth has so many implications:

This is why my personal alone time with God is so important! Spending time reading God's Word and talking with Him is **THE BIGGEST** catalyst for change in my life!

This is why I need to constantly assess who I'm hanging out with and make sure I am rubbing shoulders with people who are wiser, smarter, more successful, and closer to God than I am! That's been a big part of my week this week!

This is why I need to be even more diligent and systematic in my personal reading and leadership development time. I read quite a bit, but I need to read **MORE!** Right now, here are a few books I'm reading: *Get a Life*; *Sticky Church*, *The Dip*, & *The E-Myth Revisited*.

Who are you hanging out with? What are you reading? If you tell me the answers to those two questions, I'll tell you what you're becoming.

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Spiritual Health

PREACH THE WORD...

I preached my heart out yesterday...I felt like God had given me a message, and at the end of the day, I feel like I said what He wanted me to say. I feel like it was a great message! A message people need to hear! **HOWEVER**, attendance was **DOWN** yesterday. We've been in the middle of a series on Finances, and it's pretty obvious that some people are uncomfortable dealing with this issue in their lives. They either think that they've got it all figured out, or don't want to deal with some of the issues in their lives regarding how they view and use their money. For some it's just **EASIER** not to talk about it or deal with it. Even for those that **WERE** there yesterday, it was also a little quieter in the room than usual, as I touched on things like materialism and greed.

Here's what can't happen in my ministry, though. I can't fall into the trap of only preaching messages that will "pack the house out." I can't fall into the trap of thinking that the goal of my preaching is to make people laugh; help people have an "enjoyable" experience at church. I agree with my colleague Francis Chan: "I can build a bigger church than Jesus. If I'll just tell everyone what they want to hear." **WOW.**

As a **PREACHER**, I have to be willing to teach the "uncomfortable" parts of Scripture; deal with the **HARD** teachings of Jesus; I can not water down the requirements for following Jesus; I must deal with the issues that, frankly, no one would ever give me a hard time about, if I **NEVER** brought them up! Money is one of them. Every time I teach on money, someone leaves our church and never comes back. Every time. Others just stay away until the series is over. That's cool. Because it's not my job to **MAKE** people come to church; it's not my job to **MAKE** people listen; It's not my job to **MAKE** them open their hearts and ears to hear what God wants to say to them.

Know what my job is? To preach the Word. To preach what I feel God has laid on my heart; to speak the truth in love. To preach the **WHOLE COUNSEL** of the Bible...even the parts a lot of people don't want to deal with. That's my job!

Pastor, that's your job, too. And on this Monday, I feel like this is EXACTLY what a lot of pastors across America need to hear...straight from God's heart:

"Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you."

2 Timothy 4:2-5 (NLT)

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Preaching

CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEADER...

I never ceased to be amazed at the leadership of Jesus. He truly WAS and IS a GREAT leader! Some people have pushed back at the idea of leadership teaching in the church, labeling it as a non-spiritual, business principle. I TOTALLY disagree! I believe Christian leaders should be the BEST leaders in the world, because we have the greatest leader EVER living inside of us! Jesus was first and foremost a leader! At Mountain Lake, we seek to live and teach a series of Leadership Practices, based concretely on the life of Jesus. We call them ECHO PRACTICES: Resounding Leadership. Ripple Effect Leadership. We believe an ECHO LEADER:

Shares the Vision: A leader believes in the vision and inspire others to share it.

Encourages the Heart: A leader, encourages, challenges, and celebrates others.

Enables Others: A leader recruits and builds great teams.

Models the way: A leader sets the pace and the example.

Read the Gospels with a new lens. Start looking for the ECHO PRACTICES exhibited in and through the life of Jesus. You'll be amazed by a GREAT leader!

"Jesus, thanks for being a GREAT LEADER!

Enable ME to lead others the way You've led me!"

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Miscellaneous

THE POWER OF THE TEAM...

I am away from the office several days traveling. That's not the cool part. the cool part is that my church is running without me. I haven't responded to a phone call or email in the last few days, but my church has NOT suffered. One of the things I am most proud of, is the fact that my church can run just fine WITHOUT ME, because it's NOT ABOUT ME in the first place. My Ministry Team understands our calling and our mission, and are empowered to lead their ministries and are competent in doing so.

People who've been at Mountain Lake while know that if they come to our offices, they might not be able to find me, and they probably won't be able to meet with me without an appointment. They also know it would probably be better to meet with, or talk to someone else, because they probably can do a better job than me, and know more about what's going on than I do! And I love that! However, if you're new at Mountain Lake, it might surprise you to know that:

I don't do much counseling. I probably do a couple counseling appointments each MONTH!

I visit the hospital once about every three months.

I perform about two funerals per year.

I don't lead a Small Group.

I've personally baptized only five people in the history of Mountain Lake.

I only teach about 70% of the time at Mountain Lake.

I've only taught five times at the new campus of Mountain Lake we launched a year ago.

I don't lead our Ministry Team Staff Meetings.

I do not go to the office until lunch every day. I study from home every morning.

Why am I proud of what I DON'T do at my church? Because my job is NOT to do all the work of ministry. My job is to EQUIP people to do the work of the ministry. My job is simple: Start something. Do it for a while. Train someone else to do it. Stop doing it. Start something else. You get the picture? THAT'S EQUIPPING. Here's what the apostle Paul said my job is:

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NLT) 11He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, 13until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Staff

[OUR HOPE...](#)

So many times, we place our hope in so many things: Our job; Our job security; Our 401 K; Our abilities; Our talents; Our strengths; Our degrees; Our achievements; Our accomplishments; Our favorite team (mine let me down last night); Our church... Where does your confidence come from? What do you place your hope in? What do you love to brag about?

King David said: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" Psalm 20:7 (NIV). The number of horses and chariots an army had was a symbol of an army's strength. God, however, constantly reminded the Israelite that if they trusted in their own strength, they would be limiting what God could do in and through them. Here's a sticky dilemma: The more strengths we have and the stronger abilities we have, the more we'll always be tempted to place our hope in those strengths and abilities and rely on God less and less. THIS should be our testimony: Some trust in chariots(abilities); some trust in horses (strengths); but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. What are your abilities? Your

strengths? Embrace them,; allow God to use them; but don't trust in them. They will let you down eventually. However, if your trust is in God, He will never fail you... Just something to chew on today...

Posted by: Shawn Lovejoy, Spiritual health

Will Mancini

THE CLARITY VACUUM

Many people ask me how I became a "clarity evangelist." It all started in the window between July 2001 – December of 2002. In that time I was given the opportunity to work with scores of churches across the country. My world was polarized as I had my first "Nehemiah experience." It wasn't walls that were in disrepair but the quality and nature of visionary leadership.

The urgent need of the church in North America today is clarity. Leaders have not disciplined themselves to pray, listen, think and dialogue with their teams in a way that produces a shared, vivid understanding of where God is taking their ministry. I have never encountered one that did not have an immediate need for better clarity--and most have a desperate need. How would you know if you have clarity? You have it if you can answer "yes" to these questions:

- 1. In the last 30 days did you hear church members talk about your church's vision?*
- 2. Is your church's identity unquestionably contagious?*
- 3. Does your mission roll off your tongue with heartfelt conviction?*
- 4. Does your staff embrace the value of values?*
- 5. Have you planned an event in the next six months that will help your staff see God's future for your church?*
- 6. Does your staff enthusiastically agree about how to accomplish the church's mission?*
- 7. Do you have a process on paper that shows how your church will develop leaders?*
- 8. Does all church communication reflect and reinforce your vision?*
- 9. Do you know the next ministry to launch or staff to hire?*
- 10. Do you have 100% confidence that all of the time, money and resources going into the church are being utilized to make disciples at the end of the day?*

Posted by: Will Mancini, Vision

DISTRACTIONS IN DISGUISE

Henry Ford said a basic human problem is trying to do too much at once. When Jesus prayed to the Father just before his death, he recounted, "I have completed everything that you called me to do." I am always stunned by the reality that Jesus did no more or less than he was created and called to do. Yet he had more than a few opportunities each day of his ministry. Like Jesus, leaders today are met with far more "opportunities" than God wants us to pursue. The question becomes what "opportunities" are really distractions in disguise. So how did our Savior know what to dive into and what to avoid? What gave him crystal clarity when confronted with an ocean of urgent needs?

Certainly his knowledge of Scripture and his intimate relationship with the Father were

indispensable. But what else was at play? It's a great question to ponder as a team. At the end of the day, the question begs for the development of shared values. What are the missional motives that a team can use each day as the constant backdrop for filtering opportunities and making decisions.

Posted by: Will Mancini, Passion, Calling

"IF YOU CAN'T SAY IT CLEARLY YOU DON'T KNOW IT COMPLETELY"

I was scanning blog entries for last week's release of my book [Church Unique](#) (on [Favebot.com](#)). I ran across an interview on vision with Nelson Searcy on a blog called [Visional Life](#). Here are my two favorite snippets:

Cultivating a vision: Where does vision come from? Vision can flow from a number of sources:

* Experience: Because of what I have learned from the past, I have a vision for the future.*

Inspiration: Because of an imaginative or spiritual spark, I have a vision for the future.*

Analysis: Because of my analytical study, I have a vision for the future.

The key point on vision is that it is unique to every leader. My vision must be cultivated out of experience, inspiration, or analysis. If you borrow a vision, you are simply managing another person's vision, you are not leading. To borrow a vision is to fail to lead.

Verbalize clearly: If you can't say it clearly, you don't know it completely. You may think that the vision makes sense, but your mind will fill in the holes of the vision without you being aware. When you verbalize the vision, you've taken the important step of examining the holes and resolving them – for yourself and for others.

Posted by: Will Mancini, Vision

ESPN LEADERSHIP LESSONS PART 1

Recently one of our Navigator's heard [George Bodenheimer](#), ESPN's CEO, speak and share their top eight leadership lessons. Here are the first four:

1) **Define your mission...and drive it home.** ESPN's mission is to serve sports fans everywhere. It began in 1979 with the radical vision of providing a sports channel for 24 hours a day- a mind stretch for the typical television sports enthusiasts.

2) **Understand your strengths.** One of ESPN's values is covering sports with authority and personality. When asked about the threat of the NFL network, the CEO replied that the NFL poses no threat at all. The reason? Simply stated the NFL can't compete with ESPN's strength of authority as an independent source.

3) **Have passion for what you do.** One way the employees of ESPN stay passionate is how they nurture an underdog spirit- another company value. The irony is that they remain the clear

category leader, despite the fact that they think and act with the ethos and passion of the underdog.

4) **Develop a winning culture that breeds and feeds on success.** Overtime, ESPN has grown to be the worldwide leader of sports and one of the world's premier brands with more than 40 business entities and counting - including seven domestic (ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN Classic, ESPNEWS, ESPN Deportes, ESPN Today and ESPN Now) and 25 international television networks, ESPN HD, a simulcast service of ESPN in high-definition, ESPN Regional Television, ESPN.com, ESPN Radio, ESPN The Magazine and books, SportsTicker, the ESPN Zones (sports-themed restaurants), and other growing new businesses including ESPN Broadband, ESPN Wireless, ESPN Video-on-Demand, ESPN Interactive and ESPN Pay-Per-View. The beauty of the accomplishment is the blend of attention to corporate culture, focus on the mission and extension of the mission through creativity and innovation.

Posted by: Will Mancini, Miscellaneous

ESPN LEADERSHIP LESSONS PART 2

Following up on a previous post that began reviewing eight leadership lessons from ESPN's CEO, George Bodenheimer:

5) **Have fun along the way.** I oftentimes need to remind myself to appreciate and enjoy the journey. I think that many in ministry share this challenge. One of ESPN's mantra's is "We take sports seriously but we don't take ourselves seriously." I love that!

6) **Build your brand.** Branding is about intentional communication with every person your organization reaches. It includes how you communicate vision visually and how you tell your story. Have you asked the question recently, "What do people think of when they think of you?"

7) **Innovate, Innovate, Innovate.** ESPN has always demonstrated a relentless pursuit of innovation. In June of 2007, Keith Clinkscales was named senior vice president, content development and enterprises. As head of ESPN Content Development, Clinkscales launched a new ESPN incubator media lab designed to develop and create new sports-driven content for all ESPN media platforms; expanding the ESPN Content Development brand. A place for innovation, experimentation and breakthrough programming and initiatives, since its inception, ESPN Content Development has created and aired initiatives like Varsity Inc. and E:60. The ESPN is famous for its new components and early adopter practices at ESPN.com; from things like the video sidebar, to mobile ESPN, ESPN fantasy sports, and ESPN 360 to name a few.

8) **To empower people is to lead.** The impact of an organization is always determined by the leadership ability to raise and release other leaders. Its no surprise that ESPN promotes empowerment as a core tenet. [Read more.](#)

Posted by: Will Mancini, Miscellaneous

SEVEN WAYS TO DEVELOP A CHURCH'S VISION

Here is a fun little blog on vision from a guy named Keith Drury:

1. Forget vision—just minister. Pastor does not work with a vision for the future but "takes it as it comes" responding a week at a time waiting to "see what happens." Vision is overrated.
2. Keep on Keeping on. On arrival the new pastor finds out what the pre-existing vision of the church was before arrival and goes with that.
3. All swim. Pastor gathers the entire church to develop a vision statement.
4. Board dreams & casts. Pastor meets with the board developing a vision, then they cast it to the whole church.
5. Pastoral staff dream & cast. Pastor meets with pastoral staff developing the vision then together they cast it to the board and church.
6. Moses-on-the-mountain. Pastor "goes up the mountain" and seeks the vision, then returns to cast it to board and members.
7. Denomination's choice. Pastor and church adopts the District Superintendent's vision (and denomination's) for the church.

Has your church tried one of these before?

Posted by: Will Mancini, Vision

STICKY BUT NOT CONTRIVED

The title of this blog is a statement that is becoming more useful as I coach leaders to articulate their values. The primary error that leaders make in articulating values is that they articulate too many. The second error is that they choose words that don't jar the mind and heart in a way that "shakes up" meaning for peoples' lives. The third error is that in an effort not to sound contrived, they end up saying something so inert that values are impotent.

During the vision process at First Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, one of the pastors grabbed a denominational book and read a section of the ordination commitment. The covenant included a promise to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. I have never forgotten this four word sequence.

Posted by: Will Mancini, Vision

STICKY BUT NOT CONTRIVED PART 3

I mentioned an innovative ministry a few posts ago named [Wayfarer](#). I think their articulated values are pretty sticky- five motives that pulsate with deep meaning for this team. The five values are communicated with fifteen words. A few months after they articulated these, Dave Rhodes, one of their founders, was on a plane talking to a stranger about their ministry. In the

brief interchange he shared their values and the the conversation continued to unfold to become one of their biggest ministry partnerships.

- Christ before Christianity
- Rhythm before Regimen
- Wrestle before Settle
- Go before Know
- We before Me

Read the descriptions of these values as well as their mission and aim [here](#).

Posted by: Will Mancini, Vision

STRUCTURE AS SOLUTION

This last week I led a quarterly offsite meeting for [Faithbridge](#). Faithbridge is second home church for me as I serve as a leadership coach on the staff. Our focus of the day was the "challenge of structure." I started the day by anchoring the topic of organizational structure into a biblical-theological foundation. I asked the staff the simple question, 'When in biblical history did God provide structure as a solution.' Here is some of the things on our list:

Structure of marriage is a solution to man being alone

Organization on the ark as a solution for preserving planet life

The reorganization in Exodus 18 to provide wholeness, health and sustainability to people of Israel

The levitical structure to provide worship and access to God on behalf of Israel

Jesus choosing the 12 and sending the 72 as a solution for proclaiming the kingdom

Smaller organized groups facilitating discipleship - Acts 2

The selection of 7 leaders when Hellenistic Jewish widows were being overlooked in the distribution of the bread - Acts 6

We spent half the day rethinking ministry department structures based on the 40% rule: Every 40% of growth requires a new structure.

As I continued to think about structure as solution, I thought of the trinitarian structure. What problem does the trinity solve? It is the solution to God being loving and self-sufficient at the same time.

Posted by: Will Mancini, Miscellaneous

Tony Morgan

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

When my staff team shows up at the office on Monday morning, is it because they love what they do or is it the relationships?

When my daughter's friends show up for student ministry, is it because they know they'll hear a great message or is it the relationships?

When my kids laugh at me laughing at my own jokes, is it because of my keen sense of humor or is it the relationships?

When people attend a NewSpring service for the first time, is it because we created a compelling series graphic or is it the relationships?

When people return to my blog, is it because of my writing ability (or lack thereof) or is it the relationships?

When people volunteer at NewSpring, is it because they get to use their gifts or is it the relationships?

What I do is important. I'm just not convinced it's what's most important.

Where is your focus?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Focus

LEADERSHIP THOUGHTS FROM I CORINTHIANS 1-8

I'm in the process of going back through the Bible viewing it through the eyes of a leader. Here are more thoughts from I Corinthians:

Part of my role as a leader is to model this: "agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." ([1:10](#))

God will use ordinary men and women to accomplish his work. ([1:28-29](#))

When Paul said he did not come with "superior wisdom," I wonder if that was more about his approach to sharing truth rather than his lack of wisdom. ([2:1-5](#))

Paul demonstrates a key leadership lesson—there are instances when it's wise to acknowledge our limitations. ([1:18-2:5](#))

God makes things grow. We should expect growth. ([3:6-7](#))

The true test of a leader's impact is revealed under fire. ([3:10-15](#))

"Those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." ([4:2](#))

I need to live a life worthy of imitation. ([4:16](#))

The health of my marriage directly impacts my strength as a leader. ([7:33-35](#))

Is my intention to impart knowledge or demonstrate love? ([8:1-3](#))

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP THOUGHTS FROM MATTHEW 1-7

I'm in the process of going back through the Bible viewing it through the eyes of a leader. Here are my thoughts from the first seven chapters of Matthew:

Leaders make mistakes. God can redeem leaders. ([1:6](#))

It's all about obedience. Joseph "did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him." When was the last time you heard from God and did what he told you to do? ([1:24](#))

I may have positional power, but God is always more powerful. ([3:11](#))

The way I live my life is dictated by the amount of time I spend in the Word of God. It is my sustenance. ([4:4](#))

Time is running out. I need to embrace the urgency. ([4:17](#))

Part of my responsibility is to look for the ministry potential in others. ([4:19-20](#))

My leadership should produce peace. ([5:9](#))

My actions will speak louder than my words. ([5:16](#))

God doesn't like it when there's division and anger between leaders. ([5:22](#))

I need to follow through with my commitments. ([5:37](#))

People will persecute me. I need to pray for them. That's difficult for me. ([5:44](#))

God wants me to be me. He wants us to be real—not fake. ([6:5](#))

There are some actions people don't see, but God still does. ([6:18](#))

What I do with my money will impact my heart. Interesting that God didn't say it the other way around. Makes me think disciplines with time and money impact the condition of my heart. ([6:21](#))

As a leader, I need to prepare for tomorrow, but I shouldn't worry about tomorrow. ([6:34](#))

If I'm a good leader, my ministry will bear good fruit. The measure of my success is not the input but the outcome. ([7:17](#))

The win isn't for people to hear the message—the win is life application. ([7:24](#))

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Miscellaneous

SWAY

I just wrapped up the book *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* by Ori and Rom Brafman. There were some intriguing thoughts in the book that have the potential to challenge the way we think. Here are some of the lines that grabbed my attention.

“The moment we label a person or a situation, we put on blinders to all evidence that contradicts our diagnosis.”

“The more meaningful a potential loss is, the more loss averse we become. In other words, the more there is on the line, the easier it is to get swept into an irrational decision.”

“When we encounter a new object, person, or situation, the value we assign to it shapes our further perception of it.”

“The price we pay for a ticket affects our enjoyment of the performance.”

“A single word has the power to alter our whole perception of another person-and possibly sour the relationship before it even begins.”

“When we’re in the position to make a diagnosis, we *all* become overly confident in our predictive abilities and overly optimistic about the future... We often ignore all evidence that contradicts what we want to believe.”

“If you’ve ever been fortunate enough to work for a boss who values and believes in you, you’ll know that you tend to rise to meet the high expectations set for you. On the other hand, there’s nothing that will make you feel more incompetent and demoralized than a supervisor who is convinced you don’t have what it takes.”

“Rather than assuming the final product speaks for itself, it’s good to remember to regularly engage and update members of our team during the process.”

“Neuropsychologists have shown that activities associated with addictive substances and those associated with monetary rewards are both processed by the pleasure center. Because monetary incentives present such a strong allure to us, they distort our thinking.”

“The presence of a dissenter-any dissenter, no matter how incompetent-still made it possible for a large segment of participants to deviate from the majority and give the right answer.”

“When we adopt the long view, on the other hand, immediate potential losses don’t seem as menacing.”

“If we got kicked out and the board brought in a new CEO, what do you think he would do?... Why shouldn’t you and I walk out the door, come back, and do it ourselves?”

“We make diagnostic errors when we narrow down our field of possibilities and zero in on a single interpretation of a situation or person.”

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Decision Making

HIRE USING THE “I LIKE YOU” TEST

Last week one of the folks on my team was chatting with my wife, Emily. During the conversation, that staffer shared:

“I can tell Tony hired everyone on our team because we all get along so well.”

That’s encouraging for me to hear. Not to be too boastful, but it’s true. I get to work each day with a world-class team that has huge capacity. It’s a dream team. Here’s the best part — I actually enjoy hanging out with them as well. They’re fun!

You can have that kind of team as well, but you’ll have to work at it.

You’ll have to have tough conversations when you find that someone is in the wrong role or doesn’t have the right personality fit.

You’ll have to hire people using the “I Like You” test instead of just using the “Can You Perform the Job?” test.

You’ll have to be patient (it took me about 18 months) before you can bring the right people together.

You’ll have to dream big to attract big talent.

You’ll have to be intentional about scheduling “fun time” to complement the “work like maniacs” time.

You’ll have to give people the freedom to do their thing instead of just telling them where they can go.

You’ll have to be interested in things like their family, their health, their spiritual journey and not just their job performance.

You could have a dream team as well, but something tells me you’re too lazy, too afraid or not disciplined enough to make that happen.

Hope you feel challenged by that statement. You should be. Our mission is a big one, and you deserve a dream team to accomplish it.

It also makes ministry and life a lot more fun.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Staffing

EMPOWERMENT VERSUS DELEGATION

On Friday, part of the discussion I had with the coaching network guys was related to the differences between empowerment and delegation. We took about 15 minutes to brainstorm a list of the differences between the two. Here’s part of where we landed:

Here’s the reality. It’s a lot easier to delegate tasks. And, there are instances, particularly in emergency response situations, where delegation is necessary. In the long run, though, empowering other leaders is the way to build healthier organizations. It will be messier along the

way, but you end up in a place where your organization can have a much bigger impact and more people will be fulfilled in their roles.

Do you agree? What would you add to the list?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Delegation

10 REASONS WHY YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING TO FAIL

I've experienced failures. I've watched others fail. I'm guessing you've seen plenty as well. This morning I tried to think through some common reasons why failure happens. I'm looking forward to some healthy conversation on this one. With that, here are:

10 Reasons Why You're Probably Going to Fail

It's not your passion. If it doesn't make your heart beat fast or cause your mind to race when you're trying to sleep, you're probably doing the wrong thing.

You don't have a plan. You need a vision, and you need to identify specific steps to make that vision become reality. That includes a financial plan. (I happen to believe you need direction from God on this.)

You're waiting for it to be perfect. Test-drive it. Beta-test that new idea. You'll fall into the trap of inaction if you think it has to be absolutely right from day one.

You're not willing to work hard. Everything worth pursuing in my life has involved discipline and perseverance.

It'll outgrow you. Keep learning. Keep growing. But more importantly, build a team of people including leaders that can be who you're not.

You've had success in the past. I've watched organizations hang on to a good idea for too long. Time passes. Momentum fades. It's risky to let go of the past and jump on the next wave.

You're unwilling to stop doing something else. Complexity is easy. Simplicity takes discipline. You can't build a healthy marriage if you're unwilling to give up dating other women. Who/what do you need to stop dating?

You won't build a team of friends. Anyone can hire from a resume. You need to find people you want to share life with. In the long run, great relationships will get you out of bed in the morning.

You won't have the tough conversations. When breakdown happens (and it always does), someone needs to put on their big-boy pants and initiate the difficult conversation that leads to relational healing.

You're afraid of failure. When fear consumes you, it will cause you to do stupid things. You'll let negativity distract you. You'll embrace the known, and grow comfortable with mediocrity. The more often you fail, though, the more often you'll find success.

Here's the deal. I don't think this list is just about personal failure. This is about organizational failure (your ministry, your church plant, etc.). This is about business failure (your start up, your

turnaround effort, etc.). This is about relational failure (your marriage, your dating relationship, etc.). The same principles apply.

Now it's your turn. What else should be on the list? What are some other ingredients for failure you've experienced or witnessed? What would you add/delete from the list?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Miscellaneous

FINDING TALENT

I wish I had the time (and the brain) to come up with just a small percentage of the insightful thoughts that Seth Godin generates. Until that happens, chew on this [quote from Seth](#) from earlier today:

“...Organizations that work best with extraordinary talent are almost certainly not investing enough in finding and developing it. If marketing works so well that you spend a fortune on it, why aren't you marketing your jobs? If talent is so important that you are betting the company on it, why aren't you actually investing in finding and retaining that talent?”

What do you think? Does this principle apply to ministry organizations with either staff or volunteer roles? Have you noticed any non-profits that are doing this effectively?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Staffing

ARE YOU EFFECTIVELY RAISING UP NEW LEADERS?

One of the frequent topics of conversations around here is *how do we develop future leaders at NewSpring?* It's a frequent conversation because we don't know the answer.

Leaders are developed around here. We just don't have an intentional plan for making that happen...if that makes sense. In my opinion we have a great leadership environment. And, we have great leaders. We just don't have a specific strategy for developing future leaders. That's why I'm asking you for help.

I'm not the only person looking for help. Here's an excerpt from an email message I received earlier this week:

“I've recently been given a new and daunting assignment from our Senior Pastor. He has asked to me to begin creating a Leadership Development Program here at our church for people within our congregation to move into other areas of ministry. Specifically, we have several guys that we see carrying the potential to be strong ministry leaders, associate pastors or even campus pastors at the point when we are ready to go multi-site. However, one thing that is severely lacking is a means by which we develop these guys. And I have to tell you I'm not really sure where to start.

Do you have any suggestions maybe from what you're doing at NewSpring or from other churches that have leadership development programs that are effectively raising up new leaders? If you have any books, links or other resources you would refer, I would be really grateful.”

So, what are your thoughts?

Are you experiencing success with leadership development at your church? If so, what are you doing?

What books or websites would you recommend on this topic?

Or, maybe more importantly, do you think it's possible to develop leaders, or are leaders discovered?

This is an all-skate. I want to hear lots of conversation. Pick one or more of these questions and let's hear your thoughts.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Developing Leaders

LEAVE THE AWESOME

I really believe that less is more. I've talked about that on a number of occasions here. This is just [one example](#).

Yesterday I saw a great post on the Zen Habits blog. The post is called "[Pare It Down: Cut Away the Extraneous to Leave the Awesome](#)." I loved these very practical steps to paring it down:

Spend a few minutes thinking about what is really essential. What is it that you really want above all else? What is it about your product or service that the customer really wants? What is it you are really trying to communicate? If you had to pick one thing about whatever you're doing, what would it be?

Be bold. Don't be afraid to throw stuff out. You can always add stuff back in later — remember that less is better as long as you're leaving in the essentials.

What is blocking the essentials? Sometimes the awesome in something is being blocked by other things — can you remove those things to show the awesome and let it shine? Remove the noise to let the music be heard.

Come back to it. Sometimes you can't see the extraneous the first time you start paring down. So do your best, and then come back later and try again. You might be able to pare down even more this time. Keep coming back as long as you can — the more you pare, the better in most cases.

Within churches and in my life, I see so many opportunities to embrace simplicity. For example:

Fewer meetings equal more meaningful relational connections.

Fewer commitments equal more time with family.

Fewer words equal a more focused message.

Fewer ministry programs equal a clearer path for discipleship.

Fewer rules equal more time to love God and love others.

Where do you see the "less is more" principle playing out in your life and ministry?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Focus, Simplicity

HUMILITY

After several people recommended I pick it up, I finally got the hint. Apparently, I needed to hear this message. With that in mind, I read through *Humility* by C.J. Mahaney while I was at the beach last weekend. Here are some of the highlights from my reading:

“Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God’s holiness and our sinfulness.”

“The real issue here is not *if* pride exists in your heart; it’s *where* pride exists and *how* pride is being expressed in your life.

“The proud person seeks to glorify himself and not God, thereby attempting in effect to deprive God of something only He is worthy to receive.”

“Show me a church where there’s division, where there’s quarreling, and I’ll show you a church where there’s pride.”

“Most of us spend more time listening to lies than we do speaking truth to ourselves.”

“Where there’s worry, where there’s anxiousness, *pride* is at the root of it. When I am experiencing anxiety, the root issue is that I’m trying to be self-sufficient. I’m acting independent of God.”

“For too many, their understanding of God’s activity has been reduced to the spectacular, and it appears to them that the spectacular is something that happens only to someone else, never to them.”

“Where there’s an absence of edifying words there’s also normally the presence of pride and of self-righteousness, because those who are proud are too preoccupied with themselves and think too highly of themselves to care about building others up or to be sensitive to their true needs.”

“You can’t effectively watch yourself by yourself; you need the discerning eyes of others.”

“The crucial unanswered question is not *whether* we will suffer, but *how we’ll respond* when we suffer.”

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Selflessness

9 DO’S AND DON’TS FOR MINISTRY GROWTH

This isn’t for senior pastors. (Though these same principles apply to your ministry.) And this post isn’t about weekend services. (Though it could be.) This advice is for every church leader who is responsible for a ministry, program or event that functions outside of the weekend services. (I’m pretty confident what I’m about to share is going to tick you off.) Here are:

9 Do’s and Don’ts for Ministry Growth

You don’t need a logo. A new logo isn’t the key to successful ministry. Life change is the key to successful ministry. Only Jesus can change lives. Yes, there are times when you’ll need to update your branding; however, it’s not going to make or break your ministry.

Your fancy flyers won't help. 80% of the people who show up to a weekend service come with a friend who invites them. That same principle applies to your ministry as well. If people aren't inviting their friends, that's likely a ministry problem and not a promotions problem.

Put people first. Life change happens most often within the context of relationships. If your ministry isn't helping people engage in relational connections (inside and outside of the church), then your ministry will not grow.

Lead your ministry. You should focus on that. You aren't gifted at promotions (even though you think you are). You should let communications professionals focus on that, and stop fighting against the people who are trying to help you. Spend more time doing ministry and less time trying to promote your ministry.

Remember: print is dead. (this coming from someone who writes books). It's highly likely that whatever you're printing for your audience will just end up in a trash can. Any business in America relying on print media is dying a slow death. You should always think Web first with an emphasis on interactivity and building relationships.

Don't wait on the church to establish online community. That's *your* responsibility. Most people you're trying to reach won't visit your church's website, but they will engage with your Web presence on Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, your blog, etc.

You probably need to cut programs and events. Less is more. If you have fewer events and less programs, more people will connect with your ministry. Stop confusing them and help them focus on the next appropriate step. ([Check this out.](#))

Grow through volunteers. As much as possible, let staff support ministry and encourage volunteers to be responsible for face-to-face connections with the people you are trying to reach or help. When you take those roles out of the hands of volunteers, you've essentially limited the growth of your ministry...and taken away their responsibility to make disciples.

You are not competing against other ministries. As soon as you sense "your ministry" is competing with another ministry in your church for money, volunteers, space, calendar time, platform promotions, etc., you should resign. You are not a leader. You are, at best, a manager of resources and, at worst, the one holding the entire ministry back from growth and unity.

Agree or disagree? And, what's number 10?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Miscellaneous

SHOULD I PURSUE UNEXCELLENT?

Hey, [Bob](#), if you're still out there, I'd love to pursue a conversation with you on the topic of "excellence." I know it's en vogue these days to downplay the value of excellence in ministry. I'm not buying it, though, and I'm hoping you might help me understand the thinking behind it. These questions popped to mind in reaction to [your recent comment](#).

First of all, what's a "transformational mindset?" Please have patience. I know I'm not the brightest crayon in the box.

Are you saying we should embrace less-than-excellent Bible teaching? Is it OK for us to just give 75% effort in serving others?

If the business world has abandoned excellence, why did Starbucks recently [close all their stores](#) to train all their baristas to make a better espresso?

Do you think God wants us to embrace “average” or “mediocre” instead of excellent? If not, help me better understand your position.

Just in case you’re wondering, I do think there are times when holding too tightly to excellence can be a detriment to churches. For example:

It’s a problem when we pursue excellence at the expense of action. Sometimes we need to be more willing to launch the beta version even though it has flaws.

It’s a problem if we let our expectations for excellence turn into an expectation for perfection.

It’s a problem when we let excellence become an excuse for not delegating or empowering others.

It’s a problem when we let excellence get in the way of doing what God has called us to do.

That said, are you willing to share your thoughts on this topic and hopefully teach me something new in the process?

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Expectations

7 FILTERS FOR LEADERSHIP DECISIONS

One of the advantages of serving with [Perry](#) is that I get to sit under powerful teaching, but I also get to watch him model what it is to be a leader in a growing ministry/organization. Yesterday, as we were meeting in our weekly leadership team gathering, he offered this insight. One of the things that Perry is doing is he’s empowering leaders around him to make decisions. He offered these seven questions as filters for us to consider whether or not we’re making wise decisions.

Does this decision compromise the Gospel?

Will this negatively impact our vision?

Is this something everyone will be genuinely excited about?

Is this just a temporary solution?

Will this decision add more to our plate?

Are we attempting excellence or extravagance?

Am I making this decision for the good of the church or just my area?

From those seven questions, you get a real sense of the values Perry holds high for [NewSpring](#). Those questions will look different for your church or organization, but do you know what your questions are? If not, it’s highly likely that the leaders around you either aren’t empowered to make decisions or they don’t know what a wise decision looks like.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Decision Making

10 STUPIDEST LEADERSHIP MISTAKES I'VE MADE

In case you missed Tim's notes from my keynote session last week, here are the...

10 Stupidest Leadership Mistakes I've Made

1. Hiring too fast and firing too slow. The right people don't need to be managed—they just need to be pointed in the right direction. Jim Collins said, "If the person came to tell you that he or she is leaving to pursue an exciting new opportunity, would you feel terribly disappointed or secretly relieved?" If you'd be relieved, it's time for them to go.

2. Putting the projects before the people. Ecclesiastes 7:18 says, "The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." This is one of those areas where we need to embrace the tension between relating with people and accomplishing the mission/getting the job done.

3. Trying to fix the problem rather than the process. It's like continuing to change diapers instead of potty-training your kids. You can either continue to react to the problem, or you can fix the process. 90% of the time it's a systems-problem rather than a people-problem.

4. Delegating tasks instead of responsibility. I told the story of the three little pigs. "if all I've known is straw houses and I control every detail of their construction, then my leadership will never generate brick house ideas."

5. Assuming it's always black and white. Following rules is easier than the messiness of relationships. Following rules is easier than discerning God's will. The policies or guidelines we establish should actually remove barriers and allow more freedom within our organizations. But, innovative organizations don't value the rules over the mission.

6. Not following my gut. (...or is that the Holy Spirit?) Sometimes when I'm facing a big decision, I try to acquire more information rather than seek God's direction. When we stop listening to God, he stops talking to us. God stopped talking to Abraham for 13 years between the last verse of Genesis 16 and the first chapter of 17. And, sometimes, God requires us to take a step, in faith, before he reveals his plan. Check out Joshua 3.

7. Dwelling on the worst case scenario. I have the spiritual gift of discernment. That can be a positive gift when God's in control of my life. When I try to take control, that "gift" turns into sin. It's called worry or anxiety. I've wasted way too much time worrying about challenges or problems that never happened. This is my biggest area of vulnerability. What's yours?

8. Waiting until there's a problem to provide feedback. I'm encouragement-challenged. My tendency is to only speak up when expectations aren't met. That can create a culture of fear. I need to discipline myself to encourage my team. As Tom Peters has said, "Reward excellent failures. Punish mediocre successes."

9. Staying busy. I've too often made the mistake of assuming that since I'm busy I'm adding value. It's very possible to be constantly busy and be completely ineffective. By the way, email can be the biggest trap of all. If I wanted to, I could spend every hour of every day processing email and getting absolutely nothing accomplished.

10. Spending too much time on the details rather than the dreams. Perry showed me this one. Check out Genesis 11:31-32. Terah intended to go to Canaan. Instead he stopped in Haran. He got stuck there for 205 years. Then he died. Why? Was it disobedience? Did he lose sight of

God's vision? Did he just get too comfortable? Did he settle for less than God's best? When I get too focused on responding to the urgent, I lose sight of the big picture. And, frankly, my tendency is to settle into a routine that's very comfortable but doesn't accomplish the full mission God has for my life and my ministry.

Those are my leadership mistakes. They are a reflection of my personality. They also reflect the sin that's sometimes present in my life. Your list likely looks different. But, do you know your list? You should. Ask yourself. Ask your spouse. Ask your team. Ask God. Don't settle.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Learnings

DO YOU KNOW WHO IS IN YOUR CHURCH? (YOU MAY BE SURPRISED.)

I received an email message from Lucas the other day with a link to [this post](#). Lucas knows this 22-year-old kid attending his church. He's a smart guy—so smart that he's almost wrapped up his PhD. Among other things, the guy runs sound for the church, and he's in a small group.

Turns out, though, that when he's not serving at the church, he's a software developer. This week one of the projects he's been working on went public. He's helping with the development of the new [Garmin nuvifone](#).

It's a good reminder to all of us in ministry leadership that God has brought people with unique gifts, experiences and passions to our churches. Many times they're just waiting on someone to ask for them to step up and serve. Of course, it may take an innovative ministry to fully tap the unique gifts that people are prepared to use. There aren't too many churches, as an example, that are ready to use a software developer to impact the Kingdom. Honestly, I wish there were more.

Lucas, if you're reading, let your friend know I'm more than willing to test out his work on the nuvifone. Thanks for sharing his story.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Discipleship

“DON'T FALL ME DOWN”

This evening after dinner, Brooke, our two-year-old, wanted to jump up on our oldest daughter's lap. As you might guess, any leap for a two-year-old involves a lot of risk. So, before the big jump, she blurted out, “Don't fall me down.”

I guess that fear of taking risks is something we have from birth. Don't you wonder why God created us that way? When so much joy and accomplishment can be experienced through the risks we take in life, why is it that God wired us up to instinctively fear them?

I suppose it all comes down to trust. If you know someone you love and trust is going to catch you, you apparently are willing to take bigger risks. Knowing that, of course, causes control-freaks like me to question how much faith we really have in a sovereign God. Is it wrong for me to admit that sometimes I'm afraid to leap because I'm worried God won't be there to catch me?

There, of course, is a leadership lesson here as well. People are looking for security before they're willing to risk. They want to know if they fail that someone will be there to pick them up. Does it make you wonder who on your team is ready to leap? It should.

What would you be willing to do if you knew someone would be there to *don't fall you down*? Let's commit to take that leap together.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Risk Taking

BEING THE CHURCH

I saw it happen, again, today with my own eyes. A [NewSpring](#) couple had a vehicle that they no longer needed. Rather than selling it, they decided to donate it to the church. At the same time, a young woman in our church needed a vehicle because she was asked to return the car she had been borrowing. Today, she received the keys to her new-to-her car. I love watching the church be the church.

There's a passage in the book of Acts that talks about the early church. Among other things, they were known for sharing everything they had. That same thing happens almost everyday at NewSpring. It's one of the reasons I so love my church family. It's a very generous community. Folks are genuinely interested in helping others. They live out what it means to love God and love others.

You ought to know that this characteristic of NewSpring's ministry didn't happen on accident. I've learned through the years that the local church tends to model what their leaders value. NewSpring is a generous, sharing church because Scripture says we should be and because [Perry](#) models this in his own life. I've seen him give away his own possessions. I've watched him push for our ministry to generously support various community organizations. I've been in the meetings when he's championed giving our resources to other churches. Perry has a huge heart for helping others.

If your church shut its doors today, would your community know it? And, as a Christ-follower, are you generous with your possessions and your financial resources? I hope you have the opportunity to wrestle with these questions. I'm convinced it's a key ingredient to our mission as we bring the message of hope to our communities.

Posted by: Tony Morgan, Modelling

Perry Noble

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART ONE)

I often have the privilege of getting to have lunch with a pastor/church planter. (By the way, Steven NAILED IT with this post in regards to meetings like that!) One of the things I am often asked is, “What do you wish someone would have told you before you began?”

I’ve thought about that a lot...and I can’t say all of this in one posts—so here is a series of posts on this. Beginning with...

#1 - Your Primary Objective Should Be To Be Faithful To Jesus And His Vision.

Sounds simple...but trust me, it isn’t that easy to follow—and there are two reasons for this.

You’ve got to understand that everyone who comes to your church, especially in the early days, will have a vision they feel you need to adapt to. You can identify these people by the phrase, “Well, at my old church we used to...” From the very beginning I have always suggested to people who say that to return to “their old church” because we simply are not heading that direction.

If Jesus has called you to plant a church, if He has birthed a vision in your heart then you MUST be faithful to Him. From day one I have understood that one day I will stand before God and be held accountable by Him for how I led...and I am trying desperately to hear His voice. I want to be faithful.

The second reason for this is that there is so much advice out there on how to begin a church. Just recently I had lunch with a church planter who began discussing their “preview services.” When he asked me about NewSpring’s preview services I said, “We didn’t have them.” When he asked as to why I simply said, “God never said to.”

If you are planting a church then PLEASE—do read books, go to conferences, ask questions...BUT PLEASE, at the end of the day don’t try to do what someone else has done...and don’t try to become something you are not—even if something is a GREAT idea...if God isn’t leading you to do it—DON’T, I can promise if you do it will be a HUGE waste of time.

You and I are called to be faithful to Jesus. How has HE called you to do church? You’ve GOT to get a WORD from HIM...and when you do—pursue it with relentless passion and do not apologize or alter your course for ANYONE!

More on this later...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART TWO)

Following up with my last post on this...

#2 - You WILL Be Tested Within The First Year Of Starting A Church By A Big Giver!

We were! I can remember of at least two instances where there were some people who were giving BIG BUCKS to NewSpring walking away because things were not going along to “their” plan. One exit was ugly, the other was very graceful...and both were hard...because...

As the pastor/leader it is SO EASY to actually believe the lie that God needs a certain individuals money to make sure the church stays afloat. NOT TRUE...Psalm 24:1-2 pretty much says that everything belongs to God—and so that our faith needs to be in HIM and HIS provision and not some perceived “sugar daddy.”

I’ve seen it happen so many times...a big giver walks out the door and the temptation is to adjust the vision so that the money doesn’t leave. You have a choice...and if you sell God’s vision for cash then you will regret it for the rest of your ministry.

#3 - Do WHATEVER It Takes To Grow...and SHUT UP About How Much It Cost!

If I hear/see one more pastor/church planter complain about how much a conference cost and/or say they can’t afford something I am going to punch them...in the throat!

The Bible says in Proverbs 4:6-8 that we need to get wisdom—NO MATTER WHAT IT COSTS US!

Two things here...

Please spare me the e-mails about how we here at NewSpring are a big church and can therefore afford to go to conferences and such. YOU HAVE NO FLIPPIN IDEA WHAT THE HECK YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT! (Yes, I am fired up!) I’ve been a FREAK about learning and growing from day one! We were spending money to bring in consultants the first year we existed as a church. I remember loading up a plane FULL of people in 2003 to take them to C3...and it RADICALLY changed the way many of them viewed ministry.

I’ve always been “that guy” who, when given an opportunity to learn, stretch and grow, would get on a plane to WHEREVER and pay WHATEVER to learn. If you want to learn and grow...then there are PLENTY of opportunities to do so...you just have to pull your head out of your rear end for long enough to know that people aren’t just going to give you everything you ask for...learning will cost.

The second sort of piggy backs off of the first...those who are willing to pay the price will grow...and those who complain about how much things cost and cry about things...you will stay EXACTLY where you are (unless you go backwards.)

I STUDY church planters like crazy because I want to learn from them...I believe the guys just beginning are some of the most creative and innovative people on the planet...and the ones getting it done, the ones making a difference, ALL OF THEM—they are absolute FREAKS about going to the right places and connecting with the right people. They pay for plane tickets, hotel rooms, meals...WHATEVER it takes if they believe it will make their church more effective for God’s Kingdom.

Everything isn’t free...so SHUT UP about paying money when Jesus actually gave His life!!!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART THREE)

It's been awhile since I've blogged about this—here is my first and second posts on it if you forgot...

#3 - You Cannot Take People To A Place You've Never Been!

One of the things that I like to do is travel...but whenever I go somewhere new I am a little anxious because, well, I've never been there! (Duh!) However, the next time I go I am a little more relaxed and feel comfortable in giving direction to those around me. The same is true with my calling to ministry!

One of the mistakes I believe church planters/pastors often make is that we want our churches to go on incredible journeys with God—yet we are not personally on going on an incredible journey with God. We want to see our people grow closer to Jesus—yet we aren't growing closer to Jesus.

And that just won't work!

If you want God to lead your church to new places then you've got to understand that He wants to take you there first. If you want your church to get a fresh word from God then you need to beg Him for a fresh word for yourself.

If we are not being faithful in our personal walk with Christ then how in the world are we ever going to hear His voice in regards to the direction of the church and messages. I personally believe if we would spend more time on our faces before God and less time on the internet searching for sermon illustrations that God would continue to rock our worlds—AND the people in our church!

#4 - Have Fun!

Seriously, Christians (especially pastors/church leaders) are known for lots of things—but having fun is not one of them!

Ministry is TOUGH...and if we don't take time to pull away and just have fun we can easily think that life is supposed to be miserable and difficult...and those who aren't experiencing those things are “just in some sort of sinful lifestyle!”

One of the things the Lord has been revealing to me lately is that I need to have more fun...and so both in my personal life and my life at the church I am planning more things so that I can actually enjoy this life and ministry He has given me.

What's in the works staff wise? Not sure...but I am seriously thinking about a HUGE staff dodge ball game! Yes, EVERYONE would be required to play—AND seriously, it could get very violent with as many competitive people as we have!!! (Staff members—YES, I am serious!)

Personally? I looking at going to Atlanta to drive a race car soon!!! (PRAY!) Also, I am probably going to be traveling to the ATL to see a comedian...never been to a live comedy show. AND I have a few other things in mind as well.

If what Jesus said in John 10:10 is true then Christians should be the most joyful, excited and FUN people on the planet—ESPECIALLY church leaders!!!

SO...what are you going to do for fun?

BTW—whenever I read Matthew 17:24-30 I laugh because I think this was Jesus having fun (AND yes, He was teaching an unforgettable lesson!!!)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART FOUR)

I am continuing this series, which has been fun so far...this next lesson I want to share has been a painful one and so this entire post will be dedicated to it...

#5 - You Will Be Criticized When God Begins To Move—Expect It And Get Over It.

I've never met a devil worshiper—to my knowledge that is. When I first became a Christian I was convinced that I needed to do all that I could to be ready to combat the evil forces of darkness that were and are associated with the occult, so I read and studied and prepared and...and...and...nothing.

Now, looking back over the past 18 years of ministry I have realized something - although I've never met a devil worshiper...I have seen hundreds and thousands who serve him faithfully under the disguise of religion.

The first mistake I made was not understanding where criticism comes from. Paul plainly says in Ephesians 6:12 that our struggle is not against flesh and blood (or bloggers) but against the evil one.

I really hate to make it this simple...but if God IS moving in your church or ministry, if people ARE meeting Christ, if people are taking next steps by being baptized and then those same people are joining together to reach other people for Christ then let me ask a simple question - WHO WOULD WANT TO TEAR SOMETHING LIKE THAT APART? (Hmmm....)

If it's a move of God then why would God move someone to attack it? (Jesus was actually accused of being demon possessed and the work He was doing was attacked by...uh...yep, the religious. See Matthew 12:22-30)

I've heard other well meaning pastors say that they try to learn from their critics. If that is their approach then I say "go for it;" however, I ignore them. I have no desire to try and learn ANYTHING from them. Some call that arrogant—I call it focus! Several reasons why...

#1 - Who Is Saying It - The overwhelming majority of criticism I have faced has come from people who send anonymous e-mails OR ones from fake accounts. (The internet truly is a place for cowards!) SO...they aren't even willing to own up to what they are trying to say!

#2 - Critics Are Not Normal People - Seriously, if you have someone who checks out your website daily just to see what "you got wrong" (which is pride I think) AND they go to your churches website, listen to your sermons and then critiques them on-line...uh...seriously, who in the heck has time for that? Is that normal? Isn't that a little on the unhealthy side of obsessive compulsive? I don't know about you—but I just don't have time for that!

I would say to a man who is doing that to repent of your heterosexual man crush and get obsessed with Jesus and your wife...OR to a woman I would say show Jesus and your husband the attention that you show me...I think everyone would be much happier!!!

#3 - The Way They Say Things - You can tell by the way they word their attacks if it was motivated out of a love for God and others...or if insecurity and a “desire to be right” (pride) has caused the words to fly.

#4 - Their Blind Spots - A critic doesn't know you, they don't see you on a daily basis, therefore there is zero accountability in regards to what they say about you. They don't know your heart, your passion, what keeps you up at night. They don't know your battles and personal struggles. They don't see you as a person but rather a personality. I heard TD Jakes say recently that when people see you as a personality and not a person then they have no problem saying horrible things about you.

I wasted time with critics—seriously. I let them take me from my family and my ministry many times, and I lost sleep over some of the things they've said. BUT...I've not looked at a “critical website” in nearly a year and I just don't respond to negative press—I am passionately obsessed with people who need Jesus and not the “expert” in the stands who refuses to put down his soda and peanuts and get in the game!

Some may ask, “But Pastor P...do you just fly by the seat of your pants and not listen to anyone?” I will address that in my next post on “What I Wish Someone Would Have Told Me.” (The short answer is HECK NO!!! If it were not for the people around me I would have made some really bad decisions!!!)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART FIVE)

A few more things to go in this series of posts in regards to the question church planters ask me, “What do you wish someone would have told you before you began?”

#6 - NEVER, I MEAN EVER, APOLOGIZE FOR PASSION!

One of the things missing among most Americans, especially the ones in the church, is passion!

I heard a speaker say once, “In our country we don't dance, we don't sing...we don't even sin with very much enthusiasm anymore.”

AND, unfortunately, when someone does have passion, especially in relation to Jesus and/or the church—they are labeled as nuts and freaks. (When, if the same person were passionate about Oprah or NASCAR then, for SOME reason, that would be acceptable.)

I've met many young church planters FULL of passion...they dream big dreams, pray huge prayers and refuse to shut up about the vision that God has given them...which, unfortunately, threatens some “Christians” who do not want to be a part of a movement of God.

For some reason, if a pastor or church leader shows passion, it seems to be completely unacceptable. (I am not talking about the “non-Christian media,” I am talking about other Christians!!!)

One of the things that people have taken jabs at me for in the past is my passion. AND...that is fair, especially for the ones from church backgrounds because (JUST BEING HONEST) most pastors lack passion to do great things for God—instead they want to keep the sheep happy and somehow catch the attention of the church with a few more hundred members in the next town.

Pastors want “nice” church services...ones that are designed with everyone in mind except for Jesus. BUT—I’ve always said—if Christians (especially pastors) actually BELIEVED that the TOMB is EMPTY—it would show!!!

Churches don’t need men who carry around resumes in their briefcases, looking for the next best thing. (I literally saw this in seminary—nearly every pastor had a resume!) They need men FULL of passion and vision—men set on fire by God—ones who feel like they will explode unless they do & say what God has commanded—and are SO dedicated to it that, if they have to go at it alone—they will!

I have made many mistakes as a leader—and the list is LONG of the things that I regret doing; however, I do not EVER regret the passion in which I have pursued all that God has called me to do.

I REFUSE to be complacent about the church—GOD’S CHURCH! All through Scripture we see a passionate God with an incredible message—people who hear His voice and follow are SET FREE...and for some reason I just think THAT should excite us more than a young man carrying a pig skin across a painted white line.

The church was God’s idea...and personally, I believe in it with all my heart. I believe the message of Jesus Christ exchanging places with me and paying for my sin is THE single greatest news on the planet—and I absolutely REFUSE to allow non passionate people to quench the fire God has placed inside of me. (Jeremiah 20:9)

The book of Revelation is FILLED with passion—passionate WORSHIP (and it’s LOUD)—passionate people—AND a passionate God who finally separates those who have responded to His knock from those who have not. (Revelation 3:20)

This thing inside of me...the vision that God has given me for NewSpring...it’s not mine, I could have NEVER thought this up. BUT now that He’s placed it in me—IT BURNS...and so when I speak of the church and the vision...I cannot help but be filled with passion.

Never, I mean ever apologize for passion. The world does not need anymore pastors and church leaders who merely desire to marry, bury, dress to please everyone and try their best to sit on important denominational committees that accomplish NOTHING for the Kingdom...the world needs churches with men and women FULL of passion, who actually believe that God loves people and sent His Son Jesus to prove it...and do EVERYTHING it takes to get that message out!

WOW...I’m fired up...I need to go scream!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART SEVEN)

We are coming to the conclusion of this series regarding the question most church planters ask me, “Perry, what do you wish you would have known before starting this ministry.” It’s been fun...

#7 - Be True To Who God Designed You To Be

Pastors/church leaders (OR ANYONE for that matter) - please read this next sentence very carefully - you will never, I mean EVER, do life and/or ministry in such a way that wins the approval of everyone—so STOP TRYING. (Please see Galatians 1:10)

(I wrote an entire post on this back in April of last year entitled, “Playing for an audience of one,” if you want to read more about that!)

Early on in ministry I actually fell into the trap that it was actually my calling to make sure that everyone liked me—and that successful ministry was equal to being popular among everyone who darkened the doors of NewSpring Church.

Like it or not—EVERYONE wants to be liked by EVERYONE...seriously, I hate the fact that, at times, I disappoint people...and at one time I allowed pleasing people to consume me...and in doing so I was FAILING in two ways because, #1 - No one can ever please everyone and... #2 - In trying to please people I was greatly displeasing God.

God wired me in a unique way. I use comedy. I laugh a lot. I am A-D-D. I am not “deep.” I love Clemson. I hate cats (yes, even yours!) I wear blue jeans. I make fun of religious idiots. I am “abrasive” at times. I get emotional about the church and what I perceive to be God’s passion for it.

Bottom line...I am who God made me, and when I try to deviate from His shaping of my life to try to be what others expect I always make everyone around me miserable...and I dishonor God.

I’ve had people tell me before that I should never say I hate cats (I do—even yours) and that I should NEVER declare what football team is my favorite (GO TIGERS!) I could go on...but pastors, I promise you that you will say or do something each and every week that will offend the personal preferences of someone in your church.

First of all...I think that we should never purposefully try to offend another individual from the stage...but if you are being true to who God has called you to be and are, with all your heart trying to honor Jesus Christ...then let people get offended.

The apostle Paul did...

Jesus did...

And if it is our goal to be more like Him then we need to have our eyes locked on God and become exactly who He designed us to be! I cannot help who does and does not like me...but I can help whether or not I am becoming who I feel that Jesus has created me to be. I am not perfect...but I am striving to do what Paul talked about in Philippians 3:12-14...and if THIS is my goal and NOT pleasing others...somehow I think that is what God wants.

Who has God called you to be? Are you being true to His calling?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART EIGHT)

I keep saying this series is about to end...but then I keep thinking of things that I really do wish someone would have told me. So here goes..

#8 - Do Not Be Arrogant

I've always said that one of the most dangerous things God could give to someone is success. I've seriously seen people abuse God's favor...and the reason I recognize it so well is because I used to be among that crowd.

When we first began as a church we had 15 people meeting in a living room...and on our first Sunday we had 115 people show up. (January 16, 2000) Over the next several years we began to grow pretty steadily and actually moved locations once because of God blessing us with new people.

Then...it happened! On August 11th, 2002 we had 506 people—the next week we had 970, two weeks after than we had to add a service and then two weeks after that we had 1,600 people there.

People always wanted to do “what did you do?” Uh...we still don't know! I am being dead serious when I say we didn't launch a new program. We didn't do a mass mailer. We didn't do door to door visits...it just happened.

BUT...as I look back on that time and have very fond memories of what we saw God do...how I began to react still causes me to shake until this day...

I became cocky—arrogant—prideful. I began to think that our way of doing church was the only way—and that if ANYONE was not in line with OUR vision as a church then they were wrong. (I am not talking about core values here...but rather style!)

I didn't realize that I was where I was because of two reasons—the blessings of God and the favor of God—NEITHER of which I deserved.

It took awhile...but God kicked my butt. He allowed me to see that not everyone has to be a Fellowship, a Northpoint, a Willow Creek OR a NewSpring—the thing that mattered was people meeting Christ and growing up in Him...and as long as that was happening the “how's” needed to be left up to God and His direction to church leaders.

I almost allowed pride AND insecurity to completely destroy God's work...and God completely humbled me in 2005 to the point where I realize that every work He does is unique...and that HIS vision for each church will not look exactly the same...and I need to be secure enough to admit that I am not the only leader and NewSpring is not the only church that happens to be doing something right!

Church planter, pastor - PLEASE allow God to be God! If He's blessing you—rejoice! And if He's blessing someone else—rejoice and STOP telling all of your buddies, “Yeah, I just don't like what's going on over at such and such church.” If God's in it then I am positive He doesn't really care what you and I think.

God is SO MUCH BIGGER than our human minds can comprehend...and so is His plan for His church! It takes different types of churches to reach different types of people...and once again, as long as people are meeting Christ and being challenged to take next steps...THAT'S AWESOME!!!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART NINE)

First of all, it has been brought to my attention that I skipped “part six” in this series...and for all of you type A's out there that have had their lives disrupted because of this error...I sincerely apologize. :-) Seriously, I didn't know I skipped part six and I do appreciate the e-mails letting me know; however, since I am all about going forward we will go ahead with part nine—we just can't go backwards!

#9 - Never, I MEAN EVER, Underestimate The Importance And Power Of Prayer

Whenever I read Acts chapter one I am amazed at how it ends...a group of 120 people praying and seeking God. (Aren't you glad they hadn't read any of the current books that suggests that God wants to keep the church small?) Then, in the next chapter we see 3,000 people (interesting, someone counted) receiving Christ and being baptized. It all began with people praying.

At the end of Acts chapter four (Acts 4:23-31) we see a scene where Peter and John are released from prison, go back to their group & inform them of all that is going on...AND THEY PRAY! What happens during that time...the Holy Spirit enables them to speak God Word with boldness...all because people were willing to pray.

Prayer isn't just a good idea when we can't think of anything else to do. It isn't something to tack on to every Christian meeting to make us feel better about ourselves. It should never take a backseat to anything...it should be THE THING that guides the people in the church on a personal basis.

Prayer works—we've seen it over and over here at NewSpring Church. I remember the early days after we had hired Lee; in fact, it was July of 2000 and our secretary at the time came to me and said, “Perry, we just paid the bills for the month and the checking account is low, REALLY low.” She showed me the totals and I freaked out!!!

I went home completely torn up about the situation...our church was seven months old, had hardly ANYONE old enough in it to have a job and tithe...and we were literally weeks from

going under financially. I didn't know what else to do—so I began BEGGING God to intervene. In fact, the next day I called every leader in the church and DID NOT ask them for money...I just asked them to begin praying.

The next week the offering was DOUBLE what it normally was...I'm not kidding. I got together with the leadership and celebrated...and then DEMANDED that they pray harder. The next week the offering was even more...and the week after that it increased again. We had NEVER seen anything like it—AND IT WAS JULY, typically when church people take their tithe check and give it to people at the beach! :-) EVER since that time I pray for the giving at NewSpring every single day!

There was another time when we received a bill for \$1,000 in the mail that we did not have the money for—AT ALL. I called the staff together (this is was in 2001) and asked them to pray. Within three days a man in our church approached me and said, “Perry, I just received a \$1,000 bonus at work...is there anywhere it can be used in the church?”

Prayer works! Church planters/pastors—please hear me on this one! One of the most dangerous things I am noticing in the church world is that many leaders are no longer DESPERATE for God. We would rather read blogs, purchase the latest and greatest equipment and talk strategy than get on our faces before God so that HE can instill a WHITE HOT vision inside of us.

I wish someone would have told me how important it is...and, oh yeah...the larger the church has gotten the more amped up my prayer life has become. I beg God every day that He allow me to hear His voice, after all, it IS His church...He knows best...and if I doing what He wants then it is already blessed.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME (PART TEN)

Lucretia (my wife) asked me the other day how long this series was going to go on...NOT because she hated it but because she was curious. I told her that I thought I had two more posts...so here's part ten (which is really part nine because I missed part six!) :-)

#10 - Senior Pastor/Church Leader—You MUST Take Responsibility For Setting Your Schedule.

When I first became a senior pastor I thought every time opportunity knocked that it meant that God was knocking and so I had to say yes...and it caused me to set a pace that no human being could EVER sustain.

When people would call and ask me to go to lunch, I would go. When people would ask Lucretia and I over to supper—we went. When organizations would call and ask me to speak for them—I obliged. At one time I did ALL of the weddings, the funerals, the follow up...and just about anything else you can think of—AND, as I mentioned above...I NEARLY FRIED MYSELF.

Something all senior pastors must battle through is the guilt associated with saying no. Why? Because the previous generation of pastors did it all for the flock, never really asking for help and not allowing others to discover their potential in Christ...THUS today we have hundreds and thousands of impotent churches who were built on the ministry of one man—and thus died when he left.

One of the statements I make all of the time around NewSpring Church is, “The church IS NOT effective when the pastor ministers to the people, but rather when the body ministers to the body!” One of the most liberating things I’ve ever seen in Scripture is the story of Acts 6:1-7 where the apostles actually said that it would not be right to wait on tables...BUT they raised up leaders who made sure the job was done. (Thus freeing up their schedule so that more people could be reached for the kingdom—see Acts 6:7)

Pastors, hear my heart...you cannot base effective ministry on whether or not you are meeting the expectations of everyone in your church. If THAT is the definition of success then Jesus pretty much missed the mark, didn’t He? BUT...even a casual glance at Scripture clearly points out that Jesus refused to allow the expectations of others to dictate the direction of His ministry. He FAITHFULLY followed the Father.

I took responsibility for my schedule two years ago...and it has set me free. I say NO to an overwhelming number of the “opportunities” that come my way so that I can say YES to the greatest opportunities that God has given me - Lucretia, Charisse and NewSpring. (In that order!)

Pastors, one more thing...and I am just being honest. You can work your butt off for the church, completely fry yourself emotionally, spiritually and physically, begin making bad decisions (maybe even some REALLY bad ones) AND...the church you’ve slaved for, when you begin to “fall off” in your performance, will DROP YOU like a bad habit! I’ve seen it—you have to!

I am NOT trying to cause doubt and division...but I do want to warn you of the church that will work you to death and scream your praises while you do so...I once heard a wise man say, “Those that deify will also crucify—they screamed “Hosanna” on one day...and in less than a week were yelling “crucify Him.”

I say this because I am sick and tired of seeing pastors work their tail off for lazy church members and then, when their lives fall apart OR marriages go bad OR children begin to rebel...those SAME church members who once sang their praises often turn on them and begin to want to “vote them out” so that they can obtain some more fresh meat to tear into...all in the name of Christ. (For some reason...I am thinking He is not happy about that pattern!)

Pastors...our job is to seek Jesus with every ounce of energy and passion we have...and to train the people to do the work of the ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-16 is VERY clear on this!) THAT WAY...everyone gets to participate in advancing God’s Kingdom and seeing God build His church.

SO...go ahead and set realistic expectations from the beginning. Raise people up to DO the work of the ministry instead of trying to do it all. Love your wife, your children and then your church...and don’t let the expectations of others trump the expectations and calling of God on your life.

One more note on this—YES, tragedy’s take place...things come up...audibles MUST be called from time to time...but those should be the exception, NOT the rule.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

TOP SEVEN STUPID FINANCIAL MISTAKES THAT I'VE MADE—

PART ONE

Joe preached an awesome sermon this past Sunday...and I can honestly say that the dude is smokin' what he's sellin'. I began reflecting on his talk and about how he is very upfront about the fact he made some dumb mistakes with money...

SO DID I...and I wanted to share them with you...

#1 - I Did Not Place Jesus First In My Finances

OR...in other words...I did not tithe.

I used the excuse that I could not afford to tithe...and it was through some painful financial lessons that God actually showed me that I could not afford NOT to tithe. God kept bringing me back to Matthew 6:21 and Matthew 6:24 over and over again...and in the fall of 1999 I completely surrendered the 10%. (And I've never missed it!)

#2 - I treated tithing as the finish line.

When I began tithing I sort of expected God to strike up the heavenly marching band...and for about a year I was quite proud of my newly formed spiritual discipline...until...

In the summer of 2000 Jason Wilson, our Executive Pastor, was speaking at NewSpring Church and said, "We all know that Scripture says to tithe...what I want to ask tonight is what are you doing with the other 90% to advance His Kingdom; after all, He does own it all!"

That statement hit me in the face like a ton of bricks...Psalm 24:1 became more real to me than ever before...and that night I surrendered the other 90% to Jesus!

Tithing isn't the finish line...it's the starting point...God has called us to be generous givers—HE IS!!! (II Corinthians 9:15)

#3 - I thought I could NEVER get out of debt.

When Lucretia and I got married on April 8, 2000 we had over \$100,000 worth of debt and DIDN'T EVEN OWN A HOME. It was all credit cards, student loans and ridiculous purchases (all made by me!)

I felt trapped—heck, I was trapped...and I had just about given up hope until I heard about this guy named Dave Ramsey. It was in one of his all day sessions that I began to understand that I could get out of debt...but it was going to take sacrifice, a lifestyle adjustment...but it COULD be done!

In November of 2007 Lucretia and I became debt free...we owe on nothing except for the house. Trust me—if we can do it—YOU CAN TOO!!!

(By the way...if you are making one of these mistakes...OR any of the next four that I will talk about later on this week...and you do not MAKE it a priority to get to Joe's class this weekend...you're passing on an incredible opportunity! Seriously, there is NO REASON for you to be in debt...when Jesus sets us free...WE ARE FREE, and yet so many Christians go and enslave themselves to debt! BREAK FREE THIS WEEKEND!!! BE HERE!)

Stay tuned for the other four...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

TOP SEVEN STUPID FINANCIAL MISTAKES THAT I'VE MADE— PART TWO

Following up from my last post on this...

#4 - Seeking to live the “minimum payment” lifestyle.

I remember my first credit card...after getting it I stopped at a sporting goods store and bought a gun. (Just like all pastors should!) It was \$300...and when I got the bill in the mail the next month the payment was ONLY \$15!!! (I didn't know what 19% interest meant!) It was the beginning of a PAINFUL lesson for me—making the minimum payment is NOT a great financial plan!

Within four years I was carrying maxed out balances on around seven credit cards and “successfully” making the minimum payments every month...which was KILLING ME financially. I reasoned that if I continued to make the minimum payments that I would one day be out of debt...which WAS true...but “that day” would have been in the year 2900 at the rate I was going!

#5 - Transferring credit card balances

Don't roll your eyes...some of you do this! I would get a “convenient” credit card offer in the mail and it would say, “transfer your balances today and get no interest for six months.” What the offer didn't tell you is that the interest rate was an arm and a leg after that six months.

I always told myself that I could pay off the balance within six months—WHICH NEVER HAPPENED! I realized then that Proverbs 22:7 was/is true...in just four years of having a credit card (which was only going to be used in case of an “emergency”) I had DISCOVERED that my VISA to financial freedom wasn't in obtaining more AMERICAN OBSESS but rather in turning over MASTER CARD to Jesus instead of the banks!

#6 - STUPID car decisions.

I used to be the guy who said, “I will always have a car payment.”

I used to be the guy that when a car needed a repair I would say, “Go get another one, you don't want to sink money into that old thing.” (Which, by the way, is STUPID financial advice! Seriously! Spending \$300 to fix a leak...or \$45,000 on a new car—DUH!!!)

So...because of my desire to have a new car every year and a half (no, I am not making that up) I kept trading them in...and discovered what the term “upside down” means. (It means, “I am a stupid, materialistic person”–at least that’s what it meant to me!)

I once financed a car that was two years old for 84 months at a 12% interest rate...DUMB!!!

Today I own my cars...they do not own me...and that is a very freeing feeling. Most people I have talked to who are strapped financially could free themselves up so much if they would just sell their car...but their desire for status rather than financial freedom will prevent them from it most of the time.

#7 - Not having an emergency fund.

One of the things that Joe and Dave teach is that emergencies are going to happen, the car is going to break down, the kids are going to get sick, the tire is going to go flat...and that if money is set aside for these emergencies then they are less worrisome when they take place.

You CAN set aside an emergency fund...Joe will teach you how if you will sign up for his class...seriously, BE HERE!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

SEVEN JOY KILLERS IN MINISTRY

One of the most powerful things a pastor (or any human being for that matter) has is JOY...Scripture says in Nehemiah 8:10 that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

However, after spending a lot of time with pastors one of the things I have noticed is how many of us seem to have a lack of joy–what are the things that rob us?

#1 - Comparison - If you compare yourself to other churches then you will always be in some sort of depressed mode–there is always someone else out there who is seemingly growing faster or being more creative. Compare yourself ONLY to the vision God gave you.

#2 - Critics - If you hyper focus on them they can seem larger than the world...my advice, don’t swim with the sharks, don’t eat yellow snow and don’t listen to people who don’t love you and desire nothing more than to tear you down!

#3 - Being Busy - There are so many pastors/church leaders out there who feel like all they do is spin plates...and that one day things “will just get better.” To make matters worse–we now have devices that we carry that make sure our schedule is always in front of us AND that we are always accessible.

#4 - Pride - Daniel 4:37 is so true! Trust me, I know! Anytime I’ve ever thought, “Dang I’m good,” God always brings me down a level...OR FOUR!

#5 - Loss of Perspective - Whenever I think that I am more concerned about the church than Jesus it always causes stress and anxiety, which negates joy! Remember–it is HIS church!

#6 - Lack of Faith - Whenever I desire comfort more than obedience I always know that something is not right! Hebrews 11:6 is SO true!

#7 - No Growth - Whenever I stop reading, listening to other teachers and don't network with other leaders I both feel alone AND I rob NewSpring of the collective wisdom of other people who are much wiser than me. When I feel the pressure of having to come up with every new idea—it ALWAYS robs me of joy!

Next week—how to restore joy in ministry.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Life

HOW TO RESTORE JOY IN MINISTRY (AND LIFE)

Last Friday I posted about seven joy killers in ministry—today I want to share some ways that I believe joy can be restored...at least these are some things that work for me.

#1 - Have Fun!

I was in a conversation recently when a guy asked me, “So what do you do for fun?”

I had no answer!

THEN it dawned on me that I had become all work and no play! SO...this year...2008...I am going to start having some fun. If John 10:10 is true...I need to max out life.

One of the problem with every miserable person I know is that all of us have allowed ourselves to fall into the trap that having any kind of fun is a sin. We use the excuse, “Well, the devil never takes a day off,” never stopping to realize that we should not be attempting to imitate him!

What's your plan for having fun this next month? Seriously! You won't do it unless you plan it—so go for it! (I want to drive a race car. ride a snowmobile and go somewhere out west and kill some sort of innocent animal with a high powered rifle!!!)

#2 - Time Away!

One of the things that has made it on to my schedule for this next year are at least 12 days of solitude. One of the things I need is extended time away with God...that means no e-mail, no cell phone, no television...just me, a Bible, a journal...and peace and quiet. I have one of those days coming up...and every time I have one I leave feeling extremely refreshed.

By the way...these days do not magically appear on your calendar...they must be planned intentionally and guarded like crazy!

#3 - Be An Encourager

Usually when a pastor hears of another pastor or church being successful they REFUSE to rejoice with them. We all go into saying something like this, “Yeah—I heard about that church and what is going on over there is good...but did you know...” AND then we list the things we do not like and tear them apart.

God simply does not reward that type of behavior...He never has. The best thing we can do in ministry (and life) is to be an encourager.

#4 - Take Some Risks

There is NOTHING that will steal a pastors joy more than playing it safe. However, all too often we desire leading in such a way that will cost us nothing.

I have discovered that when I take risks...for some strange reason...I experience joy. Usually when I have not been willing to take risks it is because I am violating Ephesians 4:30...and ANYTIME anyone does this joy just seems to fly away!

What risk do you need to take? Is there a decision you are delaying? Scared? Good!!! If God said to do it then do it!!!

#5 - Understand That God Cares About Your Church More Than You Do!

God knew about NewSpring Church before the foundations of the world...He's been caring about it for thousands of years. AND...after I am gone He will still care for it.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that the church is HIS...that He would build it. He wants it to grow more than I do. He wants to see people come to faith in Him more than I do. He wants to see people set free more than I do.

Anytime I feel like I am the only one who desires good at NewSpring it robs me of my joy...but when I realize that this isn't actually my church, that it belongs to Jesus and He CARES about it more than me...it brings me great joy just to think about the fact that He has allowed me to be involved...and that the best is yet to come!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Life

STEPPING BACK IN TIME

I heard Rick Warren say once, "People keep asking me am I all about taking the church forward—actually, I am about taking it backwards...BACK to the first 300 years of Christianity." He went on to say that the churches desire should be to replicate one of the most EXPLOSIVE growth and influence that it's ever seen.

Last Thursday the team that I serve with had an off site meeting where I asked the question, "What is it about the first three hundred years of the church that made it so powerful?" Here is a list of some of the things we came up with.

Passion for Jesus - the early church was not centered around certain types of ministries but rather a man—they were freakishly obsessed with Jesus! He was REAL to them!

They were non-religious - Paul fought hard to keep the religious idiots away from people who were falling in love with Christ...and the focus was on what Jesus had done to pay for sin and not people's effort to do so.

Strong Community - No one in the early church thought that "their faith" was a private matter—they encouraged one another, supported one another, love one another and provided for one another. They knew the calling to walk with Christ was also a calling to walk with others. (When Jesus was on earth He didn't walk alone!)

Urgency - They were serious about seeing people come to Christ...their was an urgency about them. They didn't care about Roberts Rules of Order or boycotting pagan activities...their focus was on reaching the lost.

Anticipation - There was always a sense that God was about to do something BIG!

A Recognition and respect of leadership - Leaders in the early church were respected and honored...but NOT worshiped. Hebrews 13:7 and Hebrews 13:17 point to both the responsibility that leaders bear and the instructions on how to treat them.

Involvement - EVERYONE was involved in ministry—it wasn't left up to the “paid professionals!”

Willingness to be persecuted - They were willing to lose their lives for the Gospel. Shane Duffey, our creative director, said it best - “They were willing to be killed...and we're rarely willing to be criticized!” DANG!

They saw things happen - They begged God for big things...they believed His vision was larger than repaving a parking lot and sending off second hand clothes to a third world country—they took action - and God honored their vision.

They taught truth - At the end of the day all that matter is what we do with the truth of God's Word—they KNEW this and that was their focus.

This was one of the most exciting conversations I've ever been a part of! Seriously! What God did back then He still longs to do today!!!

Don't get me wrong—I am NOT saying that we should forget about all of the technology that God has given us to advance His message and just go back to meeting in caves! (For those against the use of technology I would simply ask—does your church have air conditioner? Heat? If so...and you condemn the use of technology then you are a hypocrite!)

Paul said in Ephesians 2:19-21 that JESUS is the cornerstone...can you imagine what would happen if a church truly captured the passions and desires of the early church and combined them with the abilities and opportunities that God has given us in our modern world? WOW—the results could...well...the world could be RADICALLY IMPACTED!

Call me crazy...but I am praying that NewSpring can be that church...and that by stepping back we can move forward and see Jesus fulfill Matthew 16:18 over and over again.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Focus, Simplicity

FINISHING WELL—A LESSON FROM THE NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

For some reason every time I read II Timothy 4:6-7 I want to cry like a baby...and I pray that for myself and the people that I serve with. It is not only my passion to see NewSpring Church accomplish far more than anyone could have ever imagined—but also to finish well—to be radically loved and respected by those who know me the best when my life is over.

I've thought a lot about this since the Super Bowl. The Pats went 18-0 this past season, they had some incredible moments, set some outstanding records and were the talk of every sports show in the world; however, they will not be remembered for the eighteen games they won...but rather the one game they lost.

They didn't finish well.

I've been in ministry for nearly 20 years now...and I've seen wonderful men of God accomplish great things for His Kingdom. However, I have seen some of those same men choose to make bad moral decisions, thus negating in everyone's mind the victories they won for Jesus.

Call that right or wrong—we can debate that all day long. The one thing that cannot be debated is this - that you and I will not be remembered for how well we started the race...OR how we endured during the middle...but rather how we crossed the finish line.

I want to finish well...I want that for all of us.

One more thing about the Pats...the week before the Super Bowl (and since) HOW they played the game has been called into question. Most of us have seen the allegations from 2003 & how their coach has been accused of taping the Rams final practice. The thing that seems to make this believable is that he (their coach) was busted at the beginning of this year basically doing the same thing during the game.

SO...whenever this past season is looked upon in football history there will always be some sort of cloud of doubt because...well...somewhere along the line INTEGRITY has seemingly been compromised.

I have learned that in football...in ministry...in LIFE—INTEGRITY MATTERS! It makes no difference if we are growing great ministries if, somewhere along the lines, we feel like we need to compromise our integrity.

Sometimes the desire to “win” can seemingly overshadow the call of God on our lives to run the race faithfully.

I do not write this as a man who has it all together. AND...I am not judging ANYONE. When I see another minister choose a life of sin (NO ONE FALLS INTO IT), thus disqualifying himself from ministry I ALWAYS say, “By God's grace that isn't me!” I know my potential for sin is unlimited if I do not intentionally strive to keep my eyes focused on Jesus.

BUT...what I do have is passion to play the game in such a way that honors God and inspires people...and that one day when I breathe my last breath those who knew me the best will stand around my coffin and say, “The one thing about Perry that I can say is that the guy loved Jesus, loved his family and loved NewSpring with every ounce of life in his body...he finished well.”

Posted by: Perry Noble., Integrity

FOUR QUALITIES OF AN AWESOME TEAM MEMBER

I did a post on who and who I did not listen to here...and in it I said that I would address the type of person that I feel that a leader needs to surround themselves with. So...here we go...and sorry it took so long!

#1 - An Awesome Team Member ALWAYS Tells The Truth.

I have a rule with the leadership team that I serve with. (Who are they—another post, another time...but for now they are Jason, Jason, Tony, Paul, Shane, Trish and LB.) Here's the rule...

When we sit in our staff meetings I want nothing but the raw, honest, painful truth about ANYTHING that we happen to be discussing/working through.

I am not one of those guys who allows only certain things to be said to me on certain days...I want honesty from those closest to me.

Let me say this...as a leader YOU must make sure to do all that you can to create this type of environment. You MUST invite conflict. For example, I've seen people give looks of disapproval when people make a comment but not speak up...and so I will say, "Hey Jason, it seems you didn't agree with what Tony just said—what are you thinking?"

YES...it does create tension...but this is how the best decisions are made.

The same is true in our creative team...if I share an idea and it is not good—I want to know! AND...if I perceive that someone isn't being truthful with me...I want them off of the team! Life is too short to surround myself with people who blow smoke up my rear end...I want the truth!

(By the way...this was not my idea...it comes from every successful leader I've ever seen.)

#2 - An Awesome Team Member ALWAYS Respects Everyone Else On The Team.

I am HUGE when it comes to respect. I am convinced that THE only reason that I am where I am in life is because of the favor and blessing of God, NEITHER of which I deserve...and so when it comes to our environment I do not want it to be a "respect Perry only" place...but EVERYONE respects EVERYONE.

Let me be VERY clear here...I respect EVERYONE on the team I serve with...and if I didn't respect them then they would not be in the room leading with me. I LOVE these people...and when they speak...I LISTEN. God has used them to fire me up, inspire me, teach me AND humble me...and ANYONE of them can come to me at any time and share with me what is on their hearts because I respect them.

BUT...they also share that same respect with one another—which is ESSENTIAL for a successful team. If there is disrespect among the team members then your team will always drift towards dysfunction.

#3 - An Awesome Staff Member Is Always Loyal.

One of the things our team knows and understands is this—we all have each other's backs!

Now let me be VERY clear...we would NEVER conceal any type of sin and disguise it as "being loyal." That, to me, is overriding a Biblical mandate with a desire for comfort.

BUT...when someone else comes up to one of us and tries to talk smack about someone else on the team—we don't put up with that—EVER.

Trust is ESSENTIAL for a team to achieve its maximum potential. You can't sit around a table with people who you believe are going to go out of the room and bash you to their friends and co-workers. If I didn't perceive that someone on the team was loyal to the entire team...they would be gone.

Behind closed doors anyone is free to say anything to anyone...but when we walk out of that room we do so with one vision...and we won't allow people to take our eyes off of it.

#4 -An Awesome Team Member Never Seeks To Do The Minimum.

If you have someone on the team who is constantly trying to get out of work (OR who wants a divine marching band to play for him/her every time they seemingly go above and beyond)– WATCH OUT!

One of the incredible things about the team I serve with is that I KNOW that NO ONE that sits around the table has EVERY thought, “How can I do as little as possible and still seem to be getting my job done?”

I serve with people who have a pit bull type of intensity. When we come up with a project and assign it to whoever...they don't halfway do it and then throw out excuses...they MAKE things happen...and are committed to doing whatever it takes to make sure that God's work is done with EXCELLENCE.

Jesus Christ did not change the world with half-hearted, lazy, self seeking people whose biggest desire was to be solitaire on their computer! He turned the world upside down with men and women who were willing to go wherever and do whatever He asked of them...and He's still seeking the same type of people today.

Hope that helps...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER HEAR FROM A STAFF MEMBER

I have the privilege to serve with an incredible staff...a fired up group of “git ‘r done” men & women who love Jesus and NewSpring Church.

However, in my ministry experience, both in the life of NewSpring, working in other churches and conversations with many pastors and leaders I believe there are five phrases that we should NEVER hear from someone on staff.

#1 - “That's Not My Job.”

When a staff member is asked to do something and they reply, “That's not my job,” then you can be assured that he/she does not have a heart that is fully devoted to the ministry.

The staff we have here at NewSpring Church walk around with fire in their eyes...and when asked to do something they just make it happen. Now...I have seen this abused & do not think ANYONE should allow themselves to be ran over; however, when asked to do something that might not serve the person BUT WILL SERVE THE CHURCH...the answer should always be yes.

#2 - “That Can't Be Done.”

I have noticed something about staff members that say something cannot be done...USUALLY the ones who say that are the ones who are going to be asked to do the particular project they are freaking out about...and it will require tons of work...SO, they just say it can't be done.

I have a rule...I don't ever want to hear can't be done. One of the best people on the planet at this is Ken! He is one of the founding members of NewSpring Church as was hired to come on staff in 2002. I've NEVER heard him say, "we can't do that!" HOWEVER...

He is realistic with me—he has often said, "Now we CAN do that...but it will require such and such and we don't have that—and if we want it then it is going to cost this...so what do you want to do?" I LOVE HIS ATTITUDE!

Trust me, when a staff member continually says that something cannot be done they either have a lazy work ethic OR a very small view of who God is...neither are beneficial for your team.

#3 - "All I Need Is More Staff & Money To Make This Happen."

When people begin to use resources as an excuse for a stagnant or failing ministry then you can be sure they are in trouble and have most likely become spoiled, thus forgetting the art of being innovative.

#4 - "Recognize Me!"

Beware of the staff member who is always telling you how much work they did, how many hours they put in and how tired they are.

HOLD ON...as a leader it is our job to make sure that staff members are not sacrificed on the altar of ministry. We should pay them well and make sure they have adequate time off. More often than not we have to FORCE people around here to take time off.

BUT...when someone is always demanding attention for the work they've done then you can be sure that either pride or insecurity is coming out...and neither are good!

#5 - "My ministry needs BLANK to...and if we don't get it then..."

When a staff member begins to focus on his/her ministry more than the church as a whole...trust me, you have a HUGE problem.

A good staff member does have passion and vision for their particular area of ministry; however, they have an even greater passion for the church as a whole and will gladly lay aside their plans if it means that it is best for the church.

The church will either operate as a loosely organized group of sub ministries...OR ONE BODY with many parts...and if a staff member cannot be a part of the body then they most likely do not have a kingdom mindset.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

ACTING WITH URGENCY

There are times in life when action **MUST** be taken...I had one of those times several months ago...

I had been out and about and was pulling into my neighborhood when I felt something crawling in my pants right around my knee. I thought maybe my mind was playing tricks on me and dismissed it until...

While pulling into my driveway whatever "it" was decided to begin biting me...right around mid thigh!

How did I respond? Well...I didn't do as many Christians would have done and begin praying about it. I didn't form a group with other people who had been bitten to discuss the problem. I didn't try to decide whether "it" had been predestined to bite me **OR** if it had chosen to...

I responded with urgency!

First of all I screamed like a girl! I am not trying to be crass here...but when you are a dude and something bites you mid-thigh...it is perfectly acceptable to scream!

Second of all I pulled my car into my garage as fast as I could...as I think back I probably barely made it in...our door isn't the fastest opening door in the world.

Third I **LEAPED** out of my car and pulled my pants off. (I know—that's gross, but ANY dude in my situation would have done the same!) I could not find whatever had bitten me earlier...so I just jumped up and down on my pants, hoping to eventually "squish" whatever it was that had **VIOLENTLY** disrupted my day.

(Lucretia gave me a **VERY** weird look when I walked inside with no pants on!)

Bottom line...when I was bitten...everything changed. I acted with urgency...I had to, sitting there and being passive was not an option...and doing so could have caused serious damage and pain!

There are times in life when many of us have felt "bitten" by God...nudged in an undeniably divine way that makes us incredibly uncomfortable and forces us to take immediate action. Simply put—I believe that God **OFTEN** causes us to act with urgency.

You see, if heaven and hell are real (and I believe they are), and people without Christ really do go to hell then we need to act with urgency. Unfortunately, many churches have used "evangelism repellent" to make sure that the "go and tell" bug gets nowhere near them.

When it comes to evangelism Scripture strongly indicates that we should all act with urgency...with passion...with a seriousness like never before.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Urgency

MY FIVE RULES FOR MEETING WITH A MENTOR

I have had the privilege of being mentored by some incredible leaders, some you would know, others you might not—but nonetheless, God has used them to teach me SO MUCH about life and ministry.

Over the years I have developed five rules for meeting with a mentor that I would love to share here today...you may agree or disagree, all I know is that they have worked for me.

#1 - I Always Adjust To Their Schedule—ALWAYS!

When I am attempting to set up an appointment with someone I want to meet with—I always ask them (or their assistant) to throw two or three dates at me that is most convenient for them...and then I adjust my schedule to make the meeting happen.

I NEVER send them the times I want and then ask them to adjust their schedules. I am the one who wants the meeting...and if they are available to me I will bend over backwards to hang out with them.

#2 - I Am Always Early For The Appointment

If I am driving from out of town I always make sure I arrive around 30 minutes early. If I get their TOO early then I will find a coffee shop—OR break out a book (ALWAYS have a book with you.)

Usually I will arrive at the person's office to meet them about 15 minutes early...and quite a few times the person I am meeting with has been ready, thus giving me “bonus time!”

#3 - I Have A List Of At Least Five Questions That I Want To Ask.

I remember John Maxwell saying to me once, “I will mentor you, but you have to ask the questions. I am not preparing a lesson for you...YOU guide this meeting. If you want to know something—ASK. If you don't ask anything then we don't really have anything to talk about.”

SO...anytime I meet with a mentor (especially JOHN) I am LOADED with questions. Sometimes I get them all answered...sometimes I don't...but I NEVER walk into a meeting without having a list of what I would like to know.

#4 - I Don't Talk About Myself Unless They Ask.

When I meet with a mentor I don't spend 30 minutes telling them about myself, my daily routine and how good I think I am. I ask questions and then SHUT UP! If I disagree I do not argue. If they ask me a question then I will answer...if not then I will keep on asking them my questions. They didn't ask to meet with me...I wanted to meet with them—TO LEARN from them, not debate them.

#5 - I Always Send A Note/Gift Saying Thanks.

I haven't done this until recently...but anytime someone gives me time I will send them a Starbucks gift card or a restaurant gift card—just to thank them for the time. (And I jot them about a four sentence note—NOT A BOOK, but a note.)

Those are my rules...hope they help!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Modeling

15 SIGNS THAT YOU (OR YOUR CHURCH) LACKS VISION

- #15 - No one is ever challenged to radically rearrange their lives to be a part of what God is doing.
- #14 - God hasn't asked you to give something up.
- #13 - Everyone in your church is perfect. (If you are truly reaching lost people then you will discover that ministry is messy.)
- #12 - Nothing in regards to how you lead has changed in the past year.
- #11 - When your youth group wants to do something you make them have a bake sale in front of Wal Mart—but when your senior adults want to do something the church covers the cost; after all, they are tithers! (And that same church will wonder why “the youth don't come to church anymore.”)
- #10 - You always find something wrong with ministries that are seeing fruit.
- #9 - You can do everything you have in front of you WITHOUT the help of God AND others.
- #8 - You spend more time on other churches websites than you do reading your Bible.
- #7 - You think the answer to every problem is, “If we just had more money.”
- #6 - No one has ever left your church.
- #5 - You continually call other churches begging them for money.
- #4 - You allow people with money to dictate the way you spend your time and the direction of the church.
- #3 - When you go to a conference and come back and announce “we are changing everything” because you have received INSPIRATION not REVELATION.
- #2 - You've never spent sleepless nights wondering, “How in heck are we going to do this? Seriously, I told our church we were going to do WHAT?”
- #1 - You worry more about keeping the people in your church happy then you do about pleasing God and speaking the truth.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Vision

TEN QUESTIONS I AM WRESTLING WITH...

- #1 - Is there anything in my life that I need to stop doing?
- #2 - Is there anything in my life that I should start doing?
(By the way...the answer to #2 is YES...but in order for it to happen I REALLY need to wrestle with question #1!)
- #3 - Should I twitter?
- #4 - How can I be more efficient in the way I use my time?

#5 - How can I be a better husband?

#6 - How can I be a better father?

#7 - Will I ever attempt another marathon? (I am leaning towards a “no” on that one!)

#8 - Why, out of all the people on this planet, is God allowing me to be a part of what He is doing? Seriously, when I read II Samuel 7:18 this week I LOST IT! DANG...God has been so good to me!

#9 - How can we as a church continue to assist people in taking their next step with Christ?

#10 - Is it OK for me to admit that I believe Brad Cooper is an incredibly good looking guy? (I think I just did!)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

TOP SIX TEMPTATIONS SENIOR PASTORS FACE

#1 - Selling Out God’s Vision In Exchange For A Paycheck.

I know so many pastors who fear losing their jobs because they think if they say what God wants them to say or attempt what God wants them to attempt then they will get fired. They claim to believe in the Sovereignty of God but then cower before the “all powerful...committee!”

#2 - Trying To Please Everyone

You CAN’T do it—no matter how you preach, what you wear or who you talk to—someone is going to get angry at you. Jesus never tried to please everyone...He was faithful to His Father and His calling—we should do the same.

#3 - Thinking Working Harder Will Solve The Problem

There have been so many times I have felt like I needed to violate the 4th commandment in order to make things happen...BUT—the commandment to rest is not a mere suggestion. It’s a command!

Sometimes the godliest thing a pastor can do is walk away from the work for awhile and relax...and let God prove how HE is perfectly capable of running the world (and the church) just fine!

#4 - Sacrificing Their Family

I’ve seen so many pastors allow the church to thrust their wives into activities that they hate—but the pastor tells them to do it in order to “keep the flock happy.”

I’ve seen pastors go to the sporting events and school plays of every kid in the church—except for his own; after all, they will understand, right?

Pastors—there isn’t a church or ministry ANYWHERE that is worth the price of your family! (How do you know if you are sacrificing your family? Why not ask them?)

#5 - Not Delegating Their Weaknesses

One of the myths that pastors buy into is that they have to be “well rounded.” Let me be very upfront here—there isn’t a well rounded person on planet earth. NO ONE is good at EVERYTHING.

If you have a weakness...instead of spending all of your time trying to master it (which you never will) why not delegate it and focus on the things you actually do well. THOSE are the things that will add the most value to your church over the long haul.

#6 - Avoiding Conflict

Unresolved conflict is like cancer...if not dealt with it will grow and eventually kill an organization or ministry. If there is tension or unresolved conflict on a staff...it is the pastors job to make sure it is dealt with—not ignored! (Anyone need to have a conversation today?)

#7 - Not Spending Personal Time With God

When a pastor is not personally walking with God then He cannot expect His church to do so! Pastors, NOTHING should come in between us and our personal time with God—that is where our fire comes from! We NEED HIM...He doesn’t need us. SO...we need to spend more time seeking His face rather than merely asking Him to bless our plans.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Vision

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR VISION?

One of the questions that is often asked of me by pastors and church leaders is, “Where do you get your vision?”

My answer usually seems to frustrate them because...well...it’s simple. Leadership (and vision) is as easy as listening to God.

Vision does not come through a committee. Good ideas may come that way. Much needed discussion may come out of a meeting like that...but not vision.

Vision does not come through a conference. You may get INSPIRATION...but not REVELATION. I think of the sad things in conference world today is pastors will attend a conference, go home & then try to be EVERYTHING except for what God called them to be.

Vision does not come out of books. Once again—excellent ideas do. Wisdom comes from reading. You can seriously be challenged and stretched by reading...but vision isn’t in the pages of the next best seller.

Vision does not come from trying to repeat what has been successful in the past...that’s not vision, that’s the leader being a victim of previous success.

I still say that passionate, white hot, hell charging, world changing & people inspiring vision comes from intentional and uninterrupted time with Jesus...in HIS Word, seeking HIS face through prayers—staying connected with HIS Holy Spirit throughout the day.

So when people ask me, “Where do you get your vision?” My answer is always the time...I meet with God & I don’t move until He tells me to move...but WHEN He tells me to move I go until He tells me to stop.

I am just finished reading through the first five books of the Bible...and most of those books are about Moses...who God totally messed up his life of comfortability and asked him to lead a MAJOR relocation project. He had never done that before...he was CLUELESS...yet...

God used him in an incredible way...and, in my opinion, he is one of the most incredible leaders in all of Scripture.

In reading through Moses' story I discovered that one of the MOST REPEATED PHRASES in Moses' leadership journey is, "The Lord told Moses..." and then He would just do what the Lord told him to do.

Leadership is as easy as listening to God. I always advise pastors and church leaders to get on their face and stay there until God says otherwise. I have NEVER made a bad or wrong decision when I clearly heard from God and followed—EVER!

So how do you know when your vision is from God? Next post...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Vision

How Do You Know If Your Vision Is From God?

Great question...here are a few suggestions...

If you feel confident that you can accomplish what is in front of you with no problem at all...then you didn't hear from God.

If no one is angry at you...then you didn't hear from God.

If you don't have to ask anyone to sacrifice to make the vision come true...then you didn't hear from God.

If religious people are not steaming at you, blogging about you and/or leaving your church...then you didn't hear from God.

If you have the money in the bank to do what God has asked you church to do...then you didn't hear from God.

If every step is perfectly designed and nothing happens to totally throw you off along the way...then you didn't hear from God.

If someone doesn't try to talk you out of what you are about to attempt...then you didn't hear from God.

If you don't stay up at night thinking about the vision...then you didn't hear from God.

If your vision is in contradiction to God's Word...then you didn't hear from God. (And no, you didn't get a "special revelation" that gave you permission to trump His Word!)

If you know all of the answers...then you didn't hear from God.

Those are just a few things that came to mind. :-)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Vision

SIX “WHAT IF’S” PASTORS SHOULD WRESTLE WITH

In response to my post yesterday...I've been thinking about the way that I, as a pastor, often respond to negative things I happen to hear about other pastors and ministries.

I began thinking...

#1 - What if pastors sought to pray for other pastors rather than tear them down?

We criticize and condemn others because of insecurity in our own lives...and the more we find wrong with others the more our personal insecurities are revealed.

BUT...WHAT IF we, upon hearing negative talk, we hit our knees for the person being talked about? What if we prayed for any untruth of what we've heard to be burned away? What if we prayed that if the rumor is true that God, in His mercy, would get the pastors attention and call him to repentance?

#2 - What if pastors began to realize that God is not limited to a particular formula of doing church?

One of the reasons that we, as pastors, attempt to tear down others is because they aren't doing things the way we think they should be done.

In the earlier days of NewSpring my arrogance caused me to think and proclaim that we were actually doing church “right” and that others were wrong...now I am realizing there is no right and wrong way. The questions that need to be asked are—#1 - Are people being saved? And...#2 - Are people taking their next step in their journey with Christ?

NewSpring is a way of doing church—not THE way...and it takes different types of churches to reach different types of people. AND...I am WAY comfortable with that.

#3 - What if pastors truly celebrated the success of others rather than saying, “Yes, they are doing a good job over there—but I heard...”

I want other churches and ministries to be successful—period.

Several years ago whenever I would hear about someone's success I would try my best to find a nugget of information that would make them look bad. Sort of like, “Yeah, they are reaching a lot of people—but how many of them are REALLY growing?”

Lately I have come to realize that God blesses churches in different ways...and that when He does I need to celebrate it rather than speaking against it. Once again, the only reason a pastor cannot celebrate the success of others is insecurity (and jealousy as well!)

#4 - What if pastors did not allow other pastors to criticize other pastors/ministries in front of them?

Seriously, what if we were willing to lay the smack down and say, “Hey bro...what you are doing right now the Bible actually calls slander...stop it!”

Pastor Steven Furtick had some awesome things to say about this here...awesome stuff!

#5 - What if pastors spent more time trying to learn from those who are different from them rather than trying to discredit their ministry?

I have a philosophy of ministry that I used to not have—here it is, I can learn something valuable from any ministry that God is blessing—period!

I want to learn from people who do ministry differently than me...and it is amazing to me how stupid and insecure pastors and church leaders are when it comes to this.

For example—anytime I mention TD Jakes or Joel Osteen on this website we have idiots e-mail in with their “concerns” about issues in regards to their theology or teaching style. (As if the person e-mailing is perfect and has it all figured out!)

BUT, I’ve said it before and I will say it again...I have an incredible amount of respect for both of those men. God is blessing their ministries in an incredible way...and I know there are tons of things that I could learn from them. Just because you are trying to learn something from someone doesn’t mean that you believe exactly like them!

(And for those who feel like you can only learn from just like you...please repent to God for being shallow and ridiculous!)

By the way—I’ve had the privilege of meeting Joel...but haven’t gotten to have lunch with Bishop Jakes yet...if anyone can make that connection I would be much obliged!!! :-) (I’m serious!)

#6 - What if pastors spent more time focusing on God’s Word and their own church rather than attempting to be watchdogs of everyone else’s ministry?

Dang...that was good...even if I say so myself!!!

I’ve got to be honest...I really don’t have time to tear down the ministry efforts of others. Seriously, I’ve got enough to be concerned about in trying to be a good husband, father and pastor. The day I have the time to rip apart other people’s ministry is the day that my ministry will be fruitless and dead.

(That’s the only way I would have the time...you see, if a vineyard is producing fruit then you really don’t have the time to peak at the perceived fruitfulness—or unfruitfulness—of others.)

I once heard TD Jakes say, “The problem with most pastors is that they never leave the locker room—they always feel the need to compare!” WHEW!

Pastors...you and I can experience TRUE freedom when we compare ourselves to our calling and God’s vision for our ministry and NOT the church down the road or across the country! We will not be held accountable for their ministry—we will be held accountable for ours! (Hebrews 13:17)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

BIGGEST MISTAKES I’VE MADE AS A LEADER—PART ONE

One of the privileges I have is getting to meet with and pour into the staff that God has given me the privilege of leading. About once a week I assemble a group of people who do not directly report to me for a time where we discuss leadership issues...they ask questions and I try my best to answer them. (God has placed some REALLY sharp people on this staff!)

One of the questions that often arises is, “What are some the biggest mistakes you would say you’ve made as a leader?” I thought I would take a shot at answering that one on this site...

#1 - Not Listening To The Holy Spirit

There are times that God will give a leader insight that He gives to no one else—THUS the reason for making him the leader. And, in my opinion, THE toughest time to lead is when you KNOW what God has said...but no one else is quite seeing it the way you do.

David faced this in I Samuel 24:1-7 when Saul was “delivered” into his hands. The “leaders” around him were pressing him to make a decision—THEY EVEN HAD BIBLE VERSES to back up their desires...but David just KNEW in His heart what God had said...and he was unwilling to violate that.

THE biggest mistakes I’ve ever made is when God clearly said to do (or not to do) something and I went against His command because I could not get everyone to agree...or because it just didn’t make sense.

#2 - Not Being Who God Called Me To Be

When I first began in ministry I really struggled with being the unique creation that God called me to be. I wasted a ton of time trying to be other people because I was convinced that I could never be the man who I felt was trapped inside of me and was desperate to come out.

God didn’t call me to be anyone but me...and when I try to imitate others rather than gravitate towards the character of Christ uniquely displayed in me...I dishonor my Creator!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

BIGGEST MISTAKES I’VE MADE AS A LEADER—PART TWO

#3 - Thinking That I Could Do Things Better Than Other People—Thus Causing Me To Either Not Delegate OR Micromanage.

All leaders have a problem...we all think we can do (fill in the blank) better than the person who is doing it.

And...I would say that is a part of what God put into us as leaders. However, when we begin to constantly act on that belief it can cripple our church and demoralize those who work with us.

No one on the planet will ever do things the way I would do them. That is why it is totally necessary for me to make sure we always hire the best people possible, POUR extreme amounts of vision into them and cut them loose. That’s how the kingdom advances!

#4 - Wanting To Be Discovered Rather Than Being Devoted!

I believe that success is one of the most dangerous things that God could allow a person to have.

When NewSpring began to experience growth and God’s favor...I really felt like the rest of the church world needed to see what we were doing. I became obsessed with who (or who didn’t) know my name in the conference circles. I was hyper focused on how many hits my blog was getting. Basically...the ministry became WAY more about me and WAY less about Jesus.

Then the reality of John 3:30 hit me like a TON of bricks.

In 2005 I nearly lost my life...and it caused me to refocus on what really matters. At the end of the day I could really care less who knows my name...or who reads my blog...or if I ever speak at another conference. I am passionate about the four C's...

Christ

Cretia

Charisse

Church

That's it...at the end of the day I want to passionately love Jesus, love my wife like He loves me, love my little girl in a way that, when she gets old enough to really know me that she respects me...and lead NewSpring Church under the direction of HIS Holy Spirit to enlarge HIS kingdom and push back the gates of hell.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

SEVEN THINGS WE'VE GOT TO DO TO BE EFFECTIVE—PART ONE

Recently I shared with our staff seven things that I honestly feel each minister...heck, EACH CHRIST FOLLOWER must be willing to do if we want to have an effective ministry/lead an effective life.

(I took this out of John 14-16, some of the richest teachings of Jesus...in my opinion!)

#1 - We Have Got To Be Willing To Serve - John 13:1-5

I often joke with our congregation that I do not have the spiritual gift of mercy; however, that is not an excuse for me to be unmerciful in all that I do.

I remember once witnessing a really bad car accident. Lucretia and I were on vacation and saw the whole thing happen. Now...neither of us have the gift of mercy...but there was a NEED in front of us and so we parked our car and sprinted to the scene to see if we could help.

(When I announced that she was a doctor there was an immediate sense of peace with the people who had been in the wreck!)

There are times when we are called out of our comfort zone...and our gift zone...to serve people in a way we've never served them before.

If anything is "beneath" us...then we truly are not beneath Christ!

#2 - We Must Be Willing To Love - John 13:34-35

Christians fight too much—period!

Jesus said that the world will know we are His by the love we have for one another.

When someone doesn't believe the particular brand of theology we embrace...we need to love them anyway. I am begging God to raise up a generation of leaders who do not feel that everyone needs to be the same...and who are secure enough to learn from people who do not believe exactly like them.

Jesus didn't say they will know we are His disciples by the way we blog against one another OR attack one another...but by the love we have for one another. As I mature I am learning that I can love a brother or sister in Christ without having to agree with everything they say.

#3 - We've Got To Be Willing To Trust - John 14:1

If I could apply this verse my life would be so much better!!!

We live in a world that is completely out of control...and because of that we often make the mistake of thinking that God has lost control.

But reality is this (if you are in ministry) - God wants your church to grow more than you want it to! God wants your life to be abundant way more than you do...

One of the mistakes I have made so often is thinking that if I don't preach well that the Kingdom of God is in danger...not true. One of my sins is that I take myself way too seriously. Sure, I need to spend time studying and preparing for the message...but at the end of the day I've got to trust that God is going to do all that I cannot do!

And so...there needs to come a point where we desperately trust Him...even though we may not be able to see Him!

The world needs way less of me...WAY more of Him! (John 3:30)

More tomorrow...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

SEVEN THINGS WE'VE GOT TO DO TO BE EFFECTIVE—PART TWO

#4 - We've Got To Dream Big - John 14:12

Out of all the verses in Scripture that both excite and confuse me—this one takes the cake.

However, I believe what Jesus said here is true...and so one of the things I always want to be accused of is dreaming big.

How about you? For some reason the children of the King are the smallest dreamers on the planet. In church would we have let Vegas and Hollywood outdo us—UNACCEPTABLE!

And personally..I've seen way too many people live for lesser dreams when God has an Ephesians 3:20 life that is merely a prayer away!

I personally think the church should be outdoing Vegas and Disney! I think we have not only the ability to create...but the POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT! Having Him actually empowers us to both dream big and then accomplish the very dreams that He placed inside of us!

I believe God wants MORE for the church...and I want to see what Jesus was talking about in this verse happen!

#5 - We've Got To Be Willing To Stay Connected - John 14:15, John 14:21, John 15:5

Jesus said if we love Him that we will obey Him...but the only way to do this is by staying connected with Him on a consistent basis.

I believe that satan doesn't want to necessarily make us sin...he just wants to get us so busy that we don't have time to consistently connect with Christ.

When I travel my computer will often flash up a message, "You are about to lose power—please connect to a power source and recharge your battery before you lose everything."

DANG...I think Jesus was saying that same thing in John 15:5!

One of the biggest temptations of a pastor is to become busy. Most of us have cell phones and gadgets strapped around our belt...we don't look like a pastor—we look like flippin' Batman. I once heard Rob Bell say, "If I were satan I would invent a device that people carried that made sure their calendar was always in front of them!"

The enemy can make us so busy that we don't necessarily sin...we just don't have the time to live our lives in complete obedience!

#6 - We've Got To Be Willing To Play Hurt - John 15:18

Life hurts...pastors and Christians are often carrying wounds with them...but—we CAN'T GIVE UP!

Jesus went to a cross...and took a beating before He went. The least we can do is endure a little criticism and being kicked out of the social club at work and school!

Pastors, if you are leading then you will be condemned and criticized...move on...play hurt...and talk to God a lot about it. David, a man after God's own heart, did in the Psalms. He was so honest with God that it scares me just a little.

Pastors—we need to play hurt. If the devil takes us out it needs to be done in WAY more dramatic fashion than a blogger, and anonymous letter or a church member on his 4th church because "he can't find one to meet his needs!"

#7 - We've Got To Be Willing To Be Spirit Led - John 16:12-14

One of the most awesome privileges of following Christ is having Jesus with me every single day through the presence of His Holy Spirit.

I am NEVER alone...and I do not have to figure life out all by myself.

I always advise pastors and Christians to take some time to pray...and then LISTEN. I believe that God is ALWAYS speaking...but many times we aren't listening, thus being the reason that we miss Him at times.

I have made SO many mistakes in life when I didn't listen to the Spirit's leadership!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

WHAT IF...

I had some “what if” thoughts the other day that I wanted to share...

WHAT IF the church really believed that Jesus was as powerful as Scripture says that He is?

WHAT IF we were not afraid to BEG GOD for ridiculous things, knowing that He is able?

WHAT IF we REALLY believed that Acts 2:41-47 was actually the starting point of all that God wants to do through the church and NOT the watermark?

WHAT IF we really believed that a life dedicated to Christ means that we are completely His...not just on Sunday?

WHAT IF every church became a cheerleader of other churches and not critics?

WHAT IF we really believed the church existed to CHANGE the world and not just to “meet my needs!”

WHAT IF we really believe that teenagers and children are worth the investment and poured resources into them instead of making them sell doughnuts in front of department stores?

WHAT IF we really believed God’s Kingdom should grow through the church instead of being stagnant?

WHAT IF we were willing to lay aside our personal preferences for the sake of reaching those who are far from God?

WHAT IF we refused to participate in slandering and tearing down another person?

WHAT IF we sought to embrace God’s plan for our lives (and churches) instead of trying to get Him to bless ours?

Those are just some of the things I’ve been wondering...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

QUESTIONS I’M ASKING MYSELF—PART ONE

The other morning I spent some time reading through Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 43...and several questions popped into my mind that I thought might be beneficial if I shared. (When I link the verses they will appear in the NIV; however, I will type them out in the translation I am currently reading, which is the NLT.)

Isaiah 42:1, “Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations.”

Question #1 - Am I living a life that fully pleases God?

I once heard Brad Cooper say, “You can please God and disappoint people, or you can disappoint God and please people...but you can’t do both.” He was so right.

As I look back in life some of my biggest mistakes have been when I’ve...

Tried to please myself - Seriously, I am probably one of the most selfish people that I know. I can honestly say that 99.9% of the time I've gotten ill with Lucretia has been because of my selfish desires. The Bible says in James 4:1-3 that this attitude is just not a good thing to have—ever. ANYTIME I place what pleases me in front of what pleases God—I screw up.

Tried to please others - One of the largest temptations a pastor faces is the one to try and please everyone. It can't be done. If you are a pastor (or a human being for that matter) SOMEONE is always going to be angry with you...no matter what you do. AND you will also discover that everyone has an opinion as to how you should live your life and lead the church.

(Remember—opinions are like rear ends...everyone has one and MOST of them are incredible large and stink!)

The verse spoke volumes to me. I literally stopped and prayed when I read it, asking God to show me how to live a life that is FULLY pleasing to Him. That's what I want...more than anything in the world. And in doing so I know I will have to cast some things aside AND be willing to disappoint people.

How about you—would you be willing to ask God that question?

#2 - Am I allowing anything to cause me to lose heart?

We live in a very discouraging world; in fact, I believe that discouragement is one of the number one weapons the enemy will use to try and strike at people—especially leaders.

And so...if there are things that cause me to lose heart, that take away my joy...then I MUST continually remove them from my life.

That is why I don't read certain blogs anymore—they were joy killers. (And for the pastor out there who says you do it and it doesn't effect you—you are full of crap, it's ripping your joy out—STOP IT!) I have literally had to decide to not hang out with certain people because, after meeting with them I wanted to set my head on fire and have it put out with a sledgehammer.

(I know that doesn't sound very godly...but if everyone would be honest for just a second—we all have people like that in our lives...it's just that many don't have the courage to admit it!)

I can't allow discouragement to take a hold in my life—Scripture says in Ephesians 4:27 that we should not allow the devil to have a foothold...and one of his STRONGEST footholds on pastors and church leaders is discouragement.

That is why I don't see hateful and mean spirited emails and letters...all it does is take a shot at my soul. I am open to rebuke...in love, but that never makes it way to me in an unsigned letter or anonymous email.

What needs to be removed from your life to protect you from discouragement?

This one is a tough one...especially being the founding pastor of NewSpring...

Isaiah 42:10 (NLT), "Sing a new song to the Lord..."

#3 - What "old song" must I stop singing to make room for something new that God wants to place in my heart?

Every church planter is going to face this issue one day.

You see, when we first began NewSpring Church we were all about not being “traditional.” We were going to “break the mold.” We used phrases like “taking EXTREME risks” and “not afraid to die” quite often around here.

But here we are eight and a half years later and I am finding myself in quite a pinch because...

The traditions that we are now having to attack are the ones that I helped to develop. The ideas that we are now calling “outdated” are the ones that were once a brand new thought in my mind.

Honestly, there are times when I have been in a meeting and have wanted to halt the conversation because, well, to be honest, I didn’t like what was being discussed. It was tearing away at what I had shed hours of blood, sweat and tears over...but...God has been slowly showing me that I must celebrate the songs that we’ve sang...but I must always be open to the fact that He wants to do new things.

Is there anything in your church that was once a good idea that isn’t anymore?

We’re hitting this hard...and it’s tough for me...but I know it’s going to be awesome in the end.

He REALLY brought this home for me when I read Isaiah 43:16-19...

“I am the LORD who opened a way through the waters, making a dry path through the sea. I called forth the mighty army of Egypt with all its chariots and horses. I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned, their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick. But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it...”

I should CELEBRATE all that God has done...but ANTICIPATE that He is going to do more and be willing to change ANYTHING that He needs to change.

I’m asking Him to “put new songs” in my heart.

Here’s the last one for the week...

Isaiah 42:16 (NLT) - “I will lead blind Israel down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will brighten the darkness before them and smooth out the road ahead of them.”

#4 - Am I Sincerely Seeking God To Lead Me...Or Am I Trying To Lead Him?

There have been so many times I’ve taken my thoughts and dreams to God, asking Him to bless them and allow them to come to fruition instead of asking Him what His thoughts and dreams are.

Here’s a confession—on my best day...I am still nothing more than a blind man who desperately needs the leadership of Jesus in my life if I am going to accomplish anything significant. (John 15:5)

And the thing I am learning more and more is this—God WANTS to lead me in the right way. He wants me to get things right. He wants me to succeed in life. AND—HE WANTS TO SPEAK TO ME and show me how to get there—but this requires me giving up what I want and asking Him to open my eyes to what He wants.

This text says that He will lead me along an unfamiliar way. I believe the churches best days are yet to come. I believe God is going to do things we’ve never seen before...but in order for us to get there we have to be willing to walk in unfamiliar ways...and the only way to successfully do that is LISTEN to and FOLLOW the voice of God.

He's always speaking...many times though I've not been listening.

He will smooth out the road ahead. He will brighten the darkness...at least that's what His Word says. So...I've got to trust Him with my future.

This has **RADICALLY** changed my prayer life. Instead of taking a wish list to Him every day I am simply asking Him to allow me to see as He sees and feel as He feels...**THAT IS MESSING ME UP!** It's a process...but I'm giving up my desires and asking Him to put **HIS** in me.

I may do a decent job leading NewSpring...but I do a **HORRIBLE** job when I try to lead God. I'm blind without Him...but with Him I can't go wrong.

How about you—are you **SERIOUSLY** seeking what God wants...or are you trying to get Him to buy into your plans?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

STRUGGLING WITH THE QUESTION OF DISCIPLESHIP

One of the questions I have been asked often as a pastor is, “What is NewSpring doing to make disciples?” I've got to be honest...there is usually never a “right” way to answer this question in the eyes of the person who is asking.

What I have began doing is turning the question around and asking, “What exactly do you mean by disciple?” What's funny is...I've never gotten the same answer from anyone on this. (What the person usually asking the question finally boils it down to is, “What is NewSpring doing to make people think and act just like me?”)

Pastors, let me say right up front that Jesus pretty much demanded that we make disciples. (BUT...let me also say it is incredibly difficult to have a disciple without first having a convert!) And it is imperative that each day people are encouraged to keep in step with Jesus...but...

How does one make a disciple?

Several churches have a series of classes that people are asked to go through...and I think that is **AWESOME**; in fact, we are in the process of putting together what we consider to be some key fundamentals of the faith that will be taught in a group setting within the next year or so.

BUT...and just being honest, to the “discipleship critic” this just isn't good enough. They think there should be “more,” but, once again, when pressed on it—they can't define what “more” is.

I've always said that one of the ways we disciple people at NewSpring Church is through our Sunday services...it is my goal as a communicator every week to either - A. Teach a person something they didn't previously know...or B. Remind a person of something they had forgotten.

BUT I was reading something the other day where a person was asking, “What does your church do to disciple people...and you can't say you do it on Sundays!” WHA? (They also suggested that the church actually slow down the evangelism process until a solid discipleship process is in place...something I wholeheartedly disagree with!)

I always find it amazing that those who are usually the most adamant about discipleship usually fall in the reformed theology camp...which sort of blows my mind that they believe the Holy Spirit is completely responsible for the salvation of an individual...but after the person gets saved man must take over. Why not trust the same Holy Spirit who originally drew the person to God to continue drawing the person on a daily basis?

Some people want to claim that discipleship happens in small groups...but that doesn't really work for the churches that use small groups as a basis for connecting people in community.

So...what IS discipleship? (By the way...this is a debate that will not be ended with this blog post!) I personally believe that making a disciple consists of teaching someone how to walk with Christ (a child can usually walk by the time they are one), being there to help them when they fall down (provide community) and teaching them how to feed themselves.

People always go back to Acts 2 and talk about Acts 2:42-47, yes, it is true that 3,000 people were baptized...but the question I want to throw back out there is...do you really believe every single person followed through on their commitment? (WOW...am I a heretic or what?)

Scripture does not say. BUT...knowing human nature I think it is a pretty safe bet that some people, even though the opportunities for discipleship existed, probably went back to their old way of life after just a little while. Heck, it's human nature. After all, there are quite a few examples in Scripture of people who at one time followed Christ but then for one reason or another chose to go another direction. Lack of commitment is NOT something totally new.

BUT...the church was still there and still provided opportunities! THAT is why I think that discipleship will look different from church to church...and when people ask me what NewSpring is doing to create disciples I always reply, "Everything we can!"

What is making a disciple? We are wrestling with that questions and doing all that we can to develop a process that we believe is biblical and will set up people for success in their walk with Christ. It will be a work in progress...and we will be shaping it and reshaping it until...well...Christ comes back! It's our call—and while I don't believe we will ever perfect the process...we will do all that we can to fulfill the Great Commission.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Discipleship

FOUR LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS THAT ARE STRETCHING ME

Here are four questions that I wrote down last Friday that the Lord is using to stretch me...

#1 - What do I need to stop doing?

Every leader should ask themselves this question about once a month. If we are not careful our plates will become loaded up with things we feel like we have to do rather than the things we are called to do...and we begin to operate our lives out of obligation rather than celebration. (When a leader ceases to celebrate his life/work because of all he feels he has to do—there is a problem.)

So, I'm making that list...it's not going to be easy...but there are some things that must go...

#2 - Do I always have to be right?

One of the things the Lord has convicted me of lately is that I have always felt a silly desire to prove myself and show the world how “right” I am. My primary calling by God is obedience...not defiance of those who disagree with me.

This question has caused me to slow down when someone brings up something that I do not disagree with...I ask is it worth the discussion...is it a matter of personal preference or Scriptural interpretation...will it impact the vision, you know, those sorts of things. As I am growing as a leader I feel less and less the need to be right all of the time.

(By the way...the leader who always needs to be right will drive the leaders around him away.)

#3 - Am I helping people around me succeed?

If I am successful in life...then yea for me. But if those around me are successful...THAT will define me as a leader. People will not remember me for what I accomplish...but they will remember me for what I helped them to accomplish. And...I SERIOUSLY want everyone around me to live a life beyond their dreams and become who God created them to be...and I am SOLD OUT to that.

#4 - Am I speaking positively of other people?

I had a friend once who would not allow you to say a positive thing about another pastor or leader. Seriously, it didn't matter who you were talking about they would say, “Yeah...that person is great and all, but...”

To be honest...I always wondered what they said about me.

One of the signs of a secure leader is that they can speak positively of other people without having to slam them at the same time.

Those are just a few things the Lord is using to stretch me!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

THREE LEADERSHIP ENVIRONMENTS I AM COMMITTED TO

As a pastor/leader there are three groups of people whom I believe we need to constantly be hanging out with in order for God to stretch us in regards to our leadership.

#1 - Those Who Are Where We Have Been.

One of the mistakes that I have seen some pastors make is having the idea that once their church grows larger than so and so's church that there is nothing more that they could learn from them.

Nothing could be more untruthful!

One of the things I love to do is hang out with guys who are currently where I have been at some point in my past. Why? Because I LEARN from them! God uses them to stretch me. They don't have the resources to do all that they really want to do...so they are FORCED to rely on passion and TRUE innovation.

Some of the best sermon and leadership ideas I ever gotten have been brought on because I have the privilege of hanging out with guys who may have 100 people or less in their church, or 500 or whatever number you want to put here.

#2 - Those Who Are Currently Where I Am Currently.

One of the things I have LOVED about blog world is that it has opened up a network of connections for me...and through this I have been able to meet up with pastors from all over the US who have churches that look MUCH DIFFERENTLY from NewSpring...but they have hearts for Jesus Christ and a desire to see people come to Him.

One of the mistakes that I don't want to begin making is falling into the competitive pastors camp. I want to hang out with guys who have churches around the same size as NewSpring, and when they grow past us—CELEBRATE with them.

People who are where you are most likely are experiencing some of the same issues and problems you are wrestling with. Pastors...you NEED to place yourself in these environments as often as possible. God will use them to radically encourage you.

#3 - Those Who Are Where I Want To Go.

Again, one of the sad patterns I am noticing is insecure pastors and church planters who have no problem with the first two I covered because of how significant it makes them feel...it's sad really, these guys get together and rip apart/tear down those who are experiencing some level of success instead of being a student of something that might be working.

I learned several years ago that I can hate and despise those who are more successful than me and spend my time trying to convince others why I am better than them...OR I can do everything that is within my ability to place myself in an environment where I can meet with incredible church leaders that God has His hand all over that can speak truth into my life.

For this to happen I've paid \$\$\$ to sit at round tables. I traveled halfway across the country just to have lunch with one pastor. I rearranged my schedule. I am freakishly obsessed with this...and I will do whatever it takes to meet with these great men of God in order to better myself. (Instead of sitting around with guys who think just like me and accomplish nothing!)

I've been accused of name dropping on this blog. Am I guilty? HECK YES!!! I name drop like CRAZY! Why? Because I want the people at NewSpring Church to know that God is allowing me to meet with and learn from some incredible leaders. I want them to know I am not satisfied with where I am as a pastor...and I want to become better and better.

Over the past several years I've had the privilege to sit down one on one with John Maxwell, Andy Stanley, Craig Groeshel, Ed Young, Jud Wilhite, Greg Surratt, Mark Driscoll and Troy Gramling. Each time I sit with these guys God stretches the heck out of me. (I will be sharing some leadership thoughts I've learned from these guys over the next few weeks.)

Oh yeah...in case you are wondering, I still have a goal to sit down and share a meal, one on one, with Bill Hybels, TD Jakes, Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, Matt Chandler and Erwin McManus. God has used these men to speak into my life and influence the heck out of me!!! For those of you who pray for me on a regular basis...pray that this will happen!

So, what are you doing to place yourself in these three environments?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Learning

PASTORS/CHURCH PLANTERS...BEWARE - PART ONE

I was thinking the other day about what I would types of people I would warn a pastor/church planter about—there are seven, here are the first few...

#1 - The “I’m Going To Leave If” Person

Pastors, you are going to have people threaten to leave your church—period. And 999 times out of 1,000 the best thing you can do is let them go.

I remember once in the early years being on the telephone for over an hour, begging a young lady in our church not to leave. Why was she wanting to leave? A group of singles had gotten together and forgotten to call her.

You are going to have people who don’t like the music, your wife, you talking about your kids, the way you dress, the kind of car you drive, the version of the Bible you use, your hairstyle, your zodiac sign, your staff, and your belief on the end times.

You can’t please everyone...and, to be honest, that **BOTHERS** me! But, reality is, according to Hebrews 13:17 you and I will stand before God one day and be held accountable for how we led the church...and I would much rather a disgruntled person walk out that God’s presence go instead!

Don’t ever be held captive by a person who keeps threatening to leave.

#2 - The “Let Me Tell You How Much Money I Have” Person.

Pastors, you’ve GOT to make a choice early - are you going to be motivated by money (thus becoming a prostitute, not a prophet) OR are you going to resign to the fact that Jesus purchased you, thus making you not for sale?

I remember early on a guy calling my assistant and demanding that I come to his house for dinner. (Something I just don’t do...explanation later!) He told her where he worked, where he lived (a NICE neighborhood), the kind of car he drove and also told her he wanted to get financially involved in the church...all I had to do was come to his house for dinner.

I didn’t go. I don’t play that game. When people begin to dangle money in front of you...it is ALWAYS attached to an agenda.

We have some incredibly generous people at NewSpring Church who give faithfully every single week. In our two campaigns that we’ve done we had a giver once give \$1.4 million and another one gave \$1 million...and neither of them ever asked me for one second of my time. They gave with a pure heart and with pure motives.

When people threaten to stop giving then that is an issue they will have to work out with God. Don’t let a person who has a lot of \$\$\$ keep you from doing what God has called you to do.

When a person begins telling you how much money they have...trust me, they ultimately desire to either buy you or control you. Don’t let it happen. Tell them you are excited they have money, ask them to give generously, challenge them to be faithful in their giving...but don’t EVER begin to let them dangle money in front of you, thus becoming your source of motivation.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

PASTORS/CHURCH PLANTERS...BEWARE - PART TWO

Following up with yesterday's post, here are a few more...

#3 - The "Feed Me" Person

I have never been able to keep one of these people around...ever!

You know the drill...they always come from another church (they weren't being fed there either) and they want you to know that they are sincerely seeking a church that teaches the Bible (and they will stay as long as you teach THEIR VERSION of the Bible.)

But, if they become displeased with the sermon direction...or dissatisfied with your particular view on a theological issue...or convicted of not doing what they know they should be doing—they will say you are not feeding them and leave.

Pastor, being honest here...I've NEVER encountered a person who claimed they weren't being fed that also had a dynamic personal walk with Jesus. If that were true then they would show up to the church FULL and not need to latch on to the breast!

It's not our job to feed—but to lead to places where food can be found.

#4 - The "At My Other Church" Person

I have ZERO tolerance for this guy/girl.

They come into your church and begin to say, "Well, this is nice, but at my other church we used to (FILL IN THE BLANK.)"

I say, without apology, to these people that we are not "your other church," and...if you liked your other church so much—GO BACK!

Enough about them...

#5 - The "This Is Too Big" Person

These people amaze me. A church will begin growing, lives will begin to change...literally the Bible begins to come to life...and because a person finally has to face the fact that the church is not about them...they take off, saying that the church is TOO BIG.

Now, that same person will go to a college football game the day before with between 80,000 to 100,000 fans (99% of whom they do not know) and be absolutely PUMPED that the stadium is packed. (Usually a sign that the team is winning!)

BUT...they want to go to "God's house" the next day and desire for it to be small and "intimate." Hmm, they want the football crowd to grow and the church crowd to be small...sounds like some very screwed up priorities to me.

Bottom line...the church is SUPPOSED to grow–period! And if it gets “too big” for someone, I would say it’s because their heart is “too small.” Seriously, ask yourself, what spiritual force would motivate someone to get angry when large numbers of people are coming to Christ and being taught to walk in an intimate relationship with Him? Jesus...or satan? Seriously–it’s NOT rocket science.

Let the “this is too big” person go...and don’t argue with them!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

PASTORS/CHURCH PLANTERS...BEWARE - PART THREE

Now for the last two...

#6 - The “I Want To Know The Pastor If I’m Going To Be Here” Person

Here’s the deal, pastor, you and I are called by God to lead His church.

BUT...before that is an even greater call on our lives to love Jesus, love our wife and love and disciple our children...and there is no way that you can do all of that and also grill hot dogs with everyone in your church!

For too long pastors have been manipulated by church people into a “a pastor ought to know his church people” mentality. A thought that sounds good on the surface...EXCEPT for the fact that it is COMPLETELY un-Biblical! (Acts 6:1-7 is just one example. Exodus 18 is another!)

If a person comes in claiming they need to know you–TRUST ME ON THIS ONE–they have an agenda a mile long!!!

Yes, we should have relationships with the people we serve...but those should be led by the Holy Spirit and should NEVER take away from the first four priorities that I mentioned earlier. I lead a home group of incredible people who are not currently on staff. I go to lunch with lots of people in our church–but I never allow myself to be “guilted” into doing so...and you can’t either.

Pastor, let me warn you–there are church people out there who will allow you to spend all your time with them...and then when your marriage falls apart or your kid turns out to be a hellion or you begin to fall apart spiritually they will turn on you so fast it isn’t funny!!! I’ve seen it...so have you–that is why you must prioritize your life...and if you don’t have time for every social in the church...so be it!

#7 - The “This Place Is Too Judgmental” Person

I was reading the other morning in the OT (either Jeremiah or Ezekiel) that if a prophet doesn’t preach repentance then he isn’t a true prophet.

Pastor, any time you begin to call people out in their sin...the fertilizer will hit the fan...and you will be labeled as an intolerant, judgmental preacher.

BUT...

The only people who get angry when you preach on giving are those who bow before money.

The only people who get angry when you preach on sexual immorality are the sexual immoral.

The only people who get angry when you preach on adultery are those who are committing adultery...or those who really want to.

The only people who get angry when you preach on gossip are the people on the prayer chain...uh...I mean those who are gossiping.

Pastors, speaking about sin isn't easy...but it's right. We are called to call for confession and repentance...and offer hope for those who are willing to follow Christ.

If someone isn't angry at you then pray for God to set you on fire and lead you to preach a message that will hit the majority of your church between the eyes...and then HANG ON!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

INITIATOR OR RESPONDER?

Are you an initiator or a responder?

An initiator spends their time trying to think big and extinguish the fires of hell...a responder spends their time trying to figure out how to keep people happy and tries to extinguish the fires of small minded people.

An initiator spends their time asking God to lead them to take huge risks...a responder spends their time asking God to keep them safe.

An initiator takes God led risks...a responder will call a business meeting.

An initiator spends all of their time trying to please God...a responder spends all of their time trying to please people.

An initiator will preach what he feels that God has told him to preach and not fear the consequences...a responder will preach what makes people happy so he can receive a paycheck.

An initiator spends all of their time trying to figure out what's next...and a responder spends all their time trying to figure out how to guard the past and the present.

An initiator prays huge prayers and asks God for impossible things...a responder doesn't really think God is in the miracle business anymore & will pray prayers that doesn't require God's help to accomplish so that "God doesn't look bad!"

An initiator will surround himself with leaders who will speak their minds...a responder want people around him who will say, "Your poop doesn't stink!"

An initiator wants to meet with people who do not think like him...a responder is threatened by people who aren't just like him.

Just a few thoughts...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Intentionality

THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY & HOW OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP (AND LIFE!!!)

Here are six questions that we should all wrestle through as leaders...

#1 - The Who

As in “WHO are you going to please?” One of the things that is so disheartening about politics is that neither candidate seems to be speaking from conviction, but rather from talking points that “experts” have walked them through in order to please the largest amount of people.

The same thing goes in the church. We have the choice...to be a politician or a pastor. If God has called us...then we should do whatever it takes to please Him! Remember Hebrews 13:7...we aren't standing before a deacon board in heaven...we should not quake before them here on earth!

#2 - The What

What are you supposed to be doing? Not...what are the coolest churches in America doing? We all all called to do ministry in a unique way. Yes, we should be students of other churches...but the “what” will only be answered as we allow God to shape our souls! Be who God called you to be! It takes different types of churches to reach different types of people!

#3 - The Where

It is VERY important to like the area in which God has called you to minister and the people He has called you to minister to! I've met so many pastors who claim they hate their church and the area in which they are living. I don't understand that...true and effective ministry comes out of a sincere love for the people to whom God has called us to minister to.

#4 - The When

I heard John Maxwell say once, “If you stay a step ahead of the people then you are a leader. If you stay ten steps ahead then you are a martyr!” Just because you have a neat idea doesn't mean it is a now idea! For example...I knew God wanted me to start a church in 1996...but we didn't launch until 2000. God had to slowly cook that vision inside of me. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says He makes all things beautiful IN HIS TIME!

#5 - The Why

Why do we do what we are doing? Are our motives pure? Are we in this to build God's kingdom or our own? Our motives must always be pure if we are going to see effective ministry!

#6 - The How

Vision is not just a good buzz word...it is essential for any organization (yes, even the church) to thrive! Do a study on successful churches and you will find that their styles are very different...their theological convictions are not exactly the same...however, you will see in everyone of them a leader who has passionate, white hot vision and has always been willing to submit on areas of personal preference...but never on issues of vision!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

IF I WERE THE DEVIL...

Here are some things I would do...

I would tell church leaders that “it’s not about the numbers!” That they should be more concerned with quality than quantity. I would make them take pride in the fact that they were reaching no one, and actually get them to criticize the people that are.

I would convince church leaders that the quality of their worship services do not matter.

I would tell Christians to not allow themselves to be polluted by the world, but rather to attack it consistently so that those who are in it would be driven further from the church.

I would convince church leaders to DREAM SMALL! The last thing I would want would be people realizing that God is honored by people who really do believe that He can do the impossible! (Craig had an AWESOME post on this!)

I would get the church to focus on politics, getting them to believe that they are doomed unless a particular political party holds office.

I would make sure that those who believe in reformed theology and those who don’t hate each other; after all, if they fight with each other they have no time to fight me.

I would tell bloggers that they are “just” and “right” by setting up websites that do nothing but attack other ministries and tear them down.

I would tell pastors that it is perfectly acceptable to substitute ministry work for their personal walk with God; after all, He should understand.

I would convince pastors and church leaders to focus on what other churches are doing “wrong,” thus taking the focus off of their church.

I would tell churches that boycotting “secular” organizations is the most practical and effective way to reach the world.

I would tell young church planters that they cannot teach Scripture, call for repentance or take an offering, for that would be offensive. (What I would not tell them is that the only people that ever offends are “Christians!”)

I would get denominations to focus way more on inwards preferences and religious politics, allowing those who give the most money to call all the shots.

I would tempt the church to focus on issues and not Jesus.

I would tempt pastors to buy into the lie that things “will be better at the next church,” thus causing them to never dig roots in a community and build a great work for God.

I would tell pastors to disguise their jealousy over other pastors with statements like, “I am really concerned with such and such church down the road,” OR, “what you don’t know about THAT church is...”

I would make churches feel prideful in their particular Bible translation.

Those are just a few things...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Culture

FOUR TYPES OF STAFF MEMBERS

One of the things I will be trying to spend some time on in our upcoming meetings with our coaching network is the issue of staffing. (WOW...it begins a week from tomorrow!) In fact, a lot of the leadership questions I get have to do with staffing...so, let me lay out five type's of staff members, some good, some not so good...

#1 - The "Love To Do" Staff Member

This is the person you want around you! They have a positive attitude and are so pleasant to be around. This is the person who pulls up in the parking lot and actually thanks God before getting out of their car for the privilege of working there instead of thinking the church is blessed because they work there.

AND...they love their job! In fact, if they weren't doing what they did on staff they would do it as a volunteer! They love the church and it's vision and are willing to do everything they can!

#2 - The "Can Do" Staff Member

The one thing that has to be addressed on a staff is competency level. Because, while you may have someone who loves what they do...they just might not be able to do it. (And...in my opinion, the church should hold a higher standard here than the business community; after all, there is a lot more at stake.)

Can the person doing the job do the job? OR...has their skill set and ability been maxed out? It's a tough call...but one that must be made in order to protect the church and the staff member.

AND...let me say that the first option should always be to move the staff member to another job...because if they are a "Love To Do" staff member then they will thrive!

#3 - The "Should Do" Staff Member

This is the person on staff that gets to the office 3 minutes late and leaves 5 minutes early. They are gone a really long time for lunch...but no one ever really knows why. They spend a lot of time on their facebook pages (that are completely not ministry related) and often talk to their friends and waste time.

Sure, they get their job done—barely...but their hearts are not into it. They do what they "should do," nothing more, nothing less!

AND they have to go! You can't afford this kind of dead weight in your church! God's kingdom is WAY too important to keep these kind of people around. They are not doing what they are doing because of passion but rather a paycheck. NOT GOOD!

#4 - The "Won't Do" Staff Member

This is the staff member, when asked to do something, responds with, "that's not my job."

I know this is strong...but it has been made clear here at NewSpring Church from day one that EVERYTHING is our job...and if a staff member ever uses that they are asked to clean out their office!

If you ever have a staff member that isn't willing to do whatever it takes for the good of the church—they aren't bought into the vision. If a staff member ever becomes more departmental

(this is MY AREA) than organizational (this is MY CHURCH) then they are dangerously close to establishing ministry silo's that need to be destroyed!

One of the things I LOVE about our staff at NewSpring Church is...nothing is beneath anyone. Everyone is willing to do what it takes to get the job done...whether that means helping set out chairs, picking up trash in the parking lot on the way in...or even straightening up the restroom when noticing it is dirty!

When a staff is willing to do whatever...that attitude spreads to the volunteers...which will IMPACT a church in a huge way!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

THREE THINGS FOR PASTORS TO KEEP IN MIND—PART ONE

I'm REALLY excited about the coaching network that begins here tomorrow...got some great guys coming in and we should have a blast.

Last week on Twitter I asked a question in regards to what people felt that pastors and ministry leaders struggle with—one of the most frequent responses was people saying that all of us seem to struggle with how to handle our time...and how do we balance our schedule between family and church.

I want to share three things to keep in mind...but before I do I personally think every person who feels they struggle with this should read "Choosing to Cheat" by Andy Stanley—hands down the BEST BOOK I've ever read on the subject. Here we go...

#1 - Nothing Is More Important Than Your Personal Walk With Jesus!

And...let me be clear—your personal walk DOES NOT include sermon preparation!

I say it all the time...on most days I have an overwhelming sense of desperation. I have no idea what the heck I am doing. This is the largest church I've ever been a part of...and the only church I've ever been a pastor of...

AND the only hope I have is listening to the Almighty!

One of the things I do around once a year is begin in the book of Exodus and read through Deuteronomy so I can follow the story of Moses.

Folks, let's be honest—Moses had NO IDEA what the heck he was doing. He had never led a relocation project like that before. He had never parted a major body of water or seen manna fall from heaven.

BUT...as I read through that story every year one of the most common phrases I see in the Scriptures is, "And the Lord said to Moses."

I said it at Unleash the first year we did the conference—leadership is as easy as listening to God!

God wants you to get it right more than you do; after all, it's HIS church and He's loved it longer than you have!

One of the biggest mistakes I can make as a pastor is begin to try to operate in my own wisdom and power rather than BEGGING GOD to fill me with His wisdom and power!

I can't do this without Him! (And you can't either!)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Family, Life, Marriage

THREE THINGS FOR PASTORS TO KEEP IN MIND—PART TWO

#2 - Your Relationship With Your Wife Should Be The Most Important Human Relationship You Have!

I know way too many pastors wives who feel like the church is “the other woman.”

Pastors, the church is Christ's bride...not ours!

I once had a minister tell me that his wife often told him, “I feel you see me as Leah and the church as Rachel.”

They were divorced about a year after he told me that. Pastors, two things about your wife...

She's Not Impressed With You - All too often pastors thrive on needing to be needed, they want to be the hero and to have all eyes focused on them.

And bro...it just can be that way at home!

At church we're “something” in the eyes of others. But at home...well, our wives don't really care that we are pastors—they are more concerned about our role as husbands. AND...it's hard to be impressed with the guy who farts under the covers and wakes up with morning breath!

She loves you...she wants to be loved by you...but she isn't impressed with the fact you are a pastor. (And if she is...that will wear off.)

She Wants To Feel Pursued By You - Pastors, if we spent half of the time developing a plan for our marriage that we do planning for ministry...the results would be incredible.

She wants us to talk to her...not spend hours on the cell phone when we get home.

She wants us to be innovative in our marriage...not just in ministry.

She wants us to invest time in her...not just in making sure the message is good.

She wants us to talk to her...and not just talk about her in our messages.

She wants our attention...and not just when we “are in the mood!”

Cretia is my bride...my princess...and my passion is pursue her. I've not always done a good job with this...but more and more I am learning to pay attention to what she needs...to ask her how I can serve her...and then do all I can to communicate to her THROUGH ACTIONS that she is important to me.

I can tell her all day long...but until I step up and serve her...she won't know!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Family

THREE THINGS FOR PASTORS TO KEEP IN MIND—PART THREE

#3 - Your Kids Are Your Number One Discipleship Opportunity And Should NEVER Be Abandoned For The Sake Of The Church.

Your kids are a blessing from the Lord! I know Charisse is a blessing!!!

I know way too many pastors who will neglect their family (especially their kids) and then claim, “God has called me into ministry and what I can’t give my family He will make up for supernaturally!”

A pastor who uses this excuse needs to have his man parts removed!!! Seriously! The excuse used above is cowardly and pathetic!

Pastors, my daughter isn’t impressed with me! She could care less that I speak to thousands every week...but she does care about whether or not I take her outside to swing...or I chase her though the house...or we take a trip to see the ducks.

Dude, I’ve GOT to be honest here...if you neglect your kids for the sake of ministry...it will come back to haunt you. I know a lot of older pastors who pushed their kids to the side and now have horrible relationships with them.

We can’t push our kids aside “for the ministry,” they ARE OUR MINISTRY! AND...in several years they won’t be running around screaming for the church to disciple them because we actually embraced that role and disciplined them ourselves.

Our kids are a blessing...we need to prioritize them and treat them that way.

“But how,” you ask...you’ve got to SCHEDULE TIME & FOLLOW THROUGH...even when you feel like the work at the church is incomplete. And by the way...when was the last time you felt like everything at the church was “done!”

I am NOT an expert at this...but I am learning. AND...I know if I do not schedule things and place them as a priority...they probably won’t get done.

For example...every Monday and Tuesday night I have dinner at home with ‘Cretia and Charisse...and I hardly ever let ANYTHING get in the way of this.

Wednesday night is date night for ‘Cretia and I...ALWAYS! The best think I can do for Charisse is have a dynamic relationship with ‘Cretia!

On the weekends I am almost ALWAYS with my girls!

And...on Saturday mornings...that’s the day ‘Cretia gets to sleep in...and I get up, get Charisse up, give her breakfast...and then we go “on a date!” AND...I do just about everything in my power to MAKE this happen...and I DON’T USE MINISTRY as an excuse!

Dads...let me be very clear...I’ve always heard that they “grow up fast” and I now believe it. It seemed like I blinked and she was born...I blinked again and she was one!!! She’ll be gone before I know it...and I don’t want to be the guy saying, “I wish I had spent more time with my family!”

Your family deserves your undivided attention! YES, it's tough...but you and I have GOT to be there for them!

God will take care of HIS family (the church)...He wants us to take care of ours!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Family

THREE THINGS A SPEAKER SHOULD DO

The mind battles that are fought before and after a message are intense...always!!! Some of the highest of highs and lowest of lows are while a message is being prepared, delivered and the days (and even weeks) that follow. Here are a few pieces of advice...

#1 - Get alone with God and let Him set you on fire.

John Wesley once said, "I just set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn." We NEED that in our speakers today.

I'm afraid too many of us are dominated by the thought, "what is so and so going to think if I say this." And we become WAY more obsessed with not offending people...and in doing so we are perfectly willing to offend Jesus.

My advice...get ALONE with God and let Him absolutely put a message inside of your that absolutely burns your very soul...and you feel like you will explode if you don't get what He's put in you out of you!

One more thing before I move on...FIRE BURNS!!! If you preach what God has burned into your heart God will use it to purify some...and burn others! You & I can NOT EVER being more concerned with people's comfort & neglect God's command.

#2 - Understand That People Will ALWAYS Misunderstand What You Say...And Even Get Angry!

This may come as a complete shock to you...but I offend people every Sunday! Yes, it IS true! I know that is SO hard to believe. But...here's the kicker...

Often times I offend people that I didn't really know I was offending...and most (not all) of the time it's because they took an element of what I said...just a small piece and blew it COMPLETELY out of context. Oh yeah...it's going to happen.

For example, just the other week I made the comment from stage that the Democratic Party was way more organized and direct with what they were trying to communicate that the Republican party. I was in NO WAY endorsing either party; however, we actually had a few people think I was endorsing Democrats!!!

Pastors, people will always tell you AFTER you speak what you should and should not have said! Anyone can be an "arm chair quarterback" and "call the plays" from the comfort of their living room! But, once again, allow God to get you on fire, to put HIS WORDS in YOUR HEART, don't feel like you need to throw out a disclaimer for every other statement.

#3 - Keep The "One Day" Principle In Mind

I say it all of the time—but Hebrews 13:17 is a verse that every pastor SHOULD memorize!!!

Pastors, one day we will stand before God and be held accountable for how we lead and communicate.

Every message I prepare and deliver I have to say, “Would I be willing to stand in front of the Almighty right now with a clear conscience in regards to this message?”

You see, when we preach—HE is the ONE we are called to honor...not the deacons, church board or the largest giver!

One day I will stand in front of God...and if you are settled in your heart in regards to that—then step out and speak with confidence and conviction, knowing that you can NEVER, I mean EVER please God and people!

By the way...before I close let me say that I am FULLY CONVINCED that it is a great idea for pastors to bounce their messages off of a group of people for the purpose of clarity and getting new ideas and thoughts...but dude, they will not stand beside you one day when you go before God...it will be you and Him...so always make sure that you are doing what you do for His honor...HIS ALONE!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Preaching

C-H-A-N-G-E

So what’s involved in changing something up?

C = Calculation

If a change is going to be made I believe some time must be spent investigating the possible outcomes that will be associated with it. Some of the biggest mistakes I’ve made as a leader have been changing something without thinking it through.

H = Hesitation

When it comes to changing something that we’ve established...we always hesitate. Don’t get me wrong, I think pausing before making the change is healthy...however, when hesitation turns into an excuse to delay the obvious...problems WILL occur.

A = Anticipate Resistance

The very first reaction to change will always be some sort of resistance. As I leader I am coming more and more to understand that the first question a person runs through their mind when change is introduced is, “How is thing going to impact me?” And...if they detect that it may impact them in any negative sort of way...their natural tendency is to resist.

N = Necessary

Change is SO necessary! That statement was EASY to accept when we first began because we were changing the ways that other people did things; however, in the past couple of years or so it has become a sobering reality that the changes that are necessary are things we once thought of as edgy and innovative...which ISN’T easy...but, like I said...is necessary.

G = God Factor

What changes are God telling you to make? This could be personal...or even church wide. I know that He's been speaking into me very directly lately and telling me some personal changes that I need to make in regards to the ways I lead myself and His church. God isn't a dull God...and so following Him should never be either. He isn't telling me the "why's" right now...just the "what's"...and getting comfortable with that has been an adjustment...but a good one!

E = Expectation

Whenever God leads us to change—we can expect fruit to come out of it. (See John 15:4-5) I have found myself getting way to nervous in the past when God leads me to change something when, in reality, I have NEVER screwed anything up by simply being completely obedient to Him—even when that includes MAJOR change.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Change

SIX THINGS I BELIEVE LEADERS SHOULD NEVER DO—PART ONE

#1 - A Leader Should Never Attack A Problem Alone

If a leader tries to attack a problem all by themselves...then they aren't leading anyone!

One of the best resources a leader has is the team that God places around him.

I can't imagine going after a problem without the advice of the godly men and women God has placed around me!

#2 - A Leader Should Never Assume The Worst In People.

One of my goals as a leader is to help people become all that they can be through Christ...and I cannot do that if I am always thinking negative things about them...or assuming they are trying to undermine me in some way.

Do leaders get burned because they believe in people? YEP! I have been...so have you. BUT we can't give up on people because of a few negative experiences.

One of the verses I believe a leader needs to memorize and pray for those who serve with them is Philippians 4:8. One of the places the enemy loves to attack the most is among the leadership of a church...and the battle always begins in the mind.

So...pray for the people you serve with...and don't allow the enemy to hijack your mind!

#3 - A Leader Should Never Fall In Love With "The Way Things Are."

Leaders do not lay awake at night and dream about how to maintain the status quo, they have a thankful attitude in regards to what God has done...and an expectant attitude in regards to what else they feel He wants to do!

I've got to be honest here...it really bothers me when "leaders" fall in love with systems and structures simply because of the comfortably factor that is associated with the "known!"

However, it is in the unknown that God has done His best work in me, stretching and developing me in ways that I could never have experienced if I had been stuck in “cruise control.”

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD NOT DO IN A MEETING...

Some people love meetings...and some hate them. Personally, I love them as long as things are actually being accomplished. I sat down the other day and begin to brainstorm about the meetings that absolutely energize me...and came up with a list of four things I don't want to do personally that I thought I would share here...

#1 - Don't Assume Every Problem Must Be Solved On The Spot

I used to be the guy that would say, “We aren't going to leave this room until we come up with a solution for this issue!” WHICH would make us made decisions based upon desperation rather than God's direction.

Sometimes (many times actually) the best thing a team can do when it comes to a problem or an issue is actually table it for a week so that it can be thought about and prayed through.

What CAN (and often does) happen in a meeting when everyone feels like a solution needs to be developed on the spot is that people begin to talk in circles...and so the conversation that takes place for hours merely includes the same people saying the same things.

Don't be afraid to walk away...even if its for a couple of hours...so that a fresh perspective can be had.

#2 - Don't Be Afraid To Leave The Agenda

I am an agenda guy...I have notes typed up before each meeting as to what I hope to accomplish...and I usually follow it to a tee.

However, there are times when the agenda MUST be ditched because of what is happening in the room.

For example, last Tuesday in our Senior Management Team meeting an issue came up that led to about an hour long discussion...and it wasn't originally on the agenda. However, it was a God ordained conversation that really had a serious impact on everyone in the room.

Always be mindful of the fact that we should have things we want to accomplish...but when God moves and wants to take it in another direction...it's always best to follow Him!

#3 - Don't Be So Concerned About Your Own Self Image That You Hold Back From Saying What You Really Believe.

One of the biggest mistakes I've personally made in meetings is not saying what I think and then leaving incredibly frustrated at myself for not speaking up.

Ever been there?

There is absolutely NO reason at all to leave a meeting not having put everything you've got on the table. If God called you to lead...the SPEAK UP! Sure, you might be wrong...and if so then all it costs you is a little pride. BUT...if you are right then the possibilities are endless.

The stakes in church leadership are WAY TOO HIGH for a leader to put fear and pride before anointing and calling.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Meetings

FOUR QUESTIONS EVERY CHURCH SHOULD WRESTLE WITH - PART ONE

In reading through Romans recently the Lord grabbed my attention through what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 10:14-15, in these two verses there are four questions that I believe every church should obsess over!

#1 - "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?"

Every church (well, nearly every church) would admit that they want to see people come to Christ, to "believe on the name of Jesus;" however, my fear (and frustration) is that many times we fail to understand that people who don't know Christ simply do not BELIEVE that He is the answer to their issues!

Guess what...that makes it pretty much impossible for a Non - Christian to begin acting like a Christian. (An agenda many churches seemed to be obsessed with!)

So where does that leave us? Simple—we need to live our lives and preach the Gospel in such a way that people far from God don't have a hard time believing in God because of the hypocrisy they see in our lives...OR because of the sub par standards we have set in our worship services!

It's not that the Gospel is "unbelievable," but rather the fact that often times we make it unbelievable.

Yes, I know that "salvation belongs to the Lord," and that no one comes to Christ unless they are drawn by Him...it's just that I think we need to do life and do church in such a way that when Jesus does draw someone to Himself He can draw them THROUGH us rather than sending them AROUND us.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

FOUR QUESTIONS EVERY CHURCH SHOULD WRESTLE WITH - PART TWO

Continuing the post from yesterday based on Romans 10:14-15,

#2 - "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?"

If we truly want people to believe in Jesus then we **MUST** do all that we can to make sure they hear about Him!

I think one of the fundamental problems that exists in church world is that we have communicated very clear messages...however, very few of them actually have anything to do with Jesus. We say things like...

Do more, try harder

Don't do (fill in the blank!)

This particular political party must be our obsession.

Don't watch this movie or listen to this music

Boycott this

I could go on and on...but I think we all get the point. The church spends **WAY** too much time talking about what it is against and never gets to the heart of the message that can actually change people from the inside out—JESUS!

They can't believe in Jesus until a church decides that **HE** is going to be their one obsession!

#3 - "And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

You and I are called to preach the Gospel every single day.

How we treat the waiter or waitress this weekend is preaching a message!

How we react when someone cuts us off in traffic is preaching a message (and our kids are on the front row!)

How we talk about our spouse is preaching a message!

What we are willing to say about others when they are not around is preaching a message!

Everything we do preaches a message...our lifestyle openly declares whether or not we love Jesus...or merely just the idea of Jesus! If we claim to love Jesus but are not living for Him then we are nothing more than, as Craig Groeschel would say, a practical atheist!

Being a Christian is **NOT** about simply what we **KNOW** (none of us will ever know more than Satan!) It's what we **DO** with what we know!

People outside the walls are "listening" to us "preach" every single day...and you and I need to be willing to (preach) live in such a way that shows the world that we believe!

Let's do our best to live out to a watching world what it means to love Jesus...our life just might be the message that God uses to help someone cross over from death to life!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

FOUR QUESTIONS EVERY CHURCH SHOULD WRESTLE WITH - PART THREE

Last post on this from Romans 10:14-15,

#4 - “And how can they preach unless they are sent?”

Pardon me while I go “Rick Warren” and use an acrostic on this one! S-E-N-T stands for...

S = Set On Fire!!! Personal evangelism and inviting people to church MUST be regularly taught from the stage! People have GOT to know that lost people matter to God (Luke 19:10); therefore they MUST matter to the church!

E = Encouraged!!! Anytime you ask someone to invite people to church there is some excitement...but also discouragement because they begin thinking, “I’ve already asked them a hundred times and they won’t come!!!”

Encourage them...I always tell them that I am so glad that a guy named David didn’t give up on me! Ever more specifically...I am glad GOD didn’t give up on me!!!

For those of you at NewSpring getting “no’s” for this weekend—don’t give up!!! Sometimes it takes a while! It did for me!

N = Necessary!!! It is so necessary for a church to be obsessed with personal evangelism! Heck, if the early church had been a bunch of guys who loves theology more than Jesus and had decided to get in a room with people who only thought just like them and solely focused on the “finer points of theology...” Well, we’d have all gone to hell!!!

T = Tense!!! Christians must understand that when we step out into the world and begin to invite people to church...there are going to be tense conversations! AND...that’s OK! We must remember that it should not be our goal to win arguments and distance people...but to work through the tension and allow God to use us to break down walls that people have built up.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Asking Questions

THREE TRUTHS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TRYING TO RESOLVE CONFLICT—PART ONE

One of the biggest problems that I believe exists among church leaders is unresolved conflict.

We are living in a dream world if we actually believe that people who serve together on a team will never get angry at someone; however, here are three things that I have tried to personally implement in my life that helps resolve the conflict.

#1 - Understand That E-mail Does Not Work!

E-mail is a powerful and useful tool when it comes to communicating information. BUT...should be TOTALLY AVOIDED when trying to resolve conflict.

I learned in college that 80-90% of all communication is non-verbal. With that being the case—email would eliminate one of the most important aspects of communication, thereby leaving room for LOTS of misunderstanding.

I have gotten SO ANGRY at people over an email before, thinking they meant one thing when, in actuality, they meant something totally different. AND...when I finally had the guts to have a face to face conversation and bring up their “hurtful” comments in the email...they have looked at me like I was on crack and said, “Man, I am sorry you thought that...but that is not at all what I meant.”

I recently violated this first rule recently. I heard something that bothered me...and so instead of having a face to face conversation with the team I serve with & finding out the facts...I shot out an email with certain demands and hard hitting statements.

WRONG MOVE!

When people’s feelings are involved it is SO WORTH THE TIME to either break off a phone call...or walk down the hall to have a conversation.

As I said...I was recently reminded of that...and even though it takes a lot more effort to not utilize email in this arena...it keeps the relationships with the people I work with both fresh and conflict free.

Oh yeah...the same thing can be true for texting as well!

Once more...when emailing people can’t see or hear your heart or your tone...it is SO WORTH the time to talk face to face!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Conflict

THREE TRUTHS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TRYING TO RESOLVE CONFLICT—PART TWO

#2 - Be Honest!

One of the things I will do from time to time in a meeting is address the tension that exists in the room. (Isn’t it funny how tension always makes its presence known?)

One of the drawbacks of working with people you actually like is that no one wants to hurt another person’s feelings...and so they hold back from saying what is really on their mind...

WHICH is, in my opinion, one of the worse things a person can do who has been called to serve in any sort of leadership capacity!

The team that I serve with has purposefully created a “say what needs to be said” environment. Yes, we do love one another...but each one of us has made a commitment to never put personal feelings over our calling to lead!

I have often said when introducing an idea to the group, “Guys, this is what I am thinking...but in order for this to work I need your unfiltered feedback...don’t hold back!”

At times I wished I hadn't asked for that...but because people on our team do not hold back...I never have to wonder what people were REALLY thinking about an idea.

One more thing about this...if a person holds back from saying what they are really thinking...they will begin to build resentment towards a person and their ideas...even the good ones. It is SO IMPORTANT that teams be honest at all times with each other...because I've seen people EXPLODE over petty issues that were nothing more than weeks, even months of built up frustration over not saying what they were really thinking.

OK...I lied, I just had one more thought...I have discovered that when I hold back that I will often times build up assumptions in my mind that I believe the other person believes (usually negative towards me,) which will also lead to bitterness and divisiveness.

SO...my challenge to any team is...say what needs to be said! AND...to the team I serve with...THANKS for not holding back! God's Kingdom has never been advanced by wimpy men whose biggest desire was to make everyone feel OK and whose biggest desire was to experience warm fuzzies together!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Conflict

THREE TRUTHS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TRYING TO RESOLVE CONFLICT—PART THREE

And finally the third truth...

#3 - Don't Let The Sun Go Down On You If You Are Angry!

Ephesians 4:26-27 is HUGE when it comes to both resolving conflict and keeping working relationships healthy.

One of the mistakes that I made pretty often when we began NewSpring Church was to try to internalize everything that came my way, trying to "figure out" what people were really saying and thinking INSTEAD of just asking them.

And that, my friends, gave the enemy a foothold that he used to climb all over me!

The scenario would go something like this...

Someone would say something in a meeting or in the halls that I didn't like or agree with. In some instances I may have felt attacked or torn down. Of course that would make me angry...and I would usually just walk away...

BUT...when I finally calmed down I would begin to think about the person that had brought the issue to my attention...and instead of thinking about what they said I began to think about all of the things I didn't like about them...and all of the problems I thought they had.

By the time the evening rolled around I would be sitting in my home having imaginary arguments with them (I always won!!!) AND...if I wasn't careful I would begin to say slightly negative things about them in front of others...and actually looked for opportunities to tear them down.

Sin has a funny way of trying to justify itself!!!

So...several years ago I decided that if the Bible said to not allow the sun to go down on my anger...then that is exactly what I was going to do.

WHICH means I've had to make some late night phone calls. I've had to walk into some offices and close the door & say, "Hey, I know you probably didn't mean it...but I felt torn down when you said what you said..."

(By the way...90% of the time the person who I was angry with is completely surprised that I took what they said the way I did. I had someone tell me a long time ago that words don't have meanings...people have meanings. That is so true!)

Bottom line...I try my hardest to not go to bed angry at anyone! EVER! Sure, it's made for some long conversations...and there have been times that I have had to say, "Look, we obviously are not seeing eye to eye here...but can we at least agree that we are on the same team and pray through a solution?"

The enemy WANTS to destroy harmony among team members! He wants you to think negative thoughts about others. He wants us misunderstanding one another. Unity and harmony MUST be valued...and pride must be put aside so that effectiveness will continue!

There is NOTHING LIKE serving on a team where the people actually love one another...BUT that atmosphere doesn't happen by accident...it only happens when each team member decides that the sun is not going to go down on their anger!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Conflict

WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN...

One of the lessons I've learned while being in the ministry for the past 17 years is sometimes what people say isn't exactly true...things such as...

(WARNING...you will probably only like this post if you are a pastor or a staff member of a church!)

What They Say: "I'm looking for a church that preaches the Word!"

What They Mean: "I'm looking for a church that preaches MY view of the Word. I think the BLANK translation should be used...I think BLANK should be talked about a lot while BLANK should be ignored. And if you ever stop preaching my view of the Word I will leave and tell others that you don't preach the Word!"

What They Say: "Lot's of people have been coming to me and saying they don't like is..."

What They Mean: "I basically only have three friends...and all of them think exactly like me. The other night we were enjoying a time of self righteousness because, after all, we are right about everything...and were also slandering you (in the form of prayer requests) and thought it would be wise to approach you with our pet peeve. We've actually talked to no one else about this but said "lots" because we wanted to validate our dysfunction."

What They Say: "I'm leaving the church."

What They Mean: “Beg me to stay. If you will just ask me I will share with you several ways you can compromise God’s vision that He’s given you, thus becoming nothing more than a people pleasing pastor who is more interested in popularity than obedience. If you don’t bow to my demands I will remind you that I tithe and that the church needs my money, reducing you to a mere preaching whore...one who is paid for a service for the pleasure of another person.”

What They Say: “I want a church that is more focused on discipleship.”

What They Mean: “I want a church where everyone knows me and how important I am! I don’t want to reach people who are different from me, be it economic class or race or even musical preference. I already know WAY more than I do...but I somehow equate spirituality with knowledge rather than application and I rather enjoy feeling intellectually superior to those who don’t know as much as me.”

What They Say: “Don’t take this personally...but...”

What They Mean: “I am about to lower the BOOM on you...but you can’t get angry because I told you not to take it personally. Even though you have dedicated your life to this and pretty much invest every ounce of energy you have to this cause...and I think about it once or twice a week...you need to receive my attacks, even when they are personal...and you cannot retaliate because, remember, it’s not personal.”

OKAY, that was fun! I typed it all with a smile. Trust me...I’m not mad or frustrated with anyone...I just thought a pastor or two MIGHT get a smile out of this. :-)

Posted by: Perry Noble., Culture

SEVEN THINGS SENIOR PASTORS WANT THEIR STAFF TO KNOW—PART ONE

I will follow this with a series of posts entitled, “Seven things staff want their SP to know.”

#1 - I Need Positive Attitudes

Two thoughts on this...

First of all...I think a person can (and should) be held accountable for their attitude. After all, Scripture tells us in Philippians 2:5 to have the attitude of Christ.

I’m not talking about people who have a bad day from time to time—we all have those! We are imperfect people who work in an imperfect world.

BUT...I am talking about the staff member that treats everyone around him or her as some sort of inferior idiot...that simply cannot be tolerated on any staff.

The second thought in this line of thinking is a pastor needs “can do” people around him...what I mean is when he is casting vision he doesn’t need people rolling their eyes and making groaning noises and trying to play “devils advocate.” (By the way—the devil doesn’t need ANY help!)

BUT...he does need honesty! Let me paint a picture of how this looks...

Ken Wilson is a guy on our staff who does an amazing job at this! He is over our production area and simply knows how to make things happen. However, he is incredibly honest and doesn't skim over the details.

I remember once casting a huge vision of something I wanted to see happen production wise. It was a project unlike anything we had ever attempted. As I was talking in the meeting I noticed Ken writing furiously on his scratch pad.

When I had finally shut up I looked at Ken and asked, "Can we do this?"

His answer was, "Yes, we can DO anything. However, if you are serious about us pursuing what you just talked about let me share with you how much time that is going to take AND how much it is going to cost. It CAN be done...but in order for me to do it I am going to need to back off of a project or two...and we are going to need to spend more money that is in our budget!"

I LOVED THAT! His attitude was, "Yes we can...but here are the facts associated with the yes." And he left the ball in my court.

After being confronted with the facts we modified the project a tad and were able to pull off an amazing service...all because there was a staff member with a CAN DO attitude and the COURAGE to be honest.

WOW...that was long...I'll try to hit a couple tomorrow.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS SENIOR PASTORS WANT THEIR STAFF TO KNOW—PART TWO

#2 - You Will Never Know The Weight I Feel

Ministry is tough on every level—period. However, the pain and burden that a pastor has to deal with is unlike any area I've ever experienced.

I served as a staff member for nine years before becoming the senior pastor...and there isn't a class on the planet that can prepare you for what is coming your way...both good and bad.

I did a blog post entitled "The Pastors Pain" a while back that deals with this...here's the link if you haven't read it. I know some pastors are afraid to talk about this stuff because they are afraid of what people might think about them saying, "My job is tough!"

(By the way...I received a good bit of feedback from the post mentioned in the paragraph above...and the only people who had a problem with it were people who had never served a church as a senior pastor!)

Truth is truth...and it doesn't really matter what anyone thinks—period! Staff member...do all that you can to pray for that man! Trust me...he goes through it!

#3 - Don't Settle For Good Enough

One of our core values here at NewSpring Church is excellence...which does NOT mean perfection...but it does mean giving something your best effort.

As a senior pastor I have an incredible amount of confidence that the people I serve with are going to do all that they can to make sure that whatever they are working on is the best it can be!

One of the biggest problems in church world today, in my opinion, are churches that put a pathetic presentation out there and then use the word “authentic” to describe it.

(I also find it fascinating that some churches say, “we try really hard to keep it authentic.” My question is...if it is truly authentic...should you have to try to keep it that way? Just curious!)

We are called to do whatever we do with the absolute best effort we can put forth. I do not expect perfection from our staff because I am not perfect...but I do want everyone’s best effort because I believe God works through people who are willing to go all out for Him...and then believe He is going to go all out as well!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS SENIOR PASTORS WANT THEIR STAFF TO KNOW—PART THREE

#4 - PLEASE Get Along

One of the most frustrating things for a Senior Pastor to have to deal with is staff members who refuse to act like grown ups and feel the need to resort to name calling and comparison with other staff members.

As a leader of God’s church I don’t have time to try to help people who can’t escape the mentality of a second grader!!! My gosh...we are the church...we can’t provide environments that facilitate forgiveness if we are carrying unforgiveness in our hearts towards the people we work with!

#5 - Don’t Surprise Me

This one is HUGE for me! If something is going to go wrong...and you know it’s going to go wrong before hand...please tell me! Don’t let me get caught in a situation that you knew was going to happen...but didn’t tell me for fear that Jesus might actually decide to come back and fulfill everything LaHaye and Jenkins wrote about...this saving you from Carpathia and any fallout that would come as a result of your mistake.

AND...along with this A PASTOR NEEDS COMPLETE HONESTY from a staff member. Now, I understand that some staff members are afraid to be honest with their pastor...maybe because he is an insecure leader and does not like his “authority” questioned.

I’ve got to be honest...because of some very honest staff members NewSpring Church has been guided away from some decisions that I may have thought were good...but because there were staff that could see what I could not see...and they knew that I didn’t possess the information they had...and because they spoke up...we’ve been able to be used by the Lord to advance His Kingdom.

One more thing...as a senior pastor I am a PIT BULL when it comes to anyone talking about the staff that serve with me. No one, I MEAN NO ONE talks smack about my staff in front of me. I simply will not allow it!

BUT...what I tell our staff is, “If you make a stupid mistake...PLEASE don’t hide it from me. Seriously, tell me...because someone is going to tell me...and when they do I want to be able to let them know that you personally came to me and I know all about it!”

Staff members...help you pastor protect you! You are going to make mistakes. AND...trust me on this one...he is going to hear about it...so set him up for success when it comes to defending you.

One more thing...if you have a senior pastor that constantly throws you under the bus...find a new job!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS SENIOR PASTORS WANT THEIR STAFF TO KNOW—PART FOUR

#6 - Never Say, “That’s Not My Job!”

One of the most disturbing trends that is in the church world today is the one where staff members believe that their position trumps the purpose of the church. They actually believe the church exist so that they can have a job and use their “talents,” and anything outside of the boundaries of their gifting is simply “beneath” them.

Let me be clear...that is NOT the case here at NewSpring Church, which is one of the reasons I LOVE OUR STAFF!

We understand that our church exists to lift up the name of Jesus and reach the world for Him...and everyone of us are willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen.

Do I want each staff member operating in their areas of strength and gifting? Heck yes! However, there are times that we must all come together and do whatever it takes to get things done...whether that means setting up chairs, stuffing envelopes or making phone calls.

When you are on a church staff—everything is your job.

#7 - Protect Me

Do you have your pastors back?

You’ve got to watch this because the enemy is so subtle in the way he will try to destroy this relationship.

Let’s say the pastor does something that you do not necessarily agree with...or there is a misunderstanding between you and him...and you just can’t quit thinking about it...

What will usually happen in a situation like this is that the enemy will make sure some bitter church member approaches you and says something along the lines of, “Hey man, I really do love you and think you are doing an awesome job...but what is with the pastor, he’s been really ticking me off lately...”

Right there a decision MUST be made. Are you going to fall into the trap and verbally bash the pastor...or are you going to go to him and seek to work out the disagreement?

The enemy does NOT want staff harmony...and especially loves to create distrust and skepticism when it comes to the relationship between the staff and the pastor. BOTH parties MUST be aware of this...and take their thoughts captive in this fight.

“But Perry,” you ask, “what if he is sinning? What if he is wrong?” My advice...pray that God will kick his butt!!! Seriously, God is not mocked...and if the pastor is doing something ungodly or unbiblical then pray for God to absolutely WHIP HIS REAR END.

AND...if you absolutely cannot support the vision and have tried your best to biblically express your frustrations with the leadership of the church then simply resign with grace.

Next week I will blog about what every staff member wished their senior pastor knew...

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS STAFF MEMBERS WISHED THEIR SENIOR PASTORS KNEW—PART ONE

I did a series of posts last week on what the Senior Pastor wished the staff knew...now time to look at the other side of the coin.

#1 - Tell Me What You Expect Of Me

One of the things that a senior pastor must understand is that MOST staff members actually want to do an awesome job.

However, most of their frustration comes as a result of the pastor having unspoken expectations (or unrealistic ones.)

One of the best things a pastor can do is actually define success for the staff he serves with. Pastors, we've got to understand that our staff does not think like us, nor do they process information like we do...and if we want them to thrive (which will allow our church to thrive) then we've got to speak straight with them.

I cannot hold a staff member accountable for things he did or did not do that I provided no clear instruction for. And if we are not clear in our instruction...the best they can do is guess...which is incredibly frustrating for them.

#2 - Give Me Time

One of the biggest mistakes I've made as a pastor is getting fired up about something, getting key staff members together & sharing the vision with them...developing a strategy, assigning tasks and thinking big.

Some of you are wondering what the problem is with that. Well, nothing...here's where the problem begins...

The staff leave the room pretty fired up and begin to work on their aspects of making the vision become a reality. Meanwhile...I get another idea...and I am FIRED UP about it. So, a few days later I call another meeting where I share the vision, develop a strategy and assign some tasks...

BUT...this time I notice there isn't as much excitement in the room. In fact, there is sort of a sense of dread...and I get angry because "these people" aren't fired up like I am...

I did this several times as a leader and then I finally understood...I've GOT to give the staff time to actually do the work. I can't just get them in a room, snap my fingers and then BAM...it happens. If we want to do ministry with excellence...then it takes time.

This is one of the reasons I work so far ahead in message preparation. I want the video department, graphics area and our team of musical artists to have TIME to pray and prepare in regards to what is coming next. The more time I give them...the better they do...the more excited they become...and the whole team wins.

Pastors...the more we can prepare in advance the more we set our teams up for success...and the more the whole church will benefit from it as well.

YES, it does take a lot of work...but it's worth it if the staff can continue to perform with excellence and stay fired up!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS STAFF MEMBERS WISHED THEIR SENIOR PASTORS KNEW—PART TWO

#3 - "Thank You" Goes A Long Way

Pastor, when was the last time you said "thanks" to a staff member?

This is an area where I am continually seeking improvement. There are times when I get so wrapped up in the work that I forget to tell others how much I appreciate them and the job they are doing.

One day I was about to leave the office and a staff member walked by me...the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and told me to tell him "thanks" for all that he did.

So...I called him over to my car and told him how much I appreciated him and the work that he was doing in our church.

The next day he sent me an email telling me that he had worked in the business world for years...and no one had ever said "thanks" for anything...and that my encouragement meant a ton to him.

Pastors, we need to be in the business of saying "thanks!" Trust me...it goes a long way for someone on staff to feel affirmed and appreciated.

#4 - Give Me Permission To Fail

One of the biggest fears that any human being has is failure...so, rather than taking a risk they simply choose to play it safe and not make any bold moves for the cause of Christ.

Here's the deal...staff members WANT to take leaps of faith. They want to honor God. They want to try new things. BUT...most of them don't want to do it at the risk of losing their jobs.

So...give them permission to fail. As long as they mess something up in an all out effort...and as long as no one gets hurt...no problem, right?

NOW...when a staff member continually makes the same mistake over and over...it's not an issue of passion but rather an issue of competence.

BUT...if we as pastors are going to lead churches that are taking HUGE steps...then we MUST understand that WE are NOT the only ones who are going to have BIG IDEAS! If we limit our church to our ideas and innovation—they're screwed!

BUT...if we release our staff and give them permission to go all out and give it their best effort...and even if they fail...we still win because it will mean we are one step closer to something successful!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS STAFF MEMBERS WISHED THEIR SENIOR PASTORS KNEW—PART THREE

#5 - Understand That I Have A Life

We have a different philosophy here at NewSpring Church when it comes to staff and work hours.

For years we would do the work ALL DAY on Sunday thing, followed by a busy Monday through Friday...then we would take Saturday off and walk around like zombies (calling that a family day)...then we were back to Sunday!

Soon afterward we did the deal where we would give someone a day off during the week; however, with the way our church operates being staff led there always seemed to be some sort of emergency where staff members had to be called in on their day off.

SO...we decided to completely shut down the offices of NewSpring Church on Friday. We all work Sunday through Thursday and then on Friday...everyone is off!!!

IT'S AWESOME! Our staff has a weekend and walk into Sunday rested and ready to go!

I know, I know, "But what if there is an emergency on Friday and someone needs to get in touch with someone?"

Great question...our care area has a system in place should that ever happen. However, my question is, "What if there is an emergency at 3 am on Monday? Are people going to be able to expect to call the office then and find a staff member as well."

One of the biggest problems in churches today is the fact that many staff members are COMPLETELY FRIED because of a schedule that is demanding and demoralizing.

As a pastor—one of the things I MUST champion is the protection of the people that I serve with. I MUST understand that they need time to relax. I MUST understand that they need time with

their families. I MUST understand that the more rested and refreshed they are the better they will do their jobs!

Now there are times when a certain department or team will have to come in on Friday to get some things done...but that is the exception, NOT the rule.

Pastors, what are you doing to make sure the staff you serve with are not FRIED? YOU MUST take the lead on this one!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

SEVEN THINGS STAFF MEMBERS WISHED THEIR SENIOR PASTORS KNEW—PART FOUR

#6 - Let Me Take Things Off Of Your Plate

Pastors, let me make you a promise—there are things that you are doing RIGHT NOW that some of your staff members are begging God that you would stop doing them because...well...your not that good at them!

BUT...the reason you don't want to release them is because you fear that your burden might be someone else's burden, not understanding that the thing that may weigh you down actually energizes someone else.

One of the most informative and freeing meetings I've ever led was the day when I walked into our SMT meeting and asked this question, "Guys, what is the ONE THING that I am doing that you sit around and say, 'I wish Perry would stop trying to do that and just let me have it?'"

That meeting seriously set me free on some things!

#7 - Ask My Opinion

I said this earlier in the series...but when we limit our church to our wisdom and insight...they're screwed!

God placed me as the pastor over this staff for two reasons...to lead them AND to listen to them.

AND...the only reason a senior pastor would not value the opinion of the people he serves with is because he is insecure (and an idiot!)

I am so blessed that God has placed so many incredibly gifted and passionate people around me...people who are much smarter than me...and there have been times when I have been stressing over how to solve a problem and someone else will come up with the answer as if it were nothing to them!

Pastors—we've GOT to ask those who serve with us what they think...about everything. They see things we don't see. They have a perspective that we don't have. And God has placed them around us to serve with us...but also to prevent us from making bad leadership decisions.

BUT we don't know that unless we actually take the time to ask them what they think.

One of my favorite questions to ask around here when people bring me a problem is, "What do you think about that?"

What I have found is that the best and brightest leaders ALREADY have thought through the solution. ASK their opinion...you might be surprised with who God has placed with you!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Staffing

KEEPING YOUR F-O-C-U-S...PART ONE

One of the struggles that I feel leaders face is the one to stay focused...here are a few things that I am currently learning and trying to apply when it comes to F-O-C-U-S

F = FIGHT

If focus is going to be maintained...it isn't going to happen by accident, you will have to fight for it.

Let me drill down on this for a second...in the last coaching network I led I shared with the guys that a move of God will have two characteristics...

It will fire people up!

It will piss people off!

And caution MUST be taken with both groups...

The first group...out of pure passion...will want to do more than God has actually given you the vision for...they will want to add things to it. BUT...in order to be true to God and His calling we simply must do what the Lord has led us to do...no more, no less.

There are also some lazy people in the group who often want to piggy back their idea on the vision God has shared with you. They will call and begin to tell you that the church needs to capitalize on certain opportunities...but when they are challenged to lead the charge in the idea they are bringing up...they will often make a remark about how they don't have time.

I usually share two thoughts with people like this...

#1 - If God placed something in your heart to do...then do it, don't delegate it and then think you've honored Him!

#2 - Your burden will never become my passion!

The second group...out of pure stupidity...will begin to attack the vision and tear you down personally and even go as far to tell you all of the reasons that what you want to see happen cannot happen.

I seem to have the spiritual gift of pissing people off...and I'm perfectly okay with that...if I am constantly making people happy then I'm not hearing from Jesus!

I don't try to make people angry just for the sake of doing so...I would say that is sinful...but I've GOT to be true to the vision He's placed in me...and when people get angry and criticize the plan...it fires me up!!

That is why...as a leader...you've GOT to be willing to fight for the dream and desire that God has placed within you.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Focus

KEEPING YOUR F-O-C-U-S...PART TWO

F = Fight

O = Optimistic

Call me crazy...but I am an optimist...I always see the glass half full!

Let me be very clear...I've never met a person who enjoyed or embraced a pessimistic leader.

Sure, we will all have our days marked with doubt; however, if a leader doesn't fully believe in the vision that he or she is casting...and at the first sign of resistance want to throw up their hands and quit...then how in the world do they expect other people to fully buy in?

If God places something inside of you...then you have to believe what His Word says in Philippians 1:6...that HE began that work...and HE will complete it.

NO ONE can be held accountable for the optimism in relation to the vision other than the leader. And so...if the people around you don't seem to be optimistic...take a look in the mirror before talking down to them.

C = CHANGE

Many times God will change things up in order to get us to focus on Him more...and one of my prayers lately has been, "God, please DESTROY my preconceived notions of how church should be done and place YOUR HEART, MIND and DESIRES in me!"

In reading through the book of Acts lately it has been so clear to me that God had to do some MAJOR changing in the church to get them to remain focused.

In Acts 2 He changed the idea that the church was supposed to remain a group of 120 people who were committed to being "deep!"

In Acts 6:1-7 He changed the idea that the pastor needed to do everything & the people were merely to observe and not participate.

In Acts 8 He changed the idea that church is always safe.

In Acts 9 He changed the idea that some people are beyond the reach of His grace.

In Acts 10 He took Peter through a very uncomfortable experience in order to change the notion that the Gospel is limited to a group of people who looked and acted just like him.

Intense focus requires allowing God to change us in order that our attention on Him may become more intense! Change isn't always comfortable...but it is often necessary.

I personally believe that many churches are a change or two away from experiencing God's blessing and favor like never before...just my opinion!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Focus

KEEPING YOUR F-O-C-U-S...PART THREE

U = UNDERSTANDING

If we are going to remain focused as leaders then we've got to understand that God is in complete control...despite what our current circumstances are telling us.

In any significant move of God that I've ever had the privilege of being a part of...there was always a phase in which I begin to ask questions like...

Has God forgotten about me?

Has God abandoned me?

Did I hear correctly?

Is God on a coffee break?

I think we've all been there...and it is often during these times that He teaches me how HUGE He is...how He is always working...and that HIS plans will take place in HIS ways in HIS time...and that I am not the one who gets to direct His will...but rather participate in it!

When things seem most out of control...He is most in control! We cannot proclaim to be believers in the Sovereignty of God and then freak out at the first sign of the wheels coming off!

Understand this...no matter what happens...no matter WHAT happens...God is still God...He still reigns...He is not worried...we shouldn't be either!

S = SIMPLE

The more we having going on in our lives and our ministry the less we can pay attention to.

Please read that sentence again...

God didn't call me to do everything...and He didn't call you to either!

One of the goals I am setting for 2009 is to continue to simplify my life and the ministry that I am in charge of.

Making things simple allows me to enjoy the quality of my life more...and allows me to actually accomplish more than I ever thought possible.

I pity the pastor that feels like he must do everything and refuses to seek the face of Jesus and beg Him to reveal the gifting in his life...and then pursue that revelation with every single ounce of energy he has.

We've GOT to be about hearing from Jesus as to why He put us on this earth "for such a time as this!"

Look at the life of Jesus—how in the world did He accomplish so much in three years? Simple—he was focused...He kept things simple and honored His Father first!

What are the things you need to stop doing? Hint...they are the things that bring you the least amount of joy and sense of fulfillment...they are the things that you dread...and they are the

things that keep you from being who God called you to be—and you do them out of a sense of guilt rather than a sense of destiny.

Make a list...cross things off...simplify...focus!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Focus

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS FROM A RUGBY GAME - PART ONE

While I was in Australia I had the opportunity to play rugby with some of the guys at Hillsong College. Two quick thoughts on that before I jump in...

#1 - My body is definitely MUCH more sensitive to pain than it used to be!

#2 - I had an awesome time playing...as the country song says, “I ain’t as good as I once was—but I’m as good once as I ever was!”

My experience at playing rugby, though, caused me to sit around and think about leadership...and I began asking myself four questions in light of the experience I gained while playing...

#1 - Do I Want The Ball?

When I first stepped onto the field I made a quick discovery...if you are holding the ball...you were going to get your clock cleaned!

After the first several hits I had this thought, “If I will just stay away from the dude passing the ball...he won’t pass it to me...and if doesn’t pass it to me then that means I won’t get hit anymore.”

I played this way for about three minutes and then another thought hit me, “If I keep playing this way...I won’t get hit...but I also won’t know what it is like to actually advance the ball downfield.”

SO...from that point on I literally wanted the ball every single chance I could get my hands on it...

The same is true for leadership. When it comes to making the tough calls...when it comes to getting “hit” by critics and internet bloggers who sit in their underwear in their mother’s basement and manage their facebook accounts all day long...GIVE ME THE BALL!

When it comes to offending the religious...give me the ball!

When it comes to being consumed about people meeting Christ...give me the ball!

A leader wants the ball! There is something in him or her that keeps thinking, “If I had possession of the ball...I could move it a little further down field.” Some call that arrogance; however, I call it proper stewardship of the Romans 12:8 gift of leadership.

Life is WAY TOO SHORT to play it safe. Yes, getting hit does hurt...but if you aren't getting hit as a leader then you are either running the wrong way...or you just aren't in the game!

How about it...or you on the field watching the game pass you by...but are too afraid to engage because you might get hit?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS FROM A RUGBY GAME - PART TWO

The first question I talked about yesterday was, "Do I want the ball?" Today we will deal with...

#2 - Can I Deliver A Hit?

One of the MOST ENJOYABLE aspects of playing rugby was hitting people—that was FUN!!! :-)
One of the ways to EARN respect on the rugby field is hit early...hit hard and hit often. There isn't really a lot of time to try and make nice with everyone...the game is intense and requires intense play!

The same is true in leadership...a godly/wise leader knows when to deliver a hit.

One of the toughest things about leadership is...it requires courage...courage to make tough decisions...courage to have HARD face to face conversations...and courage to let people who do not buy into the vision leave...and take their money with them!

You've GOT to be willing to stand up as a leader with conviction and passion that the LORD puts in your heart and cast a compelling vision...and when people come against what you clearly know God has placed in your heart—you've got to deliver a hit.

I ALWAYS tell church planters that they will be tested within the first year or so of their church plant...probably from a person who has a lot of \$\$\$ and doesn't like the direction of the church...and will threaten to leave and pull his funding if things do not change...that person needs to be HIT with the truth...and then released to go and try to control some other co-dependent church!

One of the biggest problems I think the church in America has is "leaders" who are more concerned about their paycheck than obedience...thus backing off who God has called them to be and what He has called them to do.

Leaders have to be able to lower the boom from time to time.

NOW...what I do NOT mean is...

DO NOT yell at your church because two or three bloggers said bad things about you.

DO NOT think that four or five people complaining about a situation means that everyone is against you.

What I am saying is that when you know God has placed a fire inside of you...you've got to be willing to fight for it.

Are you willing to deliver a hit? Do you believe in the vision enough to offend those who don't buy in to what the Lord has commanded you to do?

If you aren't willing to fight for your vision...then you have no vision...all you have is a daydream that you are begging God to make come true.

BUT...a leader will fight and deliver hits for his/her vision...what about you?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS FROM A RUGBY GAME - PART THREE

Here's the third question in the series...

#3 - Am I Willing To Learn New Things?

One of the coolest things about the game of rugby is that as the game progressed I learned more and more about the philosophy of the game, asked a lot of questions...and by the time the game was over I had become a more effective player.

I didn't walk on the field...ask for one explanation...get the basics and then try to figure the rest out. I was playing a game I hadn't played before...and so I sought wisdom from those who had been playing much longer than me!

As a leader I MUST be about the business of trying my best to learn more and more about the role of leadership the Lord has called me to.

AND...I can't assume that I have learned all that there is to know about what God has called me to do. In order to play the game more effectively...I've GOT to ask those who have been playing longer than me questions and SHUT UP and listen to them as they share wisdom.

One of the things I think I have always done well is try my best to place myself in environments where I can meet with people who I know I can learn from. I have always known that I am way over my head...that I am not smart enough to do this on my own...and that God has given me the opportunity to learn from others.

I had an intern ask me the other day about what blogs I read...and I told him that I am down to about 10 or so...mostly friends who I try to keep up with & see how their lives are going.

I hardly EVER read church planters blogs anymore because many of them are quickly becoming experts at making complete @\$\$e\$ of themselves by attacking other pastors and ministries that are successful.

Let me be honest...I don't have a lot of time to focus on what is WRONG with other churches...I am WAY TOO FOCUSED on what is wrong with the church that God has called me to lead. I do not pastor the perfect church...and when I do then maybe I can tell other churches and pastors how to be more like me...I just don't see that happening any time soon!!

Leaders are learners...and...the best ones are willing to learn from other leaders who may not share the same theological convictions or hold to the same methodology...but in the end want to see the name of Jesus exalted!

I MUST BE in a constant state of learning if I am going to be an effective leader.

THAT IS WHY IT CRACKS ME UP when I hear other pastors accuse me of name dropping. Let me be straight up with you...I name drop like CRAZY...I will do it until the day I die because I want the church I lead to understand that I, as their leader, am trying to seek as much wisdom as I can get from those who have gone before me...and I could care less if other pastors get mad about it.

Can I be honest for just a second? I believe the only reason other pastors get jealous about "name dropping" is because...well...they don't have any names to drop!!! They have simply surrounded themselves with other guys who think like them, look like them and believe like them for the purpose of affirming their dysfunction and criticizing success!!!

If you want to be a leader then you've GOT TO BREAK OUT of your normal circles and allow God to stretch you through the teaching of other leaders WHO ARE NOT LIKE YOU!

How about it...are you willing to learn new things?

Posted by: Perry Noble., Miscellaneous

FIVE REASONS FOR PASTORS TO NOT QUIT!

If a pastor is ever tempted to resign/drop out of the ministry...it happens on either Sunday night or Monday morning!

So...if you are that pastor...let me give you five reasons not to quit!

#1 - God Called You!

Whenever I am going through a rough time in ministry...I think back to where I was when He found me. It blows me away that He called me! His promises in Isaiah 43:1-6 are PRICELESS to me!!!

#2 - I've Often Found That The Enemy Works Overtime on Discouragement Right Before God Does Something Awesome!

#3 - Philippians 1:6!!!

He didn't bring you this far to let you down or watch you fail!

#4 - The Example Of Jesus!

I never will forget being at a conference and a pastor saying, "I once had a man stand in front of me and say, 'Give me one reason that I should not quit right now.'"

The pastor replied, "Because one day both you and I are going to stand in front of One whose assignment was much tougher than ours and He didn't quit! Neither should we!!!"

DANG!

#5 - There ARE People Who Believe In The Vision God Has Given You!

I used to allow myself to think that the one or two idiots/bloggers out there who were attacking me were the majority!

I used to allow myself to think that the two or three negative emails I would get were the opinions of the masses.

I was wrong!

When you cast a compelling vision...it will fire some people up and piss some people off...

And the ones that are pissed are usually the most vocal.

But you can't allow the pissed to trump the passion God has placed inside of you!

AND...you've got to understand that there are people ON BOARD! People DO BELIEVE in the vision God has placed IN you...the one like Jeremiah 20:9 describes!

Don't focus on the critics and skeptics...focus on the ones who buy in, who ask the right questions and focus on the right issues...and who will charge hell with you!

They are IN YOUR CHURCH! Find them...pour into them...and begin a revolution!!!

DON'T QUIT!!!

Just felt like someone needed to hear that today!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Persistence

SEVEN LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS I'VE EXPERIENCED—PART ONE

When I sit down with pastors and church leaders one of the most frequently asked questions of me is this, "How would you say your leadership has changed in the past several years?"

So...I sat down the other day in Starbucks and began listing the changes that I have noticed...and that others have brought to my attention...and there are seven that I will cover here...here goes...

#1 - I've Moved From Personal Preferences To Conviction.

When we lead by what we want rather than what God wants—we ALWAYS screw things up!

#2 - I've Moved From Decision Making To Delegation.

If I have godly people around me who love Jesus, hear from Jesus and love His church...then the best thing I can do is cast a clear and compelling vision and get out of their way! If I have to be involved in 100% of the decisions that go on around here I will hamstring this church.

#3 - I've Moved From Insecurity To Confidence.

I used to really be obsessed with what everyone thought about me and our church...and when someone spoke against either it would bother me for days.

But now...heck...I am serious when I say that I could really care less what other church people think about what we are doing! I will answer one day to the MOST HIGH GOD and it should be my goal to please and honor Him...knowing that if I do so the religious will be offended and lash out...but by being true to the vision God has placed inside of me that hundreds and thousands of people will come to know Christ.

Posted by: Perry Noble., Change

SEVEN LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS I'VE EXPERIENCED—PART TWO

#4 - I've Moved From More To Less

I used to believe the myth that in order to be successful in ministry that I needed to be “well rounded” and try to be good at everything.

WRONG!

Especially in the past few years...I've really tried to key in on what I am passionate about and what I do well...knowing that others are gifted and passionate about the areas that I am not.

Many church people expect pastors to be good at everything because they don't want to do anything. AND...if you spend your time being obsessed with what others want you to be...you will NEVER be who God called you to be!!!

Question for leaders—what are you currently doing that you hate to do? Why not delegate it and become more focused on what you love to do. Operate from passion rather than obligation!

#5 - I've Moved From Talker To Listener

I used to think that I always had to be the one talking in every meeting...and that a comment was necessary from me in order to complete every thought from the person who came up with it. Uh...NOPE!

Especially in the past couple of years...I ask twice as many questions as I offer solutions. I want to hear from the people around me. I want to hear from other church leaders. The more I get into this church thing the more I realize that I really don't know a lot...and I need all of the help I can get.

James 1:19 says that I should be QUICK to listen and SLOW to speak! God gave me two ears and one mouth for a reason!

#6 - I've Moved From My Perspective To His Perspective!

This one is still fresh...but here's the deal I've been learning lately...if I am truly a servant of the MOST HIGH GOD then I need to take the risks He leads me to take and not worry about the problems that I so easily invent in my mind.

If He is Sovereign over the universe...then I have nothing to lose by being completely obedient to His voice.

#7 - I've Moved From Being Discovered To Being Developed.

I used to be passionate about others noticing me...now I just want God to shape me more and more into His image.

Those are some transitions I've went through...and I am sure there are more to come!

Posted by: Perry Noble., Change

Bob Roberts, Jr.

EASY FAITH

We often debate at what level of maturity a disciple is functional. I think, frankly, that the disciples of the early church were probably far less “mature” than we would want to believe.

We debate methods of catch and release; How much? How far? In what ways? How connected do we stay with people we disciple, etc?

We debate process, methods, etc., many things about how to make disciples. We get in little groups, or one on one, or bring our Bible’s, I’m just not sure there’s any one way. I’m not sure any one approach for an entire lifetime works either. We hopefully outgrow systems, processes, and even disciplers along the way.

I’m thinking the core of the issue in producing rapidly growing disciples that are expanding is in the whole issue of “conversion.” What are we calling people to? As I’ve recently read Acts, and Luke, and tons of other scriptures this week, there was a real call to abandonment. Jesus said, “You follow me, you’re gonna die, but be ok with it because life is eternal.”

I think we try too hard to ease people in.

When people are eased in to a relationship with Christ and a body of believers they ease out, real easily. If a decision to follow Christ doesn’t make someone uneasy they may have joined a religion, but they haven’t found Jesus.

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Discipleship

WHAT A WEEK!

An Aha Moment.

What a week!!! Spent a few hours with Tom McGhee yesterday of WildWorks, then Bob Buford, and finally today Bobb Biehl. Bobb is someone that has spoken into my life for the past ten years. I’d heard him at a conferences prior to that, but have really learned aggressively from him the past ten. Basically, Bob is a structure and implementation man who helps you see what all you have, what you need, and some of how to get there. He’s spoken at NorthWood at different times and has been very well received. He has a wealth of information, books, and seminars, which are all incredible, but his ability to look at the big picture of all that is taking place and help put the parts in order is exceptional. He also helps you see what you’re missing. He was one of the original founding Board members of Focus on the Family, and has consulted the top ministries and ministry leaders of the U.S. along with business, government, entertainers, and tons of other leaders. His client list is a Who’s Who of leaders in the U.S. Here are just ten questions that Bobb will hit me with - among dozens of others, but if you can answer these 10, get ready for some good stuff to happen!

1. What is it that God has called you to do?

2. What is unique that you bring to the table?
3. What is your single greatest strength?
4. How are you organized to see the vision fulfilled?
5. How is your team organized and who is your team?
6. What three things would you do to give you a 50% increase in your area of work/ministry?
7. Do you know why you do what you do?
8. What are you most excited about?
9. What is your biggest obstacle?
10. What three changes in me would be most pleasing to God?

You can visit Bob's web-site at www.masterplanninggroup.com for some awesome resources.

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Asking Questions

WHY DO WE START CHURCHES?

For the past 25 years, over and over again, the reason given for starting churches is because it is the best known method of evangelism. Sooooo... we start churches to do evangelism. Acts didn't do that. Jerusalem saw a church emerge out of evangelism, and it wasn't just "pray the prayer". Antioch was the same. It was disciples living in the society first and then a church emerged. I write about this in my book *The Multiplying Church*.

Let me give you some other reasons, that I think are huge. First, it has to be the context of the Kingdom. If we focus on the Gospel of salvation, we get converts and a Sunday event. If we focus on the Gospel of the Kingdom, we still get people who follow Jesus, BUT we also focus on the "reconciliation of all things" in the world and in the community. This means that "church" becomes a force for good and transformation, not just a Sunday event. I could talk and write on this all day. We have so narrowed the Great Commission to baptisms that we have unintentionally marginalized the church in society.

Second, we were never commanded to plant churches, but to make disciples. Most western models of church planting are tied to raising up "preachers" to plant churches. We will never get to movement like that. Instead, if we focus on creating a different kind of disciple, not only will we get a different kind of church, but a lot more of them. We really believe in the T-Life model, more and more, as we move forward. Some of us are studying it even more to see how we can ramp it up.

Third, the conversation is no longer private. Muslims, Communists, Bhuddist, Athiest, Hindus, all read my blog and are my friends. Make no mistake, they read yours as well. I do the same with their's! Salam Alaikum! Namaste! Sinchow! It's funny to how we write and speak as if it's an insider's conversation. That may be true, but it's an insiders conversation in a public forum and square called the internet.

Here's what I've learned from my friends around the world, most have no beef with Jesus. They like him and his message, even if they disagree with me about who he is. Most people around

the world like it when people try to follow Jesus, especially those who call themselves such. Most people around the world like it when we try to serve them in the name of Jesus. It's our "religious colonialism" they don't care for.

Soooo, you say, how would the rest of the world feel about churches that "emerge" from people living the Jesus life, in their context, and serving others, in their community? That's not what they see. What they see is people showing up to start churches, convert people, and get them to change their religion.

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Evangelism

7 THINGS TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE AND YOUR NEW CHURCH

I was reading Amy Colon's blog for church planters wives on our site, "They have all the Fun!", and thought it was really good. It made me want to talk to you guys about being good husbands and fathers. This is the most important thing you're going to model to your church. You can do it. It's a qualification for ministry, as a matter of fact. Paul writes, if you can't lead your family, why do you think you can lead the church?

I don't think there is anything more difficult to do in ministry than to start a church, if you do it right! Anyone can do some brochures and have a gathering or a Sunday event, or whenever the time is, but to see it be the church, that's another thing. With our emphasis on engagement in glocalnet, both local and global, it can take even more time, and the result is a lot more exciting as well. It takes time, energy, creativity, the ability to hear God and recognize moments. In short, it takes every minute of every waking hour. The first two years are particularly difficult, you don't have enough money, people, or time to get it all done, but the highest level of risk is also present.

Having said all of that, I still believe there is enough time to be a great Dad and husband, as you plant a church. So how do you do it?

1. Praise your wife daily. Find something unique or special that she's done and brag on her. You build her up or tear her down. You may say you never say anything negative, but if you never say anything positive, it's like ignoring her and who she is.
2. Encourage her to have interests outside of the ministry. Those wives who have identities outside of their husbands will be far happier, more productive, and even better leaders than those who have to operate in the shadow of their husband. That doesn't mean they aren't called to it and shouldn't be involved. It just means they need a space of their own, and you should encourage it.
3. Take your wife out weekly, even if you're broke. Buy a \$.99 cent cup a joe and sit somewhere and talk. I can't tell you all the stupid things I'd do with Nikki when we were starting out and broke, just to be together.
4. If you have to be gone late into the evening, knock off at 3 or 4pm, go home and play with the kids and the wife. There's no getting around the long hours, but there are many ways to organize those hours so you can get it all done.

5. After you've established your presence in a country overseas, get your wife there as quickly as possible. If you both can't afford to go, send her on a trip to that spot really soon. She needs to be a part of it. Let her do some of the "fun" stuff. It's no big deal now for Nikki to travel all over the world without me! Make sure she gets to do some of the fun inner-city stuff as well. You don't want her being stuck in a spot she hates, because no one else will do it. She'll smile to everyone else, but spit on you!
6. Help around the house. You should be a part of picking up, watching the kids, etc. You may not be able to do as much as she does, but you need to make sure she knows you're helping and are a part of it.
7. Give her some money to take out some wicked, sinful, evil woman to have coffee or lunch with in hopes of bringing her to Christ, and you do lunch with the kids!

What would you add?

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Marriage

IT'S ABOUT JESUS!

This past week I've read three books by friends who sent them in advance for me to read and interact with. They are going to be incredible books. Mark Galli, a traveling buddy, has one coming "A Great and Terrible Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Attributes of God" - it's fantastic. One is by my good friend Alan Hirsch called ReJesus. The other is on Organic Leadership by long time friend Neil Cole. I gave them all 10's.

But here's what I'm excited about - enough talk and writing about church - Jesus is the answer not just for the world - but for the Church - Today!!!!!! The greatest ministries and stories in the world today are not about "church growth" or "ministry" or even "church planting" (Heresy!) for that matter - but are about Jesus. We are talking about everything but Him. We are talking about him, around him, doing work in his name - but I'm convinced know him or recognize him personally very little.

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Evangelism

LEADERSHIP OR MANAGEMENT?

What we need more of today than ever before in the church and society is leadership. I'm convinced that what we pass off as leadership in reality is management. There is nothing wrong with management. For any ministry that is going to grow, there has to be good, clear, focused management. However, management is only secondary to calling and vision.

Leadership that is driven by calling is never a call to a position but to a mission. Yesterday, we commissioned a young lady in our church who is going to teach English in Asia. I told her she would make it--not because she felt "called" to ministry, but because she felt called to something specific. She has a mission from God.

I don't see Moses politicking for being the leader of Israelites. If anything, he was running and hiding from it. When he stood before Pharaoh, I don't see him giving him his purpose statement or asking Miriam to let Pharaoh or the children of Israel know their 10-point strategy of plagues! It was simple. Go deliver my people. And, he did it. Not with the blessings of the Hebrews, but in spite of them. The same would be true of Abraham, Noah, David, Paul, etc. They didn't inherit organizations; if anything, organizations were created around their ministry or specific call.

Something else I've noticed is leaders want to go as far as they can and will use their last breath to stretch out just as far as they can get. For Peter, the guy who was crude, rude, and coarse, why in God's name would Jesus make him the leader of the early church? Couldn't he have done better than that? Furthermore, why didn't he get some highly educated and respected rabbi from Jerusalem--not Hicksville, Gallilee! But, this country bumpkin who fished nayked (spelling proper!) at night winds up leading the church. He doesn't just lead it, he moves its headquarters to Jerusalem in the heart of all that is cultured and wise. For him to declare that Jesus is the Messiah is HUGE. He does it, even gets a revelation from God that the Gospel is for Gentiles. He had to work through his own culture and background...but enter Paul.

Does Paul, a few years behind Peter, dream of taking over for Peter? "Wow, I feel called to enter the ministry--maybe I could one day get Peter's job." Not at all. Instead, he takes it as far as he can; he takes it full bore to the Gentiles. The revelation that Jesus is the Messiah is huge for Paul, but what the mission is, how do we get him as the Savior of the world. This was bigger than just the revelation of who Jesus was--it was what he wanted to do. He even calls himself the Apostle to the Gentiles. There is no question of his leadership, Apostle, or his mission--Gentiles. Why would he do it? He had massive headaches with everyone, Read Corinthians, Galatians--most of his letters he's having to reclarify the truth or correct someone. It's a wonder he didn't give up, go back to Jerusalem, return to Judaism and really persecute Christians when you read his Epistles; it was hard! BUT, he saw beyond his circumstances.

Call is not determined by focus groups, polls, but by God. What has God called you to? I guess that's why I love church planters and people who start ministries because it's about call. However, that's also why I get sad sometimes because to start is one thing, but to finish, that is where the credibility comes in. Not that I have a dream or mission, but that I have fruit.

Posted by: Bob Roberts, Jr., Passion, Calling

Ed Stetzer

AVOID ANY HINT

I had an awkward situation yesterday. My doctor prescribed a sleep study (part of some health tests I am doing in preparation for my forthcoming new health regimen).

The tech called me to arrange the details. She did not seem to have many details about the clinic, so I asked some questions. One of which was the setting-- in this case it was an office building with several faux bedrooms where they would wire me up and measure me sleeping.

I asked about the staff, and she was "it."

Then came that awkward moment. I knew she would not understand it, but I explained, "I can't come if it is just you and me in the building." It was awkward and I am guessing few ever said such a thing. So, I skipped out on my study (and will probably have to pay the no-show charge).

It might seem silly to you, but let me encourage you to not see it as such. Many of you who read this are young pastors. I know too many pastors who have lost great credibility because of an accusation (let alone an indiscretion).

I am not irresistible. I have a great face for radio. I do not think that anyone will swoon over me. But, I do not know the stability, morality, and disposition of people that I meet.

When I told my wife, I thought she might slap me. She has been excited about my recent health plans. However, she was the opposite. She felt protected and affirmed. She knew I would not put our family in jeopardy.

I remember [Danny Akin](#) once saying that he would not pick up a woman on the side of the road in the rain if her car broke down. He would never be alone with a woman not his wife. It seemed a bit selfish until he told the rest of the story. He would pull over and give her the keys and let her drive where she needed to be.

Guarding yourself takes work, can be awkward, and is often inconvenient. But, one problem averted makes it a good stewardship of your life, ministry, and family.

At the churches I planted, we always used something like [Saddleback's Ten Commandments](#):

Thou shalt not go to lunch alone with the opposite sex.

Thou shalt not have the opposite sex pick you up or drive you places when it is just the two of you.

Thou shalt not kiss any attender of the opposite sex or show affection that could be questioned.

Thou shalt not visit the opposite sex alone at home.

Thou shalt not counsel the opposite sex alone at the office, and thou shalt not counsel the opposite sex more than once without that person's mate. Refer them.

Thou shalt not discuss detailed sexual problems with the opposite sex in counseling. Refer them.

Thou shalt not discuss your marriage problems with an attender of the opposite sex.

Thou shalt be careful in answering emails, instant messages, chatrooms, cards or letters from the opposite sex.

Thou shalt make your co-worker your protective ally.

Thou shalt pray for the integrity of other staff members.

(The first four do not apply to unmarried staff.)

I hope you have a list like this for your own life and ministry.

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality..." (Ephesians 5:3).

Posted by: Ed Stetzer, Boundaries

[SENT THEOLOGY](#)

[Last week](#), I told you about the Bible study I'm releasing with [Threads](#) called [Sent: Living the Missional Nature of the Church](#). You can read the [full post here](#), where I discuss that "sent-ness" is in the DNA of the Church.

But, as we point out in the Bible study, we aren't just sent on our own accord; we have to understand something about the nature of God if we are really to understand our sent-ness. Many are quick to jump on the missional bandwagon (or throw rocks at it as it passes by) without seriously considering the theology that drives it.

As we look back through the pages of the Old Testament, we see over and over again the God who sends. He sends Moses as an agent of redemption (Ex. 3:12), he sends prophets to proclaim both judgment and restoration (Jer. 1), to his own people and to those who are not (Jonah). Even when he sends his own people into exile as a form of judgment, he sends them with instructions to seek the welfare of the foreign city in which they found themselves sojourning (Jer 29).

As we read through the New Testament we see the Father sent the Son to accomplish redemption for his people and indeed all creation (John 5; 8:42; 1 Jn. 4:14; Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 1:15-20). Then we see the Father and the Son sending the Spirit to bring conviction and conversion to the lost, and to empower the church for the spread of the gospel and the work of making disciples (John 14; 16; Mk. 13:11; Luke 11:13). And finally we see Jesus sending the church into the world, just as the Father sent him (John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

God has always been, and continues to be, the Sender.

So if we, as the church, do not live as sent ones to the people we live among, we are denying that we have come from God. If our identity is found in the God who sends, then "missional" will be more than a buzzword. Its meaning will remain central in defining who we are as the church.

That's what we cover in the first session of the study, in an effort to first lay the theological groundwork for living missionally as the church. You can learn more and [get your copy of Sent here](#).

Posted by: Ed Stetzer, Focus

WHEN THE MISSION GETS LOST IN THE SYSTEM

Donna and I returned from Europe last night. I will tell a bit more about our time there in the coming days. If you are so inclined, you can find some interesting pictures at [Twitter](#)).

When Donna and I talked on the plane coming home (faces 11 inches apart), we were struck by how these church planters live incarnationally. Europe was their home-- and they were seeking to live sent on God's mission.

When we went to the Vatican, we did not find it to be a spiritual experience. It spoke to us, but not about faith. It spoke to us of power. It did not evoke "go and tell." Rather, it was clearly "come and see." (And, that same sentence would be true in many non-Catholic settings as well-- including a few I know all too well.)

We talked some about the contrast of "being sent" and "maintaining structure" in a Bible study with Threads called [Sent: Living the Missional Nature of the Church](#). In Session 3 of the study, I tried to use an illustration of a yo-yo to describe how a church should constantly be pushing outward into its surrounding culture.

The logic goes like this. Most of us have a Constantinian model for church which, very simply, is summed up like this: building + clergy + program = church. We saw it quite clearly in [St. Peter's Basilica](#). The fallacy comes when we start to see those components as rules rather than tools-- that was clearly found at the Vatican but is often found in my church and denomination as well. When you create a system with God-given tools, then turn them into rules, you end up with a system that needs to be serviced not a mission that needs to be lived.

A better equation is this: body + mission + kingdom = church. We need to be a body on mission for the Kingdom. The session goes onto explain:

The biggest disparity between the two models can be seen in the focus. In the Constantinian model, the force is centripetal, moving inward. In the biblical model, the force is centrifugal, pushing outward...

Think of it in terms of a yo-yo. When you swing a yo-yo around, two forces are at work simultaneously. The centrifugal force (technically 'inertia') pushes the yo-yo outward, and at the same time, the centripital force is exercised by the string, pulling the yo-yo inward. In the yo-yo, these forces are in balance at the same time.

The church's challenge is similar. At any given moment, there is a centripetal force pulling us inward, tempting us to care most about ourselves, our comfort, and our development. This strong force is actually part of human nature, and it results in things like the Constantinian model of church. What makes it even more complicated is that the thicker the string, the greater the force pulling inward. So the more stuff we have-- the more programs, buildings, and clergy we add-- the greater the temptation to focus primarily on ourselves. When that happens, the church becomes little more than a spiritual department store, a kind of Wal-Mart for Jesus, providing religious goods and services to Christian consumers.

Now there is certainly a balance to this argument, but for far too long we have been dominated by the thickness of the string. So we tend to look in rather than looking out.

It was enlightening to stand with missionary church planters on the steps of the Vatican while we talked about starting New Testament churches in Rome and Marseille. These churches might

meet in homes, cafes, or storefronts, but they would seek to make them missional in their contexts. These missionaries are making great sacrifice, being far from their families with little resources so they could reach people far from God and tell them about a relationship, not a religion. They would let them know that Jesus would live in their hearts and not a temple built by human hands.

Posted by: Ed Stetzer , Focus

PROPHETIC WORDS FROM PENN

Late yesterday I posted about the [economy and church attendance](#). Many in the media are asking if this is really a trend. LifeWay Research will soon be adding more research to the conversation.

If there is a trend and churches do grow during hard times, the growth should come through evangelism. And, it appears to me that Christians today are less focused on evangelism today than they have been in times past-- with some considering evangelism to be too impolite or old school. They believe it is better to "show" and not "tell" (when it should be both).

So, [this video](#) from Penn (of Penn and Teller) is worth your time:

Penn says:

I don't respect people who don't proselytize. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell, and you think, 'Well, it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward'... How much do you have to hate somebody not to proselytize?

I'm speechless.

Posted by: Ed Stetzer, 12/18/08 Evangelism

Tim Stevens

IT JUST MAKES CENTS

I think that leadership translates beyond your professional career. **A real leader pays attention** to his/her marriage, gives time to his/her kids, and invests in relationships that matter. A real leader is also making wise decisions with money.

Save for **retirement** now. We started setting money aside the first year of our marriage. That first year (we were 23-years old) we could only afford \$5/month--but knew that we needed to **start the habit early**. We've increased it every year since.

Don't use a credit card for anything you can't pay off right away. Use a credit card for convenience, but **don't ever pay interest**. If you can't control yourself, get rid of the cards.

Tithe--I really believe that **God blesses those who tithe**. I think he keeps the car running longer, the roof from leaking as soon as it would have, and He loves to sprinkle you with raises and added cash you didn't expect.

Give generously. The tithe is the minimum. We began our first year of marriage giving 10% of our income and then increased it every year until we got to 20%. The first 10% goes to the general fund at our church. The other 10% we use to support missionaries, give to new building projects at our church, and bless people who come into our lives.

If you are married, **don't ever make a big purchase** without talking to each other. Really, trust me on this.

No **spontaneous purchases**. Okay, buying a pair of shorts would be fine. But anything that would be a significant purchase can wait 24-hours. Avoid any vendor who says, "You have to decide now." If the deal can't wait a day, then decide to walk away.

Live by a **budget**.

Teach your kids to handle their money. They aren't going to learn financial management at school. **No one else is going to teach them** to be generous. By the time they've been out of your house a week, they will have already received 14 credit card invitations. Teach them early.

Set aside money for fun. Fun with your spouse. Fun with your kids. Fun for yourself (for me, that means buying a geeky gadget on occasion).

When you can, start a **Rainy Day fund**. It was many years into our marriage before we could do this, but we began setting aside \$25/paycheck. Some day the furnace is going to break or a tree will fall on the side of your house. Or your house will get hit by lightning like ours did earlier this year.

Put the stuff you want on a **list** and pray about it. Don't buy it until you can pay for it with cash. This builds your faith, teaches you patience, and gives you a journal to record answers to prayer.

Don't wait until you have more money to put wise financial management into practice in your life. Faith and I started this stuff when we we had no money and we were living on beans and weenies. It just makes "cents."

Note: I first wrote this on August 1, 2006 and it quickly became my highest accessed post during my first year of blogging. With several friends working through personal financial decisions, it seemed like the right time to bring it to the surface again.

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Family

THERE ARE SIX BIG AREAS THAT PULL ON MY TIME.

I want to spend time with my **wife**.

I want to spend quantity time with my **kids** at a very important time in their life.

I want to **lead our staff** well and **do my job** with integrity.

I want to **learn** from other church leaders (conferences, visit other churches)

I want to **resource** other church leaders (teach).

I want to **write**.

All of these things are good. All of them are important. And there is a **dynamic tension** which exists in trying to juggle all of these priorities. I've seen leaders mess up.

Some sacrifice their marriage for their job.

Some sacrifice their kids.

Some leaders get on the teaching circuit and stop learning. They spend all their travel time teaching and no longer take time to sit at someone else's feet and learn.

I want to avoid all these extremes.

I've been tracking my travel schedule for a couple years. In **2006** I spent **37 nights** away from Faith. In **2007** it increased to **45 nights**.

That is too many. This year it is coming down. I've decided to spend **no more than 30 nights away from my wife** in 2008.

Oh, you should know I realize the **30 night rule is not in the Bible**. It's just what is right for me and my family right now. Others may draw the line at a different place. [Mark Batterson](#) is also committed to 30 nights. [Craig Groeschel](#) limits his travel to around 12 nights a year. I don't think the number is the point--the fact that you give it some thought and get some input is important.

Where do you draw the line?

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Discipline

TOO RISKY TO CHANGE?

We spent the past two days in all-day planning meetings with our senior team, discussing the future at Granger Community Church.

I recounted the following story to them...

About ten years ago, a consultant (we'll call him Bob) was meeting with us at Granger and challenging us to consider changes for the future. We quickly jumped on some of his ideas, and began talking about how to implement the new direction. We were running about 1,500 in attendance at the time.

Bob was surprised at how quickly we were ready to adopt change. He told us how he had spent the previous 15 years at one of the largest and most innovative churches in the country (at that time). He said our openness to change reminded him of their early days when the church was smaller. But this church had grown to more than 10,000 in a short time, and he said it was now impossible to get them to consider any big change. Everything was just too risky, too expensive, or chanced losing too many people. So they would talk issues to death and make incremental changes...but never considered anything significant.

Our senior team then considered: **Have we become that church?** Are we **too afraid** to make sweeping changes, if necessary, to catapult us into the future? Are we more **concerned** about our exposure and the number of churches **watching us** than we are about figuring out our next step? Do we ask *What does God want?* **before** or **after** we ask *How much will it cost?* or *How many people will we lose?*

Our answer was as resounding in its' unity as in its' confidence.

We will not be the team that is afraid of risk.

We will not be the team that doesn't listen to the voice of God because we are too tuned in to the whining of people.

We will not be the team that leads a church so big and flabby that it is impossible to move.

We will not be the team that misses the wave of God's Spirit because we are conducting a risk management assessment ad nauseum.

We will not be the team that keeps waiting for the right time to lead the church to the next challenge.

And then we spent the next two days talking about some REALLY radical ideas!

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Risk Taking

FIVE STAGES OF DEALING WITH FAILURE

Perhaps you've heard of the [five stages of grief](#) (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). I wonder if a similar list could help define the stages a leader goes through when his or her organization is failing. I know such a list (at least in hind sight) is helping me.

In the past year at Granger, we have been trying to get our minds and hearts around some of the data that points to failure...or if not failure, at least a lack of meeting our expectations. What do you do when not as many people are inviting their friends...not as many have a biblical worldview...not as many are tithing...not as many are reading their Bible...not as many are attending...and not as many are being baptized?

These questions are very real for us right now, and the following list represents some of the **stages of failure** I have recently experienced...

Justify. Well, the attendance is down because of the weather. Everyone is at the Notre Dame home game. People aren't reading their Bibles because we have so many seekers. The economy is in the tank so people aren't giving.

Sometimes there are rational reasons for failure, but if you continue to explain it away over time, it begins to look like an excuse rather than a reason. You can justify a week or even an entire season...but it's difficult to justify trends that are happening over time.

Question. Perhaps the stats are wrong. Maybe we didn't ask the question in the right way. I bet a certain category of people refused to take the survey and so the results are skewed.

When we don't like what the data says, it is so easy to question its' validity. We look deep for one anomaly. We find the one piece where we can cast doubt on the data...thus causing a large shadow over all the findings. Then it makes it easier to say everything is okay. The problem isn't the church, it's the data.

Blame. It's the fault of the congregation. They stopped giving. They stopped inviting their friends. They think they're mature and deep, but they aren't contributing to the cause. They are whining but not helping.

In our frustration, we blame the people. We might even design messages with a prophetic tone to get them to be better, stronger and more committed. Rather than lead them through the difficulty, we preach them through it.

Redefine. Well, it's not attendance that really matters anyway. We'd rather have 100 mature believers than 1,000 in a crowd. It doesn't matter how many are coming in our doors--what really matters is how many we are sending out our doors.

Instead of figuring out why we keep missing the target, we just move the target to the location where our arrows are landing. Rather than adopting a "both/and" mentality -- we say that it is "either/or." We are tempted to say, "Either we are growing in numbers or we are growing in our faith. It can't be both. Either we are having an impact on the community or we are helping believers mature. It can't be both. Either we are attractional or we are missional. It can't be both." Really? Why not? I think it is dangerous to redefine success just because we are missing the mark.

Lead. At some point, we decide to lead. We stop blaming, questioning, justifying or redefining--and we hunker down and lead through the crisis. We figure out what is wrong and we get on our faces before God, and we begin to fix it. We face the really tough data and talk about the facts of our situation which might be embarrassing or self-condemning. We acknowledge where we are wrong and we get risky and determine to try some stuff to get back

on track. We stick our necks out and cancel some stuff that has perceived success, and add some stuff that has no historical track record. We work through the feeling of failure, the muddy conversations and awkward staff meetings. We don't jump ship because the waters are suddenly rocky. No, instead we rally the troops, and we do what leaders do in times of crisis...we lead.

Anyone else identify with any of these stages of failure?

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Feedback, Facing the Facts

WHAT ABOUT FAILURE?

What do you do when someone makes a mistake? I was talking with my assistant yesterday about a decision he made as he wondered, "Did I just cost the church \$300 by giving the wrong answer?"

No, he didn't, but it reminded me of mistakes I've made over the years. Some have been cheap, others have been very expensive. Some have been readily apparent (have you seen the "art wall" on the east side of our church building?) -- others have taken longer to realize (can you say "salt water reef aquarium"?).

When an employee makes a mistake, there are two ways to look at it.

You could respond, "They made a mistake. It cost the company money. They are going to pay for it." Perhaps they financially have to reimburse the company, or you might try the humiliation route. A couple years ago when I went to our local Taco Bell, I noticed everyone had matching uniforms and hats, except one guy who was wearing a fluorescent pink hat. When he turned around, I saw the words on the front: "I forgot my hat today." I'm sure his boss thought he was teaching him a lesson (yeah, like find a different boss).

Or, if it was a \$1,000 mistake, you could take the posture that you just spent \$1,000 educating them. They just received \$1,000 in training that they are sure to remember, perhaps better money spent than sending them to a conference. They are \$1,000 smarter than they used to be.

The cost of mistakes are relative though, aren't they. I wonder what happened to [this aircraft mechanic](#) when she accidentally hit a button in the cockpit and it sent the jet careening into two other aircraft, causing multi-millions in damage.

Two closing thoughts:

If someone keeps making the same mistake over and over, then it is obvious the education process isn't working. Free them to spend someone else's money making mistakes.

And secondly, I'm grateful both places I've worked (my entire adult life) I have been encouraged to risk, inspired to innovate, and have been given room to fail. It has cost those organizations a few bucks, but it has made me a much better leader--which ultimately makes the organization a better place.

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Learning

OH ME OF LITTLE FAITH?

Three months ago when we made the [decision](#) to cancel our midweek believers service, **we knew it was risky**. With around 1,000 gathering each week for New Community, we changed directions and methods. **We needed a better way** to teach the Bible for life change.

We made the decision with this assumption: *Probably half of our regular attenders will not participate in the [Journey Bible Classes](#).*

Why? Because the Bible classes require a longer commitment and include homework. In essence, the bar was being raised. **We were convinced we'd lose 500 people when we made this decision**. But **to us it was worth it**, because we believed it would be better to have 500 people growing through studying the Bible than 1,000 people involved in a service that wasn't producing the desired results.

Boy, were we surprised. Last Wednesday was week #1 of our first-ever [Journey Bible Classes](#). Here were the results...

1,566 adults attended Bible classes (three options).

153 students attended their own Bible study.

More than 400 children received age-appropriate Bible training in their own classrooms.

Since many families came in 2 or more cars, our parking lot completely maxed out.

We bogged down the area streets with some people taking as long as 20 minutes just to turn into the parking lot.

We are grateful for a responsive people who are answering the call to become more knowledgeable about the Bible and **more responsible for their own spiritual growth**.

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Risk Taking

THERE IS A DYNAMIC TENSION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND LEADERS

Last week I wrote an article for an upcoming issue of [Neue Quarterly](#). I wrote about the dynamic tension that exists between artists and senior leaders in a church. I'll let you know when the article is published, but to give you a preview, I included this list of how artists and leaders are different...

Artists want to help people experience God. Leaders want to give them truth about God.

Artists want the freedom to try stuff, the chance to risk. Leaders personally like risk, but when it comes to the services, they want to know what is happening and have a pretty good idea it's going to work.

Artists are feelers. Leaders are thinkers.

Artists want to leave room in the program for spontaneity and the move of God. Leaders figure God will move ahead of time during the planning phase.

Artists have a hard time logically explaining how the artistic elements will contribute to the goal of the service...they just feel strongly that it will work. Leaders have a hard time planning a service around a feeling.

Artists like asking questions. Leaders like giving answers.

Artists like leaving the audience in the tension of the unanswered. Leaders feel like they are failing if they don't offer a convincing message.

Artists want to be a part of the dreaming phase. They want to know the "why" and not just the "what." Leaders want someone to create a service around their concept.

Obviously these statements are filled with generalities. There are many artists who are great leaders. And there are plenty of leaders who have the heart of an artist.

But I would be curious what you would add to the list? Where am I wrong? What have you experienced when the relationship between artist and leader is at its' best? What about at its' worst?

Posted by: Tim Stevens., Staffing

Tullian Tchividjian

BASIC THOUGHTS ON CHARACTER

Let's face it—we live in a society fascinated with image and style. What we look like, sound like, and live like on the outside is very important to us. It's important to us because pop-culture has convinced us that if we can “get it right” on the outside, all of our wildest dreams will come true. Three popular reality TV shows reflect this unadulterated fascination: Extreme Makeover (what we look like), American Idol (what we sound like), and Extreme Makeover Home Edition (what we live like).

There are many problems with our preoccupation with “style.” But perhaps the most detrimental one is that it leads very quickly to a restless, substance-less existence.

The greatest men and women in history have always been more preoccupied with substance (what's on the inside) than style (what's on the outside). Someone once said that the difference between image and character is just this: image is who people think you are; character is who you really are. In other words, image has everything to do with what's on the outside (style), character has everything to do with what's on the inside (substance). Os Guinness once defined character this way:

Character is the inner form that makes anyone or anything what it is—whether a person, a wine, or a historical period. Thus character is clearly distinct from such concepts as personality, image, reputation, or celebrity. Character is the essential “stuff” a person is made of.

This means that our fascination with image and style has nothing to do with being truly human. It has nothing to do with who we really are. A few years back even shock-rocker Marilyn Manson had enough sense to speak of how silly our fascination with image is in his song “Beautiful People.” Real life—true humanness—consists in so much more than what we look like, sound like, and live like. We are, according to Psalm 139:14, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” The reason we move restlessly from one image to the next and one trend to the next, is because deep inside we know there has to be more to life than style. Our souls cry out for substance. Because all human beings were made in the image of God, we know intuitively that we were created and designed for dignity, not vanity; substance, not style. “We were”, according to the rock band Switchfoot, “made to live for so much more”, but in our pursuit of image and style, we have lost ourselves. And as a result, we are restless, characterless, and understandably unsatisfied.

The good news, however, is that we need not remain lost and unsatisfied. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “trust in the Lord with all your heart (the inside stuff) and lean not on your own understanding (the outside stuff). In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” This is where real life—true character—begins!

Posted by: Tullian Tchividjian

METROSPIRITUALITY

There are endless varieties of spiritual options available to us today but the one that seems to be in vogue at the moment is a phenomenon that has recently been described as “Metrospirituality.” Theologian David Wells describes the characteristics of this latest spiritual trend.

Metrospirituality is a Yuppie movement which is combining Eastern mysticism, from sources like Buddhism and Hinduism, and Western consumerism. Respecting the environment means buying a hybrid car and respecting one’s self means connecting with one’s own inner power and they are putting this together in a single spiritual package — Jamba Juice, meditation, kindness, and aromatherapy all rolled into one!

Metrospirituality proves that many deeply spiritual people are functionally admitting that they “still haven’t found what they’re looking for.” The reason for this is, of course, that God has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in him. True spirituality is an internal possession of an ever-deepening relationship with God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Spirit. It is an internal connection between God the Creator and us his creatures. Anything less than relational union with God is a false spirituality that cannot save or satisfy us.

A few years ago I was in Starbucks with our music director, Brandon. As we waited in line to get our afternoon caffeine kick, the young barista behind the counter overheard us talking about our church, which at that point was only a year old, and we started chatting. Brandon soon invited her to visit our church one Sunday. She responded in typical postmodern fashion, saying, “I’m into spirituality, but I’m not really into organized religion.” Brandon, who has a wonderfully quick wit, replied, “Don’t worry, we’re really not that organized.”

This article by Peter Jones entitled *The New Spirituality: Dismantling and Reconstructing Reality* shows that while it is not an “organized religion, this spirituality is the reappearance of the massive system of ancient world paganism and, as such, represents the greatest threat to the church since the Greco-Roman pagan empire.” He concludes that the situation is urgent and that the church must pay attention.

Posted by: Tullian Tchividjian

Jud Wilhite

BLING BLING ASSASSIN

The Bling Bling Assassin often strikes us when we start to compare our situation with others. Mike comes over a month or so ago and as we are watching a game he tells me that I'm not getting all the HD channels I should be. I'm surprised, but it is all cool. Then I stew on this for a few days—"Mike is probably watching the game in HD right now. I can't hardly even see the football because it is fuzzy." Funny how bad standard definition TV is when you start comparing to others.

So, I finally call my service provider to upgrade to get ALL the HD games, not just some of them. My problem is I need a new dish, which they can install, but it will cost me. "Do it," I say. Then there is another problem. My receiver box is too old. They can do a new one, but it will cost me. At this point I'm already in, so I tell them to do it. Then they tell me my TV upstairs is not compatible with the new equipment (I bought it used 11 years ago. Honestly, I've prayed it would die for years. GE needs to bring good things to life that eventually die.). The best part was looking at my wife with the install guy in the room and asking, "Are you telling me I have to buy a new TV?" "Yes," he says. Nice... so I get the TV.

All this started because I began comparing my situation to someone else. I'm now a lot poorer. But I get the games in HD. I believe this tendency to compare ourselves to others and their situations and their stuff is one of the key ways the Bling Bling Assassin keeps us on the treadmill of always wanting more. I owe this great insight to my friend Mike, and I'm truly glad to have all my HD issues resolved. I also like Mike's computer bag, but I'm holding off for now. Any one else find it hard to not compare your situation or stuff?

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

IMPACT AND THE LONG TERM

I had the honor to share at Canyon Ridge Christian Church's 15th Anniversary services this past weekend in Las Vegas. It is an amazing church that was launched by Central (where I serve) years ago. What struck me throughout the weekend is how we often judge our impact in limited ways. I often tend to overestimate the short term impact of things that I say or do, and I underestimate the long term impact. The daily things we do in our jobs and families has real impact, but over time that impact grows exponentially. Listening to stories of change and hope over a 15 year history reminded me of the importance of the long term. That is what Deadly Viper is about—the daily character choices that have major impact over the long term. Today I'm reminding myself not to get too discouraged over short term challenges AND not to underestimate the power and impact of the long term! Just stay faithful and stay the course.

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

GETTING ALONG

We all know the ability to work with people is one of the most important aspects of life. I've been doing some thinking about marriage and was intrigued by some of the findings of Dr. John Gottman, a pioneer in the "scientific" study of how we relate to one another. Gottman's research over the last two decades suggests that 69 percent of all marital conflicts are perpetual, meaning they will never be "solved." Those couples that survive choose to get along in spite of the conflicts. I think this applies in varying levels to careers and work relationships as well. It really changes your focus from trying to "change" or "fix" somebody to how you can get along in spite of it. It puts the emphasis on how I can change to adapt to a situation. Do you think Gottman is right?

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING YES TO?

I, like many other people, don't enjoy telling people no. I hate disappointing people. However, I'm in a phase of life with young kids at home where I find myself saying no more than ever to things that eat up family time. What's made all the difference is to remind myself what I'm saying yes to.

Sometimes you have to say no to some really great things, so you can say yes to the best things. By saying no to some things, I'm able to say yes to the most important things. Rather than focus on my no; I'm learning to focus on the yes that my no empowers and allows to happen.

For me, I'm saying yes to God, yes to my family, and yes to the local ministry God has allowed me to serve in. In that local ministry I often have to say no so that I can say yes to where I can help the most, yes to the things only I can do, yes to using the specific gifts God has given me which will have the greatest impact.

Do you struggle with saying no? What are you saying yes to?

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

HIGH AND MIGHTY ASSASSIN

We had an awesome weekend at Central wrapping up the Deadly Viper series. I pushed through, but I was a little sluggish coming off a 14 hour journey back to Vegas from D. C. Doesn't it seem that arriving on time is like a miracle these days?

Our team at Central did another great video. I'm so thankful for the awesome job they did and do.

As I've thought about pride in my life, I've come up with a couple helpful questions for me.

Am I teachable? Am I open to learn something from everyone? When my head gets big, my mind and soul shrinks.

Do I listen to others?

When was the last time I admitted to making a bad decision? (If you never admit a bad decision, how can you grow from to not make that mistake again?)

What questions or actions help you deal with pride in your life?

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

PROCRASTINATION

For the last several weeks I've completely unplugged. I had my email turned off on my phone and many days I received NO emails.

It has been great, but I'm glad to be back. I actually had to "log in" again with wordpress to post a blog—that means I've been gone too long. I'm just glad Mike didn't remove my password! I've been on vacation and a study break and I'm pretty fired up right now. I'm sure grateful for the Viper family.

Here's my big learning—if you wait for the perfect conditions for anything in your life, you'll never get started. Procrastination gets fueled by perfectionism. We say, "When things settle down, I'll do it." Or, "I'll start the diet tomorrow." Or, "When the economy gets better." But we just keep delaying.

One of the big lessons from my break is that there is never a perfect time. The time to pursue your dream, your passion, your calling, is now! Every day is an opportunity; let's make the most of it.

What are you procrastinating? What are you doing now that you are no longer procrastinating?

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

NUGGETS

I spent the day with some great pastors yesterday at a roundtable in Las Vegas—people like Brian Houston, Craig Groeschel, Perry Noble, Bil Cornelius, Dino Rizzo, Darren Patrick and several others.

Here are a couple nuggets I wrote down.

1. It is not what people say that you have to worry about. It is what people say that is true that you have to worry about.
2. The biggest thing you have to guard is your own soul
3. You will never be poor enough. (The point being, you have to determine between you and God what "enough" is and live there. If you try to conform to everyone else's standards of what you should or should not wear, drive, or where you should live, you'll never be poor enough for those who want to criticize you).
4. The church is incredibly resilient. It thrives in times of persecution, poverty, challenge and struggle. We often underestimate its ability to survive cultural shifts and changes.
5. Life is a university, make sure everyday you go to school.

Posted by: Jud Wilhite

ITS HOW YOU FINISH

Here's a little inspiration from the message for this weekend at Central.

After actor Harrison Ford's first performance as a hotel bellhop in the film *Dead Heat* on a Merry-Go-Round, the studio vice-president called him in to his office. "Sit down kid," the studio head said. After a few words he dismissed him with, "You ain't got it kid, you ain't got it ... now get out of here." His movies have gone on to gross billions.

The first time Jerry Seinfeld walked on-stage at a comedy club as a professional comic, he looked out at the audience, froze, and forgot the English language. He stumbled through "a minute-and a half" of material and was jeered offstage. But he returned the following night and closed his set to wild applause.

Some of the most successful football quarterbacks got off to a tough start. Johnny Unitas's first pass was intercepted and ran back for a touchdown. Today his record of throwing a touchdown pass in 47 consecutive games (between 1956-1960) remains unsurpassed. Joe Montana's first pass was intercepted, but he went on to lead his team to 4 super bowl victories and he is in the hall of fame. During his first season Hall of Fame Quarterback Troy Aikman threw twice as many interceptions (18) as touchdowns (9) and didn't win a single game. He went on to win more games than any quarterback in the 1990s.

When Basketball legend Michael Jordan was cut from the High School basketball team he went home, locked himself in his room and cried. But he didn't let that moment define him. He claims that he missed more than 9,000 shots and lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times he took the game winning shot and missed. "I've failed over and over again in my life. That is why I succeed," he said. He went on to become arguably the best player in history.

We don't remember any of these people for how they started. Reaching your possible is not about how you start. It isn't about having the most talent or having the most opportunities and it sure isn't about luck. It is all about staying the course, working hard, and finishing well. Finishing well is more important than starting well.

Posted by:

POPULARITY PROSTITUTE: LOVE THE PLATFORM

Let's wrap the week of Popularity Prostitutes with a simple question: Do I love the people more than the platform?

It seems like everyone gets excited about "building a platform," "speaking on the platform," "leading from the platform," "performing on the platform," and just "getting on the platform."

Whether it is blogging, twittering, speaking at conferences, etc., everyone is about enhancing their platform or being envious of someone else's platform.

Lately, I've been challenged to simply love the people I'm called to serve. I'm not trying to build a platform so I can feel better about myself, the platform is there to serve and help others. When I love the people/clients more than the platform/stage, I get more concerned about doing a great job and less concerned about who gets the credit. I'm more concerned about impacting people rather than impressing them. What do you do to make sure people remain more important than the platform?

Posted by:

Jared Wilson

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS THE SEEKER CHURCH MOVEMENT GOT RIGHT

Actually, these are more like five "right ideas" or five "right tracks" the seeker church movement started down before it veered hard and crashed into the wall. The yes, but's will be a reflex for most of my readers (as they are for me), and I have tried to anticipate them in my explanations, but for the most part, this really is a post about some good gifts this movement has given us.

1. The Refocus of Every Member Ministry on Spiritual Gifting

Before this approach to order became practically ruthless in its well-oiled-machining of the church, the emphasis of making sure people placed in integral offices of leadership in the church were actually gifted for those offices was a great recovery of a long-neglected biblical teaching. Before this evaluation of the church's assimilation of its members to service, churches just plugged willing souls into open slots, an expedient ruthlessness of its own that did enough damage itself. Rather than make an ear out of an eye with ear aspirations, the seeker church movement at least brought with it a re-focus on Paul's teachings on the spiritual gifts in service of the church.

2. An Emphasis on Community Through Relational Groupings

Yes, the small groups movement today is a boondoggle waiting to be more widely exposed. But let's give some credit where it's due. The death of community was not the seeker church's fault unless it was the whole Church's fault. And whatever problems we may (rightly) see in one-size-fits-all, artificial "small groups as community" programs, the very notion that community is what church life is all about, that people must connect relationally and "do life" together, is not something the emerging or missional movements innovated. It was the church growth movement, borrowing from the house churches, parachurches, and the 70's Jesus Movement that recovered the notion of relational community over against the traditional church's persistent substitute of "classes."

3. An Incarnational Rethinking of Evangelism

Have these churches by and large bailed on the gospel? You bet. But in their nascence, they had the very good idea that biblical evangelism was less about revivalistic "repeat this prayer" ticket-punching and more about living lives of witness to Jesus. By dispensing with the weekly altar call, and by attempting to train its congregants in relational evangelism, the seeker churches evince an admirable trust in the Holy Spirit for conversion and a proper expectation of its members to carry the message of Jesus beyond the church walls and into their daily encounters with the lost.

In this sense, seeker churches are practically proto-missional.

4. A Recovery of the Value of the Arts

This is not precisely an ecclesiological development, and the emphasis on the arts has clearly exploded in many cases into full-on entertainment-driven Sunday morning church

"performances" and regrettable secular marketplace doppelgangers in the Christian entertainment market, but coming with the development of the church growth movement was the recovery of the value of artistry within the Church and by the Church as more than just polemic or propaganda. Again, we can obviously debate the quality of the art being produced these days, which clearly pales next to the art created by Christians in previous ages, but the valuing of art, the interest in art, the appreciation of art as not being worldly or unseemly is something that accompanied the church movements of the 70s, 80s, and 90s over against the culturally combative fundamentalism of the traditional church.

5. An Insistence that Faith is For All of Life

The execution has been terrible. Christians today are culturally conditioned and practically indistinguishable.

Yet the early emphasis by the church growth movement was that Christianity applied to all of life, not just to one hour a week within the church walls. The emphasis on "life application" teaching, which gradually and awfully subsumed proclamational preaching of the gospel, was itself a step onto the right track. It is ironic that the regular practice over the years has only further created more Christians living compartmentalized lives, as the original notion toward application actually came out of a desire for our faith to direct, inform, and impact our families, schools, and workplaces.

I and others like me spend lots of time "bashing" the seeker-centered church. I do believe this is necessary and deserved, or I wouldn't do it. But charity and honesty are necessary compatriots of reformation, and while I consider myself in revolt against the very movement I participated in and emerged from, this is my attempt at listing 5 values I am thankful to the movement for instilling in me.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

GLORY, NOT SELF-IMPROVEMENT

I've said elsewhere that we are a people starved for the glory of God.

Nothing else will do.

Glory is what we are after. Whatever else glory is, it is not just more of what we already have or the perfection of what we already have. Do we suppose that the Christian life is simply our human, biological, intellectual, moral life developed and raised a few degrees above the common stock? Do we think that faith in Jesus is a kind of mechanism, like a car jack, that we use to lever ourselves up to a higher plane where we have access to God?

Jesus' imagery, to be followed soon by his sacrifice, is totally counter to our culture of more, more. Could Jesus have made it any clearer? We don't become more, we become less. Instead of grasping more tightly to whatever we value, we let it all go: "He who loses his life will save it." "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is another way that Jesus said it.

Here's the thing: we must let Jesus define the glory for us or we will miss it entirely.

-- Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, p.102

Posted by: Jared Wilson

FEED YOURSELF; OR, AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

Last week I read another church leadership guru's rant about Christians who "complain" they aren't being fed in church. I won't link to it. It sounded the same as all the other orders to "grow up" and demands to "feed yourself." And it's not so much the person I have a problem with anyway; it's the sentiment.

As I said in an earlier post, *For I Was Hungry and You Told Me to Self-Feed*, "There are some lazy, consumerist, adulescent Christians whose 'I'm not being fed' is nothing more than a whiny excuse for growing bored with their church's programs and not serving, but there are also some mature, self-sacrificing, wise Christians whose 'I'm not being fed' is a sign a church has gone off the rails."

As I read this latest indignant polemic against the beggars for bread, a verse came to mind. It is not just Jesus' command to Peter "If you love me, feed my sheep" that is in play here. "Feed yourself" strikes me also as an echo of Cain's "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Posted by: Jared Wilson

PRIORITIES IN PREACHING

Mark Driscoll's Six Framing Questions for Preaching:

1. What does Scripture say? - The Biblical Question
2. What does the Scripture Mean? - The Theological Question
3. What is my Hook? - The Memorable Question
4. Why do people resist this truth? - The Apologetic Question
5. Why does this matter? - The Missional Question
6. How is Jesus the Hero/Savior? - The Christological Question

And Blue Fish Project on God-Centered Preaching:

Man-centred preaching will either become self-esteemism that tells us what we want to hear, or it'll be sin-focussed which will unwittingly end up convincing us that our sin isn't quite so bad as it actually is. By contrast God-centred preaching that cries 'Behold your God' and feeds on the grace of Christ will be reviled by sin but delighted with the gospel of Jesus. It'll drive changed living out of clear conviction about who God is and our new life in him.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

CONFESSION AND CONVICTION

I don't pray enough. Not nearly enough. I am awfully unfaithful in prayer. I justify this many ways to myself, but it does not assuage my conviction that my prayerlessness is sinful.

Prayers cause things to happen that wouldn't happen if you didn't pray. I wonder if there's any Calvinists out there squirming. Listen to this: When James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask," that does not mean "You'd have anyway even if you didn't ask because I gotta plan." The verse doesn't mean the opposite of what it says. It says you have not because you ask not. That means prayer causes things to happen that wouldn't happen if you wouldn't pray. This is why this is a staggeringly glorious privilege . . . If you do not avail yourself of the privilege of bringing to pass events in the universe that would not take place if you didn't pray, you are acting like a colossal fool.

-- John Piper, in the audio for the sermon Pray Like This: Hallowed Be Your Name (text version here)

An unlikely message from a man who is relentlessly logical about God's sovereignty.

I heard this incredible message a few weeks ago and it only compounded my conviction. I am that fool. The message has not let me go, and it only exacerbated what I'd been wrestling with before, and I've continued wrestling with it, because I am not repentant.

I have prayed and asked God to make me a better pray-er. I have confessed this sin to him, and I have asked him to help my unbelief.

I am, as Eugene Peterson says, an Augustinian in the pulpit and a Pelagian in the field.

Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. -- John 16:24

I became severely convicted last night while I was teaching, because I was talking about the common theme of joy in the "lost" parables in Luke 15, and it occurred to me that I do not find adequate joy in carrying my cross because I am not sufficiently satisfied in Christ and His.

What's awful about this is that not too long ago, during a very heavy cross-bearing time in my life, I was praying my guts out constantly. And God moved a mountain in my life.

I have walked away from the mirror and forgotten what I looked like. I hate that I'm one of those people who only prays when in crisis. I hope I hate it enough to stop being one of those people.

I have no problem admitting I'm a sinner, that my heart is deceitful above all things. But I suppose saying that is a form of deceit itself, as it seems I believe that merely admitting my heart is deceitful is enough. I stupidly go on as if speaking to God on an occasional basis is fine and dandy.

I'm willing to bet you're a better pray-er than I am. Would you mind praying that I develop more discipline in prayer?

Posted by: Jared Wilson

NO CREDENTIAL BUT CHRIST

When God called Moses to demand release of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity, Moses felt inadequate and unqualified. He asked, "Who am I to do such a thing?"

Now, when I ask this question of God, I usually ask in false humility. What I really want is God to reassure me of my qualifications and giftedness. What I really want is God to pump up my self-esteem. "Please remind me how awesome I am so that I'll be confident enough to do this," I ask God. And I fully expect God to respond, "Jared, you're good enough, smart enough, and doggone it, people like you."

This not what God said to Moses. In fact, he really didn't even answer the question "Who is Moses?" He answered the question "Who is God?"

The answer, of course, is God.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

-- Exodus 3:11-12

"Who am I?"

"Never mind who you are. You're right; you're a nobody. But you are called. I will be with you. And the sign of your success will not be a gold watch and a plaque and a place in Superduper Church Magazine's 100 Most Awesomest Churches and Pastors with Mad Leadership Skills, but worship of me."

"Oh."

Moses' "oh" consisted of more questions.

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD ? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

-- Exodus 4:10-12

You've likely heard the dictum "God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called."

This is why God uses shepherds, fig farmers, youngest sons, prostitutes, widows, etc.

This is why he uses sinners. Not so that they will realize their potential. Not so that they will finally see how inherently awesome they are.

But so that God gets the glory and so that he gets the glory in the vivid, repeating imagery of turning ashes to beauty.

God made man out of dirt. We -- you and I -- are dirt.

We only need to read a little bit of Paul to see how little he cares about human credentials and qualifications. And Paul actually had them.

The gospel is not the power to save because of our knowledge, our techniques, our systems, our innovations, our preaching style, our music style, our creativity, our conferences, our degrees, our viral marketing, our evaluations and efficiency, or our selves. None of those things is bad, but we make all of them idols so easily. They take so much effort, and yet we make them idols so effortlessly.

"Who are we? We're awesome!"

But the gospel is the power to save because of Jesus' work. Because God is with the gospel.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

-- 1 Corinthians 2:2

Posted by: Jared Wilson

LISTENING TO THE LITTLE GUY

Americans must count religion in order to see or show its value... To them big churches are successful churches... To win the greatest number of converts with the least expense is their constant endeavor... Numbers, numbers, oh, how they value numbers! ... Mankind goes down to America to learn how to live the earthly life; but to live the heavenly life, they go to some other people.

-- Kanzo Uchimura, "Can Americans Teach Japanese in Religion?"

He's right. We are obsessed. We are obsessed with bigger, better, faster. We define success according to quantity and presentation. We reckon churches increasing in size as effective.

And so our heroes are the big church guys. They speak at the conferences, they publish the books, they exert the influence.

But the guys at the "little churches" have just as much, if not more, to teach us about how to shepherd and how to disciple.

Disclaimer: I do not believe that big = bad. Nor do I believe that small = good. I just don't believe that big = good and small = bad, which seems to be the prevailing and operating assumption of the vast majority of American evangelicals. In the same way, because I don't believe that big = bad, I don't believe that all megachurch pastors are idolaters of ambition. Little church guys can be just as idolatrous of ambition, perhaps more so if they are discontent with the relative smallness of their churches.

I'm not proposing an either/or here, but a perspective corrective, an invitation to open up one's view to encompass more than just what is most visible.

Here are some reasons we ought to seek out and listen well to the guys who pastor "small" churches, especially if they've been doing it for a while.

1. The little guy who's been little for a while can teach you about contentment. While the big guy is constantly looking to make that next quantum leap in ministry, the little guy has been learning to be content with what God has provided. The content little church guy is not motivated by the same preoccupations of the discontent big church guy, and while his ministry may not be bigger, his peace and his joy probably will be.

2. The little guy knows about pastoring. As in, actually pastoring. Shepherding. The big church guy probably knows a lot about managing people, organizing people, probably even inspiring people, but the little guy knows his people. He knows who's struggling with what, who's fearing what, and he's spent time in the trenches of pastoral ministry, actually "curing souls." The little guy sees his flock more often than a few hours on the weekend from the stage. He tends to his flock, because he has to. And over years of doing this, he may not have cutting edge creativity or a conversational preaching style, he may not be dynamic or arena rousing, but he will have learned the art of pastoring.

3. The little guy makes for a better mentor. Not necessarily because he has more time. In fact, he probably has less time because he cannot delegate as often as the big guy with staff support. But the little guy has spent his time pastoring in biblical categories, making visits, gaining the wisdom of engaging people who are dying, divorcing, falling away. The big church guy can pass on skills, systems, techniques, tips, quotable quotes, book recommendations. He can pass on the business acumen of church growth. But the little guy makes for a better heart to heart, because he's not passing on concepts, but convictions.

4. The little guy who's been little for a while is seasoned. The guy who's grown his church from 100 to 4,000 in four years is successful. That is a remarkable achievement. But if I wanted to be mentored by a battle-hardened minister, a guy who's seen increase and decrease, who knows what it's like to have much and have little, a guy who's had his hands to the plow without looking back for the long haul, facing opposition and criticism, who has not banked his success on attractional programming but on the long-term investment of faithful pastoring, I would go the guy who's had a church of 150 for 15 years.

5. The little guy knows what really matters. He is not as often caught up in ecclesiological oneupmanship. He is not easily impressed by or easily dismissive of big churches or their pastors. Being dismissed or considered irrelevant by the big guys doesn't matter much to him, because he knows what matters. He's not a slave to statistics but has his finger on the pulse of his

congregation. He is measuring success by faithfulness to his calling and the health of his congregation. He goes through difficult times in his spiritual walk, perhaps deals with doubt and disappointment, but the course of his ministry does not follow the spirit of jealousy or ambition. The little guy really knows what "Blessed are the poor in spirit" means. He doesn't know it as a concept or an idea, but in his life and in his ministry and in his gut.

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction.

--2 Timothy 4:2

Posted by: Jared Wilson

A LETTER OF CHRIST

[A]nd you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

-- 2 Corinthians 3:3

I love that. "Show that you are a letter of Christ." Like walking, breathing epistles -- emissaries under Christ's Lordship, ambassadors for Christ's kingdom -- we testify with our very lives to the good news of Jesus. This isn't just a relaying of information; it is a subsisting on revelation. It's carrying the Spirit-illuminated Word of God in our blood, in our marrow.

They are not just idle words for you -- they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

-- Deuteronomy 32:47

I am in constant need of repenting of using God's Word and returning to being used by it. I try too often to live by bread alone.

In my heart of hearts, however, I want to stop using Jesus, appropriating Scripture, and doing church and begin trusting Jesus, living Scripture, and being the Church.

I want to be a letter of Christ.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

A BIG GOSPEL

Many of us too often live our lives on a scale that is far less than eternal. We are not living, as Dallas Willard says, an "eternal kind of life" now. We are trained and taught that the gospel is about winning at work, finding healthy relationships, controlling our finances, and/or having great sex. I firmly believe the Bible speaks to all of those things, but the Church is starving (starving!) for the glory of God. We too easily forget that the gospel covers the scale of eternity, that it is the division between heaven and hell, that God is infinite and our sin is a condemnation-

worthy offense against an eternally holy God. We preach and we settle for much less than, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Our sights are set too small.

On that note, check out Scot McKnight's CT article on The 8 Marks of a Robust Gospel.

In short:

1. The robust gospel is a story.
2. The robust gospel places transactions in the context of persons.
3. The robust gospel deals with a robust problem.
4. A robust gospel has a grand vision.
5. A robust gospel includes the life of Jesus as well as his resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit alongside Good Friday.
6. A robust gospel demands not only faith but everything.
7. A robust gospel includes the robust Spirit of God.
8. A robust gospel emerges from and leads others to the church.

Read the whole thing for explanations and context. I could quibble with points here or there, but in general it is quite good. And the call for a big gospel is always good and necessary.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

THINGS I CAN LIVE WITH (AND ONE I CAN'T)

If they come, decide it's not for them, and leave, let them say:

I wasn't a good enough speaker,
that I wasn't dynamic enough or conversational enough,
that I wasn't cool enough,
that I wasn't as engaging as the guy down the street,
that my shirt didn't match my socks,
that I wasn't wearing socks.

Let them say our band wasn't big enough,
or rockin' enough,
or hip enough,
or loud enough.
Heck, let them say it was too loud.

Let them say our group isn't big enough,
that our people aren't enough like them,
that our people are too much like them,
that there's not enough girls or not enough guys,
that we don't play games or have cool videos or enough special music.

Let them say we're too far away,
that we meet at an inconvenient time,
that we don't fit in their schedule,
that we don't have enough social activities.

I can live with all that and more.

But if they leave, if they decide it's not for them, never let them be able to say we didn't talk about Jesus.

Damn me if anyone is able to say that with any integrity.

And the other edge of that sword is:

If they leave because we talk about Jesus too much, I can live with that.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

WHO IS THE KINGDOM FOR?

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

-- Luke 14:12-14

Last night during the music at Element, I began to picture Christ on the cross while singing "My God is mighty to save," and I was overcome with conviction of my own arrogance. How dare I believe -- and allegedly treasure -- that eternal life for me meant Jesus' death and then go on living as if daily life requires anything less than crucifixion.

I was teaching out of the banquet parables last night, and this week as I pondered the excuses the invitees give the servants in those stories as to why they "can't" attend the banquet -- "I just got married," "My business is taking off," etc. -- I began to think of the myriad excuses I make for not investing in the kingdom life, especially knowing that my brothers and sisters in other parts of the world are actually risking their lives to gather to worship. For us, the bare minimum of church attendance is a take-or-leave, when-I-have-time, when-I-feel-like-it, if-it-fits-in-my-schedule selection at the buffet of weekly activities. If we can't even bother to treat gathering to worship as vital to Christian life, what must we think of daily dying to self and having all things in common with our brothers and sisters, losing our self-interest in service to the community for the good of the Body?

How arrogant we are to treat community as optional when those less rich, less successful, less fortunate, less safe are dying and willing to risk dying because they know it's not optional.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

HOLD STEADY

I have found as a teacher that clinging to a passion for the message, a burden to share the gospel, and a joy to proclaim Christ is an amazing antidote to the temptation to make feelings contingent upon the quality of the music, the smoothness of the transitions, the size of the crowd, the whatever. When I draw my excitement from Scripture and ground my motivation in an unbearable need to talk about the gospel, I cut off the emotional roller coaster of all the other who/what/when/where.

You can reach burnout rather quickly when ministry fulfillment for you is found in anything other than faithfulness to God's calling.

There are highs and lows to ministry and preaching and leading a worship service, but consciously placing myself in the contours of Scripture does wonders for my ability to be content (and excited) no matter what.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

ACCUMULATION VS. INTEGRATION

It occurs to me that when Jesus looked out at a crowd, he was not moved to anxiety over their numbers. He saw who was there and had compassion on them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

The God-exalting love of Jesus makes our earthly ambitions of "growth" so much garbage.

When you look out at the people in your church, be they 5 or 500, 100 or 1000, do you ask yourself first "How can I bring in more?" or "How can I disciple the ones I've got?"

It sounds like an obvious question, and you can certainly ask both legitimately, but the bursting-at-the-seams megachurches who are now measuring the dissatisfaction and relative spiritual immaturity of their multitudes are evidence that only one question has predominated.

T.M. Moore writes:

We've been seeking crowds, not disciples. We've considered every possible means of getting the most people into our buildings and keeping them there, and we've attracted people on the basis of mere self-interest, so that what we have are congregations ecstatic to belong to some place that, in the name of the Lord, takes their self-interest as seriously as they do.

The American Church is addicted to the conspicuous consumption of the culture it means to transform.

Would that we were as focused and intentional on the integration of current attendees into the radical life of discipleship to Jesus as we are on accumulating more and more and more bodies in our worship programs.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

THE BRILLIANCE OF JESUS

Oh, now here is something we tend to overlook or, if we even consider, fail to invest in: that is that Jesus, being God in the flesh, was the smartest man who ever lived. Does Jesus ever show up on anybody's list of the greatest thinkers of history? Gurus, perhaps. Sages, maybe. The world may think him "wise" in some Confucian sense. We think of him as an idealist, as an enlightened man, as a revolutionary. But generally speaking, we also tend to regard him as naïve or simple. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, we tend to think, "If he had lived to my age he would have repudiated his doctrine."

The world does not regard Jesus as savvy or practical, and if we within the Church will be honest with ourselves, we must admit that our frequent failures to obey his commands stem essentially from our practical disbelief that he could really be right about the way to think and act. But if we really believe Jesus was who he said he was, we know we have recorded in Scripture and at our reading convenience, the greatest human mind of all time.

How vast is the wisdom of Christ? As vast as the resources of almighty God. Revisit that exciting post-resurrection scene from the road to Emmaus in Luke's Gospel and remind yourself how all-encompassing Jesus' knowledge is (and how all-illuminating our knowledge of Jesus can be).

Jesus comes on these guys unawares and basically reveals the Bible to them. He illuminates Scripture to them. He answers their questions in such a fulfilling way that they say their hearts burned while he explained it to them.

Christians, Jesus' knowledge imparted to us is not just head knowledge, but a godly wisdom of the sort that should be our constant resource and inspiration and guide through all of life. When Jesus gives us the Sermon on the Mount, he's not just giving us a list of things to do, but an invitation to real life as Holy Spirit-enlightened persons. His commands are not just calls to right behavior, but calls to embrace a quality of the heart that leads to a pattern of life that burns with real knowledge from God. We call this real knowledge "truth."

Jesus was absolutely brilliant, and yet we don't refer to or access that brilliance with much regularity, do we? We tend to make our own decisions, utilize our own reason, and then ask God to okay it, confirm it, bless it.

We are great at compartmentalizing our lives, which is merely an extension of our implicit belief that Jesus' knowledge is for our "spiritual life" but that our "everyday life" requires a more modern knowledge, a more "realistic" knowledge. Street smarts, perhaps.

Dallas Willard writes:

The world has succeeded in opposing intelligence to goodness . . . And today any attempt to combine spirituality or moral purity with great intelligence causes widespread pangs of "cognitive dissonance." Mother Theresa, no more than Jesus, is thought of as smart -- nice, of course, but not really smart. "Smart" means good at managing how life "really" is.

Most of us have to get into the habit of thinking of Jesus as competent in all areas of our life, but we can't settle at Jesus' mere competence. We must embrace Jesus' all-surpassing brilliance. That is where Jesus' intelligence really shines through for us – he's not just a storehouse of facts

or data; he is the wellspring of all truth. Jesus the Man didn't just teach and live the truth, he was, as he said himself, the Truth itself.

We have to get past an anxiety-prone existence in which we acknowledge Jesus' moral perfection and good teaching and miraculous power, but perversely, not to the extent that we think him "in touch" with what we are really going through. In one of the great ironies of our modern evangelical subculture, we are very big on "making" the Christian faith practical and "relevant," yet by and large we go on living our lives as if Jesus had nothing relevant to bear upon what we do and say, who we date or marry, what sort of jobs we take, what sort of families we raise, where we spend our time and who we spend it with.

We're cool with Jesus being good and nice, but we're hesitant to live as if he is omniscient as well.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

SILENCE

"It is better to be silent and be real, than to talk and not be real."

-- Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians 15.1

The trouble is, I think, that too often our unnecessary verbosity and our untamed tongue really is us being "real." I think Ignatius is talking about boastful facades or lies or "talking ourselves up." But if what we say and how we say it are reflections of who we are, the unreigned speech, even if false in content, can still be us "being real."

How many times have you come across someone excusing their own insensitivity or insulting manner by claiming they are just "telling it like it is." They're just being "real" or "honest."

They're right -- they are telling you what they're like, what their real self is, the "honest" condition of their heart.

Most times, someone's unhinged tirade (or even passive-aggressive criticism) of you actually says more about them than it does you.

Sometimes you are (by which I mean "I am") in the place of the critical someone.

Sometimes it's just best to be silent. When we actively choose silence over unnecessary or unnecessarily critical speech, we reflect a real self that is actually worth boasting about.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

THE RADIANT CHURCH

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

-- Matthew 5:14

In my Scripture reading yesterday I spent some quality time in Psalm 48, which I love love love. It is about the splendor and influence of Zion, the City of God. I read it as a forecast not just of the consummated kingdom but as a blueprint for the Church, God's living witness to the kingdom on earth.

I test drove that proposition at Element's PRAXIS last night, asking our folks essentially, "What does Psalm 48 tell us the Church should do and be like?" Here are the things we came up with (read the psalm yourself and see if you don't agree) .

1. The Church should bring joy to the world. (vv.1-2)
2. The Church's message is that God is a fortress, a refuge in times of trouble. (v.3)
3. The Church makes it clear that Jesus is Lord over and above all lords, and she leads with the radical call to a revolutionary kingdom that challenges and usurps worldly authorities and systems. (vv.4-5)
4. The Church is forthright about God's holiness and righteousness, which provokes repentance and the fear of the Lord. (vv.4-8)
5. The Church is known for the love of God. They meditate on God's love, even. (v.9)
6. The Church's zeal for the glory of God, for the proclamation of His fame, for the spread of His praise spills outside the city walls and flows to the end of the earth. The Church does not exist for her own ends, for her own maintenance, but for the glory of God and the good of the world. The Church is on mission. (vv.10-14)
7. The Church cultivates a legacy of God's faithfulness. (v.14)

That is awesome to reflect on. Clearly we're not there. But God is faithful, and despite what anyone thinks of the Church, Jesus has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. When I think of that, when I think of God's faithfulness to us, when I think of Jesus' love for His Bride, and when I take those thoughts and run them through great anthems like Psalm 48, I cannot help but think of how the Church can and will be (and, dangit!, often is) radiant with the glory of God.

Posted by: Jared Wilson

LEAVING: THE DEFINING MOMENT

Bob shares an "I just left" moment, having been worn down by a message. Been there, done that (although not because of a movie clip).

As more and more people make exits from the program-driven song and dance, many of them
For me, it was not an abrupt decision, but a culmination of months and years of God's leading me into discontent. But I had a defining moment. It was in one sermon where Scripture was mishandled (it was said that the things Moses was telling Israelites to remind their children of was that God loved them and wanted them to be happy when, in context, the things he wanted them to remind their children of were the Ten Commandments and the importance of obeying

them) and the message was that the more you imagine God blessing you, the more He will give you. Halfway through I just said to my wife, "I can't do this any more."

It wasn't just that one message. That was just the tipping point.

For a friend of ours, the defining moment was the Easter Sunday sermon that didn't have anything to do with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Have you had a defining moment? What was it?

Posted by: Jared Wilson

THE GLORIOUS CHRIST AND CHRIST ALONE

We sang "On Christ the Solid Rock" at Element last night.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

This gets me. It slays me.
Honestly, in the words of another great hymn, I scarce can take it in.

I am not a fan of emotionalism. And I would never encourage gauging the quality of one's spirituality based on how one feels (I in fact discourage such temperature taking). But I do think it is important for us to be moved when we ponder the gospel. When you even barely grasp the depths of your depravity in even a glimpse of the light of God's holiness, and then see that terrible contrast intersecting at the cross, where God's only Son bled the ground red with grace, how can you not be moved?

How can I not be moved?

These days, the more I think on it, the more I reflect on it, the more I feast on it, the more I trust in it, the more I proclaim it, the more I enjoy it . . . the more I am in disorienting awe over it.

The scandalous beauty of the crucified king, the awful glory of the sacrificed Lord: this is the watershed moment of all of history, and it ought to be the watershed moment of your history.

It is Jesus' offering of himself to the torturous, murderous death on the cross that connects us to the potential of beholding him in his resurrected, exalted glory. Without the full experience of the Incarnation, obedience to the constraints of humanity (His oath, His covenant, His blood / Support me in the whelming flood), we could not behold the full glory of God and live. Yet because he became like us and died, we can behold him as he truly is and live.

When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my Hope and Stay

Oh Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand

Does it make your soul sing?

Jesus Christ is glorious. He is glorious. Because he is God, and because he bore the sins of the world, undeserving of a necessary death.

When you think on the crucified Christ, do you see the exaltation in this humiliation, the glory in this inglorious death?

Looking back through the powerful lens of the bodily resurrection, we see the cross not simply as the moment Jesus died because of sin and death, but as the moment Jesus murdered sin and death. Christ killed is Christ conquering; Christ raised is Christ in conquest.

That is amazing. Only a wild God could tell a story so fantastic.

Does the gospel still thrill you? Does it still captivate you? Does its simple presentation still warm your heart?

Or are you cold to its plot points? Has the repetition of its propositions desensitized you to its scandal? Is it theory to you, a catchphrase, a buzz word? God forbid, is it a cliché?

It is for me, still (thank God), the inconceivable event of my very real and terrible sin being covered and conquered by a very real and terrifying grace.

Behold -- fix on, revel in, exult in -- the glory of God in the glorious Christ.

When He shall come with trumpet sound

Oh may I then in Him be found

Dressed in His righteousness alone

Faultless to stand before the throne

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

-- 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

Posted by: Jared Wilson

PASTORS, DON'T WASTE YOUR PULPIT

Pastors and preachers, please preach Jesus tomorrow morning. "High church" or "relevant" church, megachurch or minichurch, traditional or contemporary, expository or topical, whatever or whatever: give your people Jesus. Not a little Jesus. A lot.

Don't save him for a special occasion.

Just speaking for myself, I have a major crisis of conscience when I feel as though I haven't preached enough Jesus. I believe it is my duty to center on the gospel every week because the Bible says it is of first importance. That means it can't be occasional or implicit.

I don't want to preach, leave the building in my car, get hit on the interstate and die, and have anyone be able to say, "His last message was on our inner potential to be awesome," or whatever. I want to teach so that if any given message is my last, it can't be said that I went out failing to have preached the gospel, failing to have proclaimed the glory of God.

Why do we settle for less?

When we have in the endless fountain of Scripture "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" and "the unsearchable riches of Christ" why do we break even for one week from that stuff to preach the searchable riches of us? Why do we press pause on the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God in the amazing gospel of grace to press play on the Seven Steps to Being a Better Person?

If you're a pastor/preacher, don't waste your pulpit!

Posted by: Jared Wilson

RESOLUTION FOR 2009 (AND BEYOND)

Resolved:

Whether I succeed or fail in my endeavors personal and public -- hopefully succeed -- I nevertheless intend to decrease.

Posted by: Jared Wilson